

Topic 20: Perseverance

Dealing with Doubts, Trials, and Fears

“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”

—James 1:12

It's tough to keep hanging in there when you're feeling doubts and facing problems, isn't it?

Maybe you're:

- ▶ A person with a lofty dream that is going to require grueling years of schooling—and even then you'll have no guarantees of success.
- ▶ Someone whose spouse is bitter and impossible to please.
- ▶ Caring for an aging parent with Alzheimer's or a child who requires around-the-clock care.
- ▶ A cancer patient who's facing another round of chemo with another drug because the last one was ineffective—just like the first two.
- ▶ The friendly kid at a new school who constantly gets teased, shunned and thinks, *What's the use? Why even try?*
- ▶ A laid-off worker who has sent out one hundred resumes without a single request for a follow-up interview.

Because life is tough—and sometimes brutal—lots of people quit things every

day. They quit a job or walk away from a friendship. They give up on a dream or pull the plug on a marriage.

For anyone who is trying to follow Jesus, life's painful and persistent hardships can foster serious doubt. If you're struggling, you may even be asking questions like:

- ▶ Is God real?
- ▶ Why isn't this “faith in Christ thing” working?
- ▶ I thought Jesus came to make my life better and more blessed?

In this lesson, we want to look at the rare and wonderful quality of perseverance. Disciples have this trait because Jesus, the one they follow, had it. Why should you keep trusting the Father in heaven and walking with him, when doing so doesn't seem to make your life easier or better? In truth, in many places of the world, being a Christian makes your life exponentially *harder*. Is it really possible to “keep the faith” in a world filled with trouble?

Let's study perseverance and see how we can cultivate this noble virtue in our lives.





Bible Study

Perseverance: What Does It Mean?

In the New Testament, there are two primary Greek words that get translated “perseverance.” One is *proskartere*. It means “to adhere” or “to cling” or “to be devoted.” Some of our English Bibles translate it “to continue (in something),” “to be steadfast,” or “to be constant.”

Get this: In Mark 3:9, this word has been used of a boat that has been made ready for Jesus, devoted for his use, and sits waiting nearby. In Acts 10:7, it describes a faithful personal attendant. In short, the idea of perseverance is persisting, staying, waiting, not leaving—and doing all that when it’s hard or boring, when you’re being opposed, or whether or not you *feel* like it.

The other word is *hupomone*. It conveys the same ideas of endurance, patience, being steadfast, having to wait. Again, the implication is that you are weary of your hard circumstances, and tired of waiting for things to change. You want to throw in the towel. But the voice of perseverance urges, “Don’t quit. Hang in there. Cling. Remain faithful despite the opposition and the tantalizing promises of life elsewhere.”

In what specific ways are followers of Christ supposed to persevere?

Take a look at these verses that urge followers of Jesus to *persevere* in some aspect of the life of faith:

- ▶ “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (Romans 12:12).
- ▶ “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9).
- ▶ “But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you” (2 Timothy 3:14, NLT).
- ▶ “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” (Hebrews 12:1).





- ▶ “Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13, NLT).
- ▶ “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful” (Colossians 4:2).
- ▶ “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people” (Ephesians 6:18).
- ▶ “So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

1. This, of course, is only a partial listing of verses that call Christians to persevere, but what specific areas do you see mentioned?

2. How would you rate yourself when it comes to persevering in the areas just mentioned?

3. Read Hebrews 6:1–8 and 10:26–31. The New Testament includes a lot of warnings like these about falling away from faith. Here are a few other examples:

- ▶ “You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.” (Jesus, speaking in Matthew 10:22, NASB)
- ▶ “As God’s coworkers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain.” (2 Cor. 6:1)
- ▶ “See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” (Hebrews 3:12)

What do you make of these verses? What are they saying?



4. How would you describe the difference between a true believer who still sins and a “make believer” who never really had true faith and still sins?

5. Check out these verses that speak of what God does to help disciples to persevere and remain faithful:

- ▶ “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand” (Jesus, speaking in John 10:28–29).
- ▶ “God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29).
- ▶ “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6, NASB).
- ▶ “All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see” (1 Peter 1:3–5, NLT).

What’s That About?

I heard some Christians arguing about “the perseverance of the saints.” They were wrestling with the question, “Can a believer lose his or her salvation?” or “Is it possible to have true faith and then turn away from it?” This is a hotly debated issue, but most Christians would agree with these statements:

- Some who claim to be believers are not truly born again due to misunderstanding of the gospel, insincerity, or misplaced trust, etc.
- God alone knows the truth about a person’s heart and spiritual condition.
- Even redeemed people will continue to sin.

God is faithful to bring his children home. Those who have exercised genuine, saving faith—they’ve been made alive spiritually and declared righteous by virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection on their behalf—cannot be un-adopted by God. Despite failure and sin, we cannot invalidate God’s grace. He will faithfully see to it that we “persevere” and enter into everlasting life.



According to these verses, why—if we have faith in Christ—do we not have to fear?

