



Before You Quit Consider This

Have You Come to the End of Your Rope?

Several years ago I tore my Achilles Tendon and although it hurt a lot, it wasn't as painful as some of my injuries have been. However, it had lasting ramifications for me because of a gigantic mistake I made. It took nearly a full year before I was able to have surgery to repair the tear and as a result because I had to use a special boot that did not allow me to use my calf muscle in any way. Consequently I lost my muscle tone in my left leg and my calf muscle shrank, making it almost useless. I had good insurance at the time and after the surgery, I was provided physical therapy to build back up my strength. However, the exercises were tedious and did not seem very beneficial. I felt like I could just as easily do them in my office as going to the physical therapy clinic and work out there. I decided to drop out of the physical therapy and chose to try to figure out my rehabilitation on my own. There were only two problems with my decision. 1. I had no idea what I was doing despite having been taught the exercise. 2. I did not keep up with the exercises because they were boring and tedious. The result was I never regained much strength in my calf muscle, and it is about half the size of my other one. In my case, perseverance would have been a huge benefit to me and could have saved me from a future catastrophic injury I later suffered.

I am probably not the only person who has made the terrible mistake of giving up too early on something. Whether it is a marriage, a college education, or a particular career, we all have quit at times before we should have done so. James the brother of Jesus has great wisdom for us and if I had paid attention to his training, I would be much better off today. He has this to say to us. **Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.** (James 1: 12 NIV) It may sound counter-intuitive, but James says that those who persevere under trial are happier, more fulfilled in life than those who don't. That is what the term translated "blessed" here describes. It brings psychological health to us to face a trial and persevere. Like Daniel and his friends who refused to eat the royal food but instead chose vegetables, they came out in the end looking much healthier, mentally and physically stronger than their peers who enjoyed the king's food. People who persevere under trial develop character, faith and hope as well as the ability to withstand pressure triumphantly.

The term translated perseveres describes the act of staying under a burden like a hiker toting a heavy backpack or a cross trainer rising under a weighty barbell. It is the determination to stay after it when many would throw up their arms in defeat. And yet as is often repeated in the gym, no pain, no gain. There is a robust benefit to staying under whatever tough burden you carry, and it is something quite precious. The word rendered "trial" is an interesting expression and it refers to a proving trial, something that reveals an important discovery either through a calamity or some sort of affliction. The trial serves not just as something tough to face but an event or an encounter that reveals just what sort of a person you are. It is a psychological or a spiritual mirror that tells you something about yourself you may not have known but also tells others who see this take place who you really are. Trials are the ultimate internal reveal of your inner life.

The expression, "when he has stood the test" is interesting. It is the final exam, the grade at the end of the course. When you go through the trial brought on by some trouble, hardship, tough task, or difficult challenge

of faith, you will be graded on your performance. Literally it reads, "having become proven". Every tough time you face is an exam you take and how you do is graded. You are assessed by those around you, by yourself and by God. He keeps track of how you do on these various trials. This checking on how we are doing in our trials and difficulties results, if we love God, in a crown of life. Make sure you note that this crown of life is only for those who love God, who keep loving Him, who love God no matter what. The crown of life is honor, it is happy celebration, it is the prize for a race well run. Only one other time is the term "crown of life" used in the Bible. **Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.** (Revelation 2: 10 NIV) To be honest, we cannot say much about what the crown of life actually is. Clearly it is a reward and whether we gain it here or in the world to come we cannot say. What we do know is that our Lord is thoroughly pleased with those who stay faithful when facing tough times and continue to love Him despite it all. Honor, recognition, and celebration are in store for all who give it their best and stay at it when Satan tries to wreck them, when the worst of troubles do not destroy the faith and loyalty of God's people.

There are two points that need to be made regarding the outcome for us when we face troubles and trials courageously and with faith in God. One, we become better people. We are made stronger, nobler, psychologically sturdy, robust emotionally, unfazed by hardship and challenges. The second point is that God has special honor and a joyful celebration in store for those who stay at it when it gets tough, who persevere when under trial. Never underestimate God's ability to outdo whatever you might suffer in rewarding you for your faithfulness. The God who knows how to throw the stars out into the sky like a field full of diamonds, who can fill the mountains with wild lupin and silence a crowd with thunder is perfectly able to give you the party of all parties when your faithful work is done.

Consider this one way you can persevere and gain the best God has to offer. You can persevere with difficult people. Jesus' own brother James, who wrote this book was a real hater. He and Jesus' other brothers decided that He was crazy, that His ministry needed to be stopped. **Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."** (Mark 3: 20-21 NIV) It would be tough to put that behind you, to let that pass. Yet, it is amazing that Jesus did not give up on His brother James. He had faith in what James could become. So when He rose from the dead, one of the ones He met with was His self-righteous, pompous brother James. **For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,** (1 Corinthians 15: 3-7 NIV) Jesus had the same approach to the woman at the well whose five marriages were scandalous, to the woman caught in adultery, to Paul who ravaged the church as its chief persecutor before Jesus met Him supernaturally, to Peter who cowardly denied knowing Jesus and to Thomas who doubted the resurrection of Jesus outright.

One of your greatest works in life may be how you refuse to give up on someone who is irritating, cold-hearted, rude or a failure. Don't give up on the guy who is critical and uncaring, the woman who is selfish and gossipy, the drug addict who never learns, the skeptic who mocks your faith. Jonah wanted to give up on the Assyrians, but God said don't. Paul wanted to give up on John Mark, but the Lord wouldn't let him. There is someone you know who needs another shot, who could use someone who believes God can work a miracle in him, who the Lord can transform her somehow. Some of your greatest acts of courage and faith will be just refusing to give up on someone who does not deserve another chance. Perseverance is hard, especially when we are talking about certain people but if it weren't, everyone would do it. You are not made for small acts of faith. You have been shaped by God to rise above trouble and hardship and reign with God in glory.