



Let Perseverance Work

“But let patience [perseverance] have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:4 NKJV).

James’ first words in chapter 1 might astound us: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance” (James 1:2 NIV). No mincing of words. James says the work perseverance does in us is so valuable that we should be overjoyed to experience all kinds of trials to have it. Then he says we should be sure to allow perseverance to complete its work so we will experience the wholeness and maturity God intends. In other words, the work we need perseverance to accomplish will be diminished if we exit the trial before God’s timing or do the wrong things in it.

I have wondered why Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stayed in the fiery furnace so long. Their story is found in Daniel 3. They had refused to worship the image of King Nebuchadnezzar and were thrown into the fire. When King Nebuchadnezzar looked into the furnace, he saw them and a fourth Person that looked like the Son of God walking around, free and unharmed. Then the king called them to come out.

Why didn’t they get out of the furnace when they found themselves alive and free? It dawned on me that maybe they were enjoying the presence of the Son of God in the midst of their trial. That must surely be a picture of what God wants for us—to find Jesus and to fellowship with Him in every trying situation. He is with us, but until we look for Him and find Him we will not receive the blessing that comes with knowing His presence in the fire. Do we first seek to know Him in the trial before we try to escape it?

Every trial we patiently endure will contribute to the work of God in us. The question is--will we “let” perseverance have its complete work? A rather impatient question I am

prone to ask in the middle of a trial is “How long, O Lord?”

I wonder if Joseph asked “how long” while he was in prison? Joseph’s story begins in Genesis 37. After a series of distressing events, Joseph ended up in Egypt as a slave. After a while, he was unjustly accused and imprisoned. In the Egyptian justice system, it was likely he would spend his life there. He experienced the favor of God even though incarcerated, but still it was an Egyptian prison! He had hope for release, but the years went by—maybe as many as 11 years.

The answer to “how long” is when God sees perseverance has had its perfect work. Joseph’s destiny was the throne of Egypt, second in command to Pharaoh. God would not place an immature, incomplete Joseph in that place of power. The stakes were too great. When God released Joseph from his prison cell, Joseph’s success was much more certain. God used Joseph to save Egypt and the tiny nation of Israel from possible destruction by famine. Joseph’s endurance had its complete work in him.

In trials we can short circuit the work God wants perseverance to accomplish in us. We can do this first by a poor attitude. Complaining and murmuring is a sign we are not persevering well and are not letting patience have its assigned work. It means we have not gotten God’s perspective regarding our trials. There is a song that says, “Our trials come only to make us strong.” That’s God’s perspective.

Near the end of the biblical account of Joseph’s life, Joseph faced his brothers who had sold him as a slave into Egypt because of their jealousy and hatred toward him. He was a prince of Egypt by then; and when they stood before him

and knew who he was, they feared for their lives. He explained to them what he then understood: what they had meant for evil God had meant for good—to the saving of many lives. Joseph had already forgiven them.

In some trials, we have a lot of forgiving to do. God will not make us forgive others; it is always our choice. Our forgiveness of others, however, is a serious matter for our own spiritual well-being. Jesus taught His disciples to pray: “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12 RSV). Right after that Jesus said: “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (6:14-15). Perseverance is having its perfect work when we are becoming people who forgive.

Everyone goes through trials. Simply experiencing trials, however, does not mean perseverance is having its perfect work—that we are becoming complete, whole, lacking nothing. Somewhere in the midst of each trial we face choices. One choice is whether to forgive. Another choice is whether to encourage anger and wrath or to put them away. David wrote, “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—it only causes harm” (Psalm 37:7, 8 NKJV).

If we aren’t paying close attention, we can make the wrong choice before we realize. It’s not easy to “rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him” when someone has offended us, has tried to harm us or when we have received injustice. We know these things are not right and should not happen. However, Paul said, “Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26 NKJ). We have the choice to remain in our anger or to put it away from us quickly. By choosing to “rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him,” we are choosing to let perseverance continue its work in us.

The most important choice is whether we will persevere in our faith in God. In all of our trials, it is ultimately our faith in God that is being tested. Our faith is the bedrock of our lives.

Satan knows this, and he has set his sights on it. He hopes that “the testing of your faith” will not produce perseverance but will destroy our faith in God’s goodness, in His love, in His care for us. If he can’t destroy our faith in God entirely, he will try to erode it subtly, causing us to doubt God in some way. Satan knows our faith is the means by which we access all that God has for us.

James wrote: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:5-8 NKJV). To doubt, which we all do to some degree occasionally, is to be double-minded and unstable. The perfect work that perseverance will work is to make us complete, whole, mature, lacking nothing. Our faith will be strengthened and we will become more and more single-minded toward God. We will become stable in all our ways.

If you would like to pray for the perfect work of perseverance in your life, pray the following. “Dear loving, kind, and faithful Heavenly Father, I honor You as God and Lord of my life. You are my God and my faith is in You. I desire to let perseverance have its perfect work in me. I ask in faith—with no doubting—that you will enable me to persevere with You in faith through every trial—that I will be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. And I ask for wisdom in all things, for you are the One who gives to all liberally and without reproach. Thank You, Father God, in Jesus’ name.” **SH**

GOD’S WORD FOR TODAY

Teaching Letter 24

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