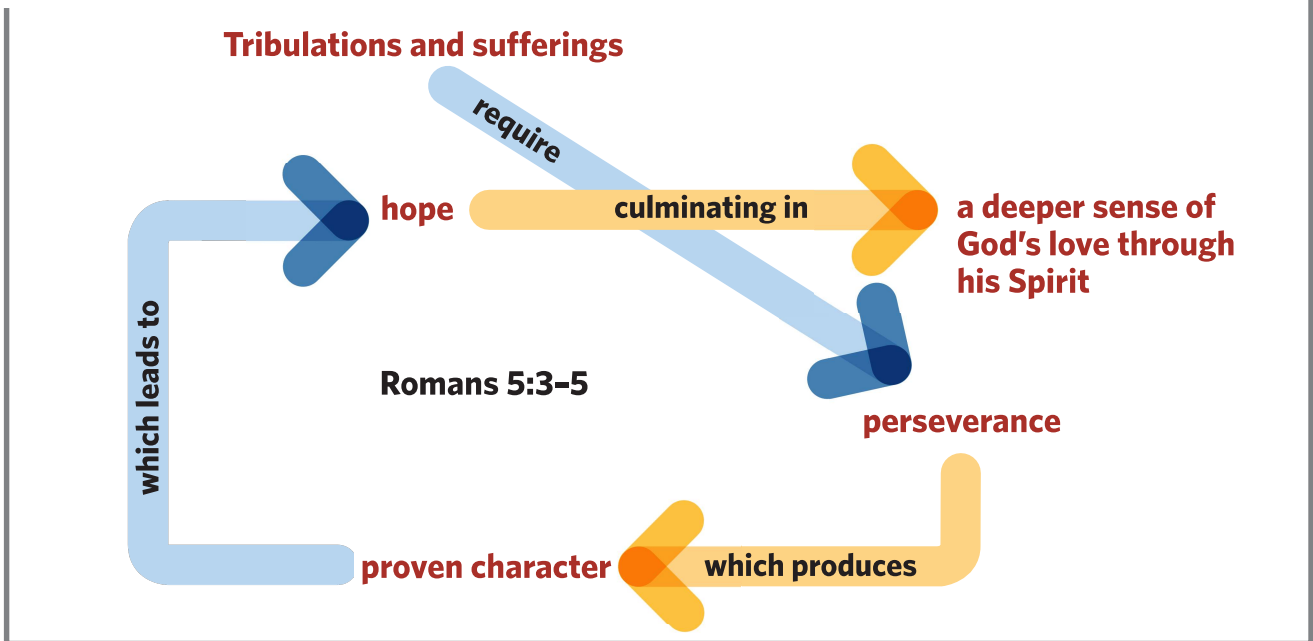
6. Writing to Christians who were facing a lot of hard things in life, the apostle James said:

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

Does that seem ridiculous to you? How is it possible to be joyful in hard times?

Notice a couple of things. First, the passage says “whenever” and not “if by chance.” In other words, trials are a fact of life. Disciples of Jesus don’t get a pass from the troubles of this world. (You can study more about this truth in “Topic 19: Overcoming.”)

Trials are never fun. But if we faithfully persevere, God brings good things out of our bad situations.





Notice also that James says difficulties come our way not to ruin us, but to develop us and strengthen us. Trials are the God-ordained/God-orchestrated “laboratory” wherein we can develop perseverance. All that waiting, trusting, and clinging is how we come to know firsthand that we are tougher than we imagined, that we can endure more than we thought. And why? Because our God is more faithful than we ever dreamed.

What can we do to cultivate perseverance in our lives?

The Lord has given his children four great resources for the hard times of life:

1. **His Word.** “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

The trustworthy promises of the Bible can shore up our flagging faith.

2. **His Spirit.** “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:26–27).

The indwelling Spirit can give us the power to continue to cling.

3. **His People.** “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (Paul writing to the Philippians, from prison, 1:3–5).

The body of Christ can surround us and provide encouragement to keep going.

4. **His Mission.** “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, 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 15:57–58).

Participation in an eternally worthy task can keep us focused on what matters.

What is perseverance? It is continuing to follow Jesus, even when he leads us to and through harrowing chapters of life. It is hanging on to and cultivating your faith through life’s difficult times.

“Perseverance is . . . a call to faithfulness, but it is also an affirmation that somehow, in spite of our failures, God will bring His committed people through the difficulties and concerns of life to their promised destiny in Christ.”
—Gerald L. Borchert

Ultimately, we are able to cling to God because he holds us firmly in his hands.



Take-Home Reflections

A Perseverance Self-Check

Check all the actions of perseverance you intend to live out.

By God's grace, secure in the love of Christ, and in the power of the Spirit:

- I will consistently open and read the Scripture, setting my hope on the things God says are true, and seeking to be a doer of the Word.
- I will be honest and authentic in prayer.
- I will, when I do, think, or say, wrong things, turn quickly to Jesus, who has forgiven me and who loves me unconditionally.
- I will honor my commitments—even when I don't feel like it.
- I will, by God's grace, step out in faith to do something that I feel is God's will but that makes me uncomfortable.
- I will seek to be faithful, not for the rest of my life, but in this moment.
- I will humble myself—confessing my sin, and asking forgiveness from those whom I have hurt.
- I will value and practice the disciplines of biblical community and spiritual friendship.
- I will initiate a much-needed conversation with a family member, friend, or coworker.
- I will cling desperately to God in my current trials—like a drowning person clinging to a lifeline.

Life Application

An important part of discipleship is learning how to apply God's truths to your life. Below are just a few ways you can start thinking about what you've learned and apply it to your daily life.

1. Memorize our memory verse, James 1:12.
 "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him."
2. Talk over the results of your Perseverance Self-Check with a trusted, confidential friend.
3. Share with the same friend or another, one of the current struggles in your life. Ask for prayer and encouragement as many struggles don't have easy answers, and some cannot be solved in this lifetime.