

Watching the News, There's Only 1 Thing Left to Do

If you're like me, you watch the cascade of nightly news items and wonder where this is all headed. To be honest, it really is downright discouraging.

Chuck Norris' son, Mike, is releasing a movie called *Amerigeddon*—that says it all! Yet in the midst of this, we must remain people of faith and optimism.

Seven words from Jesus can sustain us during these challenging times: “Let both grow together until the harvest” (Matt. 13:30). In other words, prior to the return of Jesus, there is going to be a ripening of both good and evil in our world. While we work while it's still day to be a bulwark against the flood tide of wickedness, we must make a quality decision each day to not sink in our spirit.

A popular book on the market is titled *The Secret of Success Is Not a Secret*. What is the mysterious secret?

Perseverance!

The remarkable book traces the stories of multitudes of individuals who faced incredible setbacks and yet by persevering emerged victorious. If you need fresh inspiration, get yourself a copy.

In times as challenging as today, Paul wrote to encourage the early Christian community with these words, “May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance” (2 Thess. 3:5). How apropos for our generation.

If ever there was a time for people of faith to understand the power of perseverance, it is right now! We are entering a phase of history where challenging tests are increasing as

God's exciting plans for His people are unfolding.

Here's the deal: Understanding perseverance and knowing how it is developed is a non-negotiable for walking triumphantly in these perilous times.

The Importance of Perseverance

Perseverance or endurance means remaining steadfast, constant, unwavering and actively standing strong. It means realizing my personal struggles are necessary for future achievements.

- "Therefore, since we are encompassed with such a great cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).
- "Because iniquity will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matt. 24:12-13).
- "If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses?" (Jer. 12:5).

Let's face it—pressure reveals the person! Perseverance undergirds till breakthrough.

Recently my wife and I hosted a man whose wife just died after a lengthy battle with cancer. I officiated at her memorial service days ago. They were a team and an extraordinary faith-filled couple. Yet the reality is, Vicky went to be with the Lord, though that was not what they ever imagined.

My wife and I grappled to console our dear brother that his wife was not only exemplary, but similar to John the Baptist, her earthly assignment was apparently done. Her death, like John's, is a mystery and seems premature, but we must persevere, not despair.

Sometimes we face horrendous circumstances when it appears

things have come to an end. The natural tendency is to throw in the towel and quit. Maybe that's why the word "endurance" begins with the word "end." Yet God gives us his Holy Spirit whose role is to encourage us to press on in spite of perplexing circumstances.

Do you recall in the *Rocky III* movie, when he stood discouraged and devastated on the seashore after losing the heavyweight title to Clubber Lane? In a very emotional scene, he told his wife he had basically lost "the eye of the tiger" and was giving up.

In a role reminiscent of the role of the Holy Spirit, Rocky's wife, Adrian, exhorted him passionately to stop yielding to destructive thinking, rise up and reclaim the prize.

Sylvester Stallone came to his senses and eventually reclaiming his championship title. He put into practice the discipline of discarding negative thinking and replacing it with truth. So must we on a daily basis.

John Rohr, a "mentor to the masters" in the leadership world, has a classic statement that we would do well to post on our mirror: "Success is nothing more than a few simple disciplines practiced every day."

Read that again and ponder its significance.

As pressures heat up today, we must practice the simple disciplines that are at the core of our Christian life. They are essential for us to persevere in an ominous period of history.

3 Keys to Developing Perseverance

1. Be consistent in cultivating intimacy with God.

Isaiah 40:29-31 tells us, "He gives power to the faint, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths

shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

Notice the three covenantal promises that belong to us when we "wait" (literally "intertwine" ourselves) with God by spending consistent time in His Presence, meditating on His Word, praying and worshipping Him. First, there is new strength. Second, there comes a new perspective, viewing things from the heavenly viewpoint. Third, there's new endurance!

God uses the imagery of a soaring eagle that is so different from an earthbound chicken. How many of us are like chickens clucking and flapping our wings and yet not experiencing any breakthrough or peace in difficult times? God calls us to be like the majestic eagle, who from his high vantage point will catch the current of a mighty wind and literally fly without flapping for over 10 miles.

As Corrie ten Boom used to say in encouraging people to spend quality time with Jesus, "Nestle, don't wrestle."

2. Don't change course unless God specifically directs.

Proverbs 24:16 tells us, "For a just man falls seven times and rises up again, but the wicked will fall into mischief." God tells us here to get up, dust ourselves off and stay in the race when tempted to give up. As a coach once said, "Success is rarely final. Failure is rarely fatal."

Consider presidential candidate Ben Carson who was raised in poverty in Detroit. His mother was one of 20 or so children with little more than a third-grade education. As a youth, Ben tried to stab a person and could've ended up in prison. Thank God this led to his conversion!

Yet with all the adversities he faced, Ben Carson heeded his mother's counsel and read books voraciously. He went to Yale.

He went to medical school. At the age of 33, he became the youngest head of pediatric neurosurgery at John Hopkins Hospital.

Facing numerous setbacks, he continued on with his career, achieving seats on the boards of Costco and Kellogg. He was the first doctor to separate co-joined twins after 22 hours of surgery. Today, in spite of liberal media attacks, he perseveres.

What does Carson say to us to encourage us?

“Successful people don’t have fewer problems. They have determined that nothing will stop them from going forward.”

So no matter what you’re facing, stay in the game! Unless, that is, God is redirecting your course.

Ecclesiastes 3 tells us that there is a “time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted; ... a time to break down and a time to build up; ... a time to gain and a time to lose; ... a time to keep and a time to cast away.”

The key is to be led by the Holy Spirit, who guides us each day if we position ourselves to listen to any course correction.

In Nashville, for two years we hosted regular, citywide meetings of a group we called “.”—The Awareness Group.

Every week we addressed the hot button issues of our culture and were equipped by prominent leaders.

Months ago, we sensed God directing closure. The assignment was completed, and for us to keep going would’ve been what Scripture calls a “dead work.”

Don’t continue on beyond where God has called you or where the grace of God won’t sustain you. Remember Ishmael?

3. Remember the future rewards.

Throughout life's journey, we face many obstacles. Sometimes we struggle for the sake of Christ. Other times it's due to satanic opposition. We also struggle if we shun God's laws and reap what we sow.

Yet let's remember that we serve a merciful God who loves to take our trials and turn them into triumphs, our setbacks into steppingstones and our trials into triumphs.

In the midst of life's difficulties, it's wise to remember the rewards that lie ahead to gain fresh motivation to persevere.

Take consolation from the words of Paul as he faced his execution sitting alone in a dark and dreary cell. "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, and I have kept the faith. From now on a crown of righteousness is laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

One of my spiritual mentors, Derek Prince, said, "There is no way to finish the race and keep the faith unless we fight the good fight."

If you've been discouraged or tempted to quit lately, recognize God custom-designed this commentary just for you! He's calling all of us to persevere and cross the finish line as "more than conquerors" (Rom. 8:37).

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).