

Power to Persevere

By Steven Harper

All of us, at one time or another, have faced difficult situations that led us to question whether or not we would be able to make it. Sometimes, we knew about the difficult situation before it came and we tried to prepare mentally, physically, and maybe even financially for the situation, but it was still a trying time that caused us to lose a little bit of hope. As Christians, though we know the promise of God that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5), we still sometimes harbor those doubts about our ability to persevere. Just remember that the presence of doubt in our minds is one of our enemy's greatest tools.

So what will help us to be reminded and assured that we can persevere even through the most difficult times? The answer, not surprisingly, is found in the example of our Lord, whom we know to have suffered through an experience most of us cannot really even comprehend. Let's take a look for a few minutes at the events leading up to and surrounding His betrayal, trial, and crucifixion, and learn from what He did about how we, too, can persevere through even the most difficult situations.

Confront It. Jesus knew that He had come to earth to die, but that knowledge did not prevent Him from coming. In fact, the nearer the time came, the more we see His willingness to do so. When He sat and ate with the apostles right before He was taken away, He plainly said to them, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me" (Matt. 26:21). He didn't try to deny reality, He didn't try to make it out to be less than what it was, and He did not run away from what was certain; He confronted it.

When we know difficult times are coming, then is not the time to fool ourselves and act as if it isn't really going to happen; confront the reality of the situation, call it what it is, and prepare yourself to stand firm. Denial will not help you, making excuses or making light of it will not help you, and running away will likely only delay the inevitable. Face up to the trials, prepare yourself for it, and face it with courage!

Pray About It. We probably already know that Jesus was a man of prayer (Luke 5:16), so it is not surprising to see Him take the time to pray during this difficult situation. After He and the apostles left the upper room and went into the Garden, Jesus sat His disciples down and went a short distance away and prayed. Let us note a couple of things about this scene that are worthy of our attention.

First, let us note the mental state of Jesus at this time. Though we would like to believe Jesus never worried about anything or that He was never bothered, the text plainly says "He began to be sorrowful and troubled" (Matt. 26:37). There should be no doubt that this was a difficult time for even Jesus. So what did He do about it? He prayed!

The second thing we should note about this is that Jesus prayed with intensity. The record tells us He prayed three times, asking the same thing each time (cf. Matt. 26:44), but Luke's record also tells us that during this time, "being in an agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). That, friends and brethren, is intensity in prayer!

When difficult times come, it is then that we should pray, too, and pray like Jesus. Though we may certainly be troubled and greatly sorrowed, remember that God knows that and that He cares — and He is waiting to hear from you. Take the time to speak to Him about what's on your mind and what's happening in your life. He cares.

Accept It. As was stated already, Jesus knew this day was coming, and He did not run away from it. And when He was faced with His betrayer in the Garden, He greeted him like a friend (Matt. 26:50) and commanded that those trying to defend Him cease (vv. 52-54). He was willing to face what was coming.

And when He stood before His accusers and blasphemed, struck on the face and spat upon, He did not seek revenge and did not even move to avoid their insults and abuse (Matt. 26:63, 67-68; 1Peter 2:23). When He stood before Pilate and heard more of the same, He again did nothing to defend Himself, by words or by action (Matt. 27:12-14). Jesus did not stoop to the tactics of those who attacked Him, but took the high road, instead.

In this, Jesus set the example for us, and Peter even said this was our example for perseverance (1Peter 2:20, 21). We cannot always control what happens to us, but we can control how we react and respond to what others do to us. Please don't say you "can't help it" when others prod