



## **9. A Passion for Perseverance (Hebrews 12:1-11)**

This is the ninth sermon in our series *Heart of Discipleship* series. I had planned to do something on prayer this week, but with the shorter service I thought I would do one extras to what I had planned in the series. This wasn't just put in for convenience. The whole idea of doing a sermon series is that the Pastor learns as much from it as the congregation do and one of the most dominant themes that came out of my own personal study on discipleship in the last three months or so is the whole concept of perseverance.

The word discipline from which we get discipleship should have given us the clue. Discipline isn't just something a parent metes out on his or her children, but it is an attitude of life. Likewise a parent's discipline is not necessarily punishment, which is what we normally associate with the word. Most discipline meted out in any home is actually giving the structure and framework to function in a family and in life - clean you room, tie your shoelaces, clean your teeth, put your clothes on the right way, do the washing up, go to bed at 8pm. None of these involve punishment unless the child rebels and most of the time they don't - until they become teenagers!

Invariably discipline involves having to achieve something. The most successful students in my old college were the ones that disciplined themselves to work. It wasn't usually a bore for them as they loved what they did but to achieve their goal they knew that they had to work consistently. Some we had to discipline to get them to work, but the ones most willing to comply with our work regime succeeded best not because they swotted hard, but because they gained the confidence to function as effective students.

The basis of their success wasn't what they swotted a few days before the exam but a year's worth of discipline in which they sought to understand their subject - and I can assure you that trying to get to grips with meteorology was very testing, but those who persevered with it understood it and found it more interesting as a result.

God wants us to function as effective disciples. He is a God who disciplines us to do that and encourages us to persevere towards the goal.

It's the same in other areas too. Athletes have to persevere at their training. But it isn't a training thing. We hear stories of people who have persevered with sickness and difficult situations. Maybe we've been part of them ourselves. Perseverance is often very difficult though these kinds of situation in our lives.

In the military, the training is hard and strict. Again it is for a reason: that the soldier will be equipped for battle - that he will know how to deal with every situation and prevail. He will work as a team with others and most important, will stay alive! We have remembered again the debt of gratitude we owe to those who have fought in various conflicts over the last century or so. Whether it was the trenches of the Somme or the London Blitz, there are fine examples of people persevering against

great odds. What was interesting about the last war was although people had to persevere with the conditions that wartime places on people - the threat of attack, actual attack, the loss of loved ones, the horrors of battle, rationing, restrictions on lifestyle - there was also a great camaraderie and friendships born throughout that as well as a turning to God.

The reason I say all this is that Christian discipleship involves perseverance. One of the greatest lies of the last century was that Christianity was somehow easy. I think it came out of the prosperity that the last half-century also brought us which improved the lifestyle of most people and where the comfort of the individual was paramount and we live in the benefit of that. We want instant gratification, instant comfort, instant pleasure. Maybe a long time ago we persevered with things, but not so any more.

So right at the heart of our Christian faith is perseverance. So what should we persevere at?

#### Persevere in prayer

*Luke 18:2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' 4 "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" 6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"*

If in human terms a bad judge will answer a widow who presses her claim persistently, how much more will a loving God respond to our prayers. When we are encouraged to pray without ceasing, it means just that. Let's persevere in prayer. I know I've covered this many times so I won't say more. It's scripture, let's persevere.

#### Persevere in holiness

*Hebrews 12: 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 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him 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 sinful men, 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.*

This is a wonderful chapter in Hebrews as it comes after that great chapter on the way in which God blessed the saints of the Old Testament. In many cases, the blessing came a while after the promise - Abraham is a good example. We are called to *throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us*. Or to put it another way, we need to persevere with being different. We were encouraged to do that in a previous week. God has equipped us for holiness by giving us His Spirit. We talked about the struggle in life that sometimes living as a child of God - different. Sometimes we come into situations where being holy is difficult. We are called to persevere.

And as we look we see Christ and what words does the writer to the Hebrews use to describe His work here? *Who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God* He endured the cross and despised the shame. Endured. He is our role model and a joy was set before Him. For

the joy set before Him, how much are we prepared to endure, to persevere with, as we walk His walk - as we walk in a holy way, a different way?

### ◆ Persevere in trouble and suffering

*Hebrews 12:5 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "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 those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." 7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*

There's no escaping it. Jesus has not made us immune from the trouble and suffering in the world. We are part of it and it is part of our development as disciples. It's part of our discipline. No remember, don't think of discipline as punishment (although it can be) but see it as training. As we go through the stresses and strains of life, the difficulties, the sicknesses, it is all training. *"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 those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." 7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.* Don't see yourself either as a failed Christian or an odd one out if you have problems in life. See your problems as opportunities to draw closer to God, learn from Him, come to repentance over something if that is what it is about and see His power and deliverance. Sometimes we can't see the purpose in something when it is happening. Let's just persevere and endure the hardships.

It's easy to say that, but it's sometimes difficult to appreciate when we are in the midst of a situation that brings us pain, or despair or depression. Let me give you some verses from Romans.

*Romans 5: 3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance ; 4 perseverance , character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us*

Going through problems? Let God produce character and hope in your life today. As I have said several times before, the most spiritual people I have met have been tested in trials - awful trials. It comes with the territory. "Christians" without trials? Not according to the writer to the Hebrews - here it is and it means just what it says: *If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.*

I've already given you some good reasons to persevere in your faith. Let me finish with some good reasons to persevere: Why persevere?

### ◆ Perseverance proves God's faithfulness

*1 Thess 1: 3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. 4 Therefore, among God' s churches we boast about your perseverance*

*and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. 5 All this is evidence that God' s judgement is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. 6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well.*

***Heb 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.***

We prove God's faithfulness through perseverance. As we stick in there with Him, we find that He is One who is faithful to us. Paul said to the Thessalonians that as they endured suffering it was all *this is evidence that God' s judgement is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.*

If Sven picks someone for the English football squad, it is an honour, but the footballer, however much of a star he is in his club, must submit himself to hard training and achieve the highest standards if he is going to get picked for a match. We've been picked, now let's follow the discipline of His training so that we achieve the goal.

As a believer, are you going through problems? It's not a curse on your hose, but evidence that God is working in your life. Listen to His voice, obey Him and find Him faithful.

◆ **Perseverance makes us mature**

***James 1: 2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance . 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.***

***Hebrews 12:11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.***

For an athlete or a soldier, persevering with training makes them fitter and more able to accomplish the task. As you face trials, as you persevere in prayer, you are drawn more closely to God. You become more familiar with His presence and His ways. You act in wiser ways. As we said last week in the evening service, we walk with the Spirit. We keep in step with the Spirit. We become more like Christ. Look at the problems and trials in your life. What is God teaching you? What is He saying? How is He changing you? So often we see the problems, but we don't see His hand and His blessings in our circumstances. Let's follow and serve our God, who takes our negatives and turns them into positives.

◆ **God rewards perseverance**

***Heb 12:11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.***

***2 Tim 4: 6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race , I have kept the faith. 8 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 appearing.***

We are encouraged to persevere because ultimately we have a God who rewards those who have persevered in their faith. What comes from all this is a harvest of righteousness - we grow into a mature disciple of Jesus Christ. Someone who knows

the Master, who knows the sound of His voice, who obeys Him is blessed. Paul had that wonderful expectation of glory because He persevered, fought, ran. What about us? Have we lost our perspective as we go through the struggles of life. remember that crown of righteousness. Remember that glory set before us. let's move on in His power and persevere with our walk with Him despite the difficulties.

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*Preached by Mark Reid  
Swaffham Baptist Church  
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