

Why Perseverance Is the Secret to Your Success in 2020

“By perseverance the snail reached the ark.” –Spurgeon

“We are not on the verge of Civil War. The Civil War is already in progress.” – Bill O'Reilly, 45-year journalist and best-selling author

“Larry, stop! I want to be encouraged!” Absolutely, but it's vital to understand encouragement and perseverance together as a “tag team” helping us remain hopeful and harmonious in these days of division. “Now may the God of perseverance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony” (Rom. 15:5a).

Because we'll face hardship and heartache in life and increasingly hard times in days ahead, it's imperative that Christians understand suffering and the role of patience and perseverance to prepare us to live victoriously. God is again readying an ark of safety as in the time of Noah, so it's time to heed His call.

There are those who object to a message along these lines, saying, “Christians should be optimistic people of mountain-moving faith, avoiding anything negative or political. We're to major on hope and love, God's sovereignty, revival and awakening!”

We should be optimists, not pessimists, but we also must be realists. Legislation and education are not the solutions to our problems, but regeneration—the transformative message of the gospel. Yet we're called to be “salt” in society recognizing our dual citizenship in what Augustine called the “City of God and the City of man.”

Those believing that times prior to the return of our Lord will be glorious should read the picture Jesus painted for us in Revelation 22:11 (MSG), where He foretold, "Time is just about up. Let evildoers do their worst and the dirty-minded go all out in pollution, but let the righteous maintain a straight course and the holy continue on in holiness." The prophet Isaiah painted a clear picture of the end times as characterized by both gore and glory: "light has come" as "darkness shall cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples" (Isa. 60:1-2, MEV).

The theme of endurance takes on greater significance for Christians in these end times. Jesus warned us: "Then they will hand you over to be persecuted ... you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. Then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another... Because iniquity will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (-13).

Scripture tells us how this essential character quality is developed. Romans 5:3b-4 (NIV) says "suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope".

Patience and Perseverance

Perseverance is best friends with patience. Patience is the quality of being patient, calmly waiting; perseverance is continuing on course amidst suffering, pressure and discouragement. Pressure reveals the person, ideally pressing us into God.

Pastor Andrew Brunson, imprisoned in Turkey, issued a warning when President Trump secured his release. He said American Christians are not prepared for what's coming our way. He's very concerned for our young people. Returning after two years of incarceration, he also expressed shock at the level of decline and increasing opposition to Christianity he sees in America.

Ominous storm clouds are on the horizon: overt hostility to Christian values; allegations destroying reputations without due process; incivility, angry protests and boycotts of businesses; far-left politicians, celebrities and educators hammering godless socialism, abortion-on-demand, infanticide, physician-assisted suicide, drug legalization and sexual anarchy; non-stop mockery and mean-spirited attacks upon our president; corruption of the media; LGBTQ propagandizing of children in schools; libraries and shopping malls now hosting drag queen shows as entertainment (*The Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 19, 2019).

Let's be brutally honest, here in America we have enjoyed relative peace, prosperity and protection until recently. With religious freedoms eroding, we must "stand against the schemes of the devil" ... and "be alert with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (Eph.6:11b, 18b, MEV).

"If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace in which you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?" (Jer. 12:5).

The Issue of Suffering

Since Scripture reveals that suffering produces perseverance, it's essential we understand its origins.

There are 7 basic reasons we suffer:

sake of Christ.

2. Satanic activity.

3. Sin.

4. Stigma of the fall.

5. Selfishness.

6. Shunning God's laws.

7. Stumbling in life.

The oldest book in the Bible, the book of Job, contains

invaluable insights to help us endure as we face suffering and opposition. It's helpful to review the book in four sections.

"My brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed, we count them happy who endure. You have heard of the patience of Job and have seen the purpose of the Lord, that the Lord is very gracious and merciful" (James 5:10-11).

Act 1

Job was an outstanding and upright man blessed with a wonderful family and prosperous business. The Adversary asked God's permission to attack and expose Job by devastating his business and bringing calamity on his children. He returned, seeking permission to afflict Job with sickness. His wife told him to "Curse God and die" (2:9b) but Job said, "Will we indeed accept the good from God but not accept the adversity?" (2:10b). Job persevered. (Job 1:1-12; 2:1-10)

Act 2

Three of Job's friends traveled to comfort him in his distress. They started strong but yielded to human sympathy and ungodly counsel. He wavered but continued to honor God saying, "God forbid that I should justify you. Until I die I will not put away my integrity from me" (Job 27:5).

God strengthened Job as he questioned and wrestled with God's dealings. He sent him another friend who proclaimed God's majesty, rebuked the friends and challenged Job. Job persevered (Job 2:11-13, 27:5).

Act 3

After 35 chapters of recorded debate, the Lord speaks powerfully! God overviews creation and creatures, intimating, "If I am intimately involved with the universe and animals, why would I neglect you?" Job is left undone (Job 38:1-12;

39:1-2; 9-13; 26-27; 40:1-5).

Act 4

Job recognized there's an element of mystery in creation and an element of mystery in God and suffering. He repented. He continued seeking God and serving Him as sovereign with or without an explanation. Job trusted, obeyed and was richly rewarded. Job persevered. (Job 42)

Here's the deal: These are days of preparation. We need to break free from fear and defeatism in what the Bible labels the "evil day" (Eph. 6:13).

Have you been charging God lately, making demands, setting deadlines for deliverance, breakthrough or healing? Have you been stuck in self-pity, isolating yourself, maybe becoming a "sipping saint" to drown your sorrows? Is the Adversary whispering the thought that it's time to "Curse God and die"?

Because of your Christian witness, are you facing increased ridicule, discrimination and opposition? Has a friend betrayed, abused or defrauded you, and you're nursing resentment, replaying episodes in your mind, believing, "I could never forgive him/her? My life is ruined. I'm just another Job."

Good news! Job's situation lasted less than a year! Scripture says that "the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends." God gave him "twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10), "blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning" (v. 12a), gave him "seven sons and three daughters" (v. 13) and he "lived a hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and their sons to the fourth generation" (v. 16).

Job persevered, passed the test and it paid off in the end. With pressures, opposition and suffering increasing for Christians, we're wise to learn lessons from Job, who was a

heroic example of perseverance for these perilous times.

“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” ().