



## **Something You Need but Might Not Want**

### **How Do You Want Today to Go?**

When I was in high school during my sophomore year, I decided I wanted to become a professional basketball player so I gave up on doing homework and just went outside day and night and played basketball. I worked out doing jump rope, ran, played wearing five pound ankle weights, and shot all evening and Saturdays and Sundays. I even shot baskets at our family garage. We didn't actually have a basketball hoop on it. I just pretended one was there but amazingly I made every shot I took. I played against anybody who came to the school basketball court and actually just before my senior year got pretty good. My only problem was, I had never actually been on a basketball team. I had high hopes though my senior year when I tried out for the varsity. I did not make the team. Some would wonder why I spent so much time pursuing my dream when in the end, I really had no shot at achieving it. I often had open cuts on my hands because they were so dry and they split open from all the hours I dribbled and shot baskets. I was often exhausted when I came home, sometimes completely dehydrated because back then, no one had water bottles. I destroyed my grade point average and lost whatever opportunity I had going to a four year college straight out of high school. So what did I gain from it all? I developed endurance, the ability to persevere. I learned how to keep trying, even when the odds were stacked against me.

One of the great words in the Greek New Testament is *Hupomoney*. It literally means "to stay under", "to keep bearing the burden". It is translated either perseverance or endurance in the Bible and despite how little we like those times that require perseverance, it is of great value. Perseverance builds our character and gives us moral and emotional strength which are crucial during times of stress and hardship. James, the brother of Jesus insists that perseverance is a critical part of building your life, of maximizing your potential. **Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.** (James 1:4 NIV) You have to stay under your burden if you are to develop the strength you need for having a healthy personality. Just as chicks need to peck their way out of the egg to fully mature, you must do the hard things so that you will become a stronger person. In fact James notes, **As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered.** (James 5:11 NIV) You upgrade your life when you stay under the burdens you face, when you endure the tough times that come your way.

The gold standard for perseverance and endurance is Job. James makes this point about the example Job set for us. **You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.** (James 5:11 NIV) What is fascinating about the perseverance of Job is that it wasn't exactly smooth and comfortable. His endurance was tumultuous, full of lightning and thunder. At some points Job was confident in God's goodness and fairness and other times he had real mistrust of Him and even bitterness. Job's perseverance was rocky to say the least. And that is how it is. You don't do well every time. You might be miserable and full of rage over what you face, despondent and even suicidal. Job wanted God to strike him dead. You might lash out at those you love because you are psychologically shattered. Perseverance is sometimes like a prison just as the egg feels to the chick before she breaks through the shell. Endurance makes you a better person though, even if it can be a bit miserable or maybe a lot miserable.

When Noah was given the calling by God to build the ark, it was a one hundred year ordeal. Gathering the wood, chopping, and shaping it to fit. Having to work on it every day and needing to push his boys to help. Never having seen a drop of rain yet insisting it really was God who warned him of a coming deluge from the sky and that the ark was needed to protect his family could not have been an easy sell to make to his kids and probably even to his wife. Sometimes you have to persevere when no one else believes you should, when you are looked at as a fool, a fanatic, or even a failure. We can only guess at how many times his neighbors mocked him and laughed at his comical building project. I remember growing up, one of our neighbors had a large metal boat partially built in his driveway. It sat there for more than a decade, never in sight of a lake or an ocean. Yet, one day it was gone. He had finished the ship and took it out to sea. You can't expect to be cheered when you endure and maybe others will make fun of you for trying, but the time will come when God will smile on you.

Perhaps you remember Hagar who was a slave to Sarah, the wife of Abraham. One day, Sarah came to Hagar with a demand of sorts. She wanted Hagar to sleep with Abraham and provide him with a child. We don't know how Hagar thought of this but she did sleep with Abraham and she bore him a son. Hagar's pride at becoming pregnant when Sarah couldn't get the best of her. **When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.** (Genesis 16:4 NIV) Sarah began to mistreat Hagar in retaliation and Hagar fled into the desert to escape Sarah's wrath. Out by an oasis, an angel of the Lord met Hagar. **Then the angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count."** (Genesis 16:9-10 NIV) This could not have been an easy choice to make. Hagar had to trust the Lord that He would somehow make it all work. Sometimes you may wonder like Hagar why God put you in this place and with these people. It seems so unfair, so unreasonable. And yet, as you persevere, as you submit and become pliable in God's hands, you gain divine characteristics, qualities only God Himself can work in you. Patience, love and psychological strength reach supernatural levels when Christ gets a hold on your life as you endure what He puts before you.

When Nehemiah took on the challenge of helping the people of Jerusalem rebuild the wall around the city, it was a God project. He had to push the residents to see this work as critical for their safety and well-being. For decades, it had been ignored. The people had worked on their homes and developed their trades but did nothing to secure the safety of their city. When Nehemiah found out how bad it was in Jerusalem, he became distraught. **When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.** (Nehemiah 1:4 NIV) The rebuilding of the wall became Nehemiah's mission. But it was much more than just something that needed to be done. It became a God project. The situation, when Nehemiah traveled the more than two hundred miles to Jerusalem was even worse than he expected. As he pointed out to the leaders in Jerusalem, **"You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."** (Nehemiah 2: 17 NIV) Many joined Nehemiah in the work of rebuilding the wall but there was a vocal minority who mocked him and tried to discourage the team he had assembled. Perhaps his greatest work in this was keeping his group together long enough to finish the wall.

What did Noah gain by persevering? He of course preserved the human race and the animal kingdom. What did Hagar gain by persevering? She gave her son Ishmael the opportunity to learn from his father Abraham how to walk with God and live by faith. What did Nehemiah gain by persevering? He helped protect the tiny nation of Israel from destruction by enemy invaders. What do you gain by persevering? I cannot say because that is your story to live, your exploits to be remembered by Heaven and those who love you. What I can tell you is that you have a God project that only you can complete and it will take perseverance on your part! This statement by the Apostle Paul is one for you to grab with all your might and make your own. **We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.** (1

Thessalonians 1:3 NIV) What a great declaration to be made of you when you are remembered for your work done in faith in Christ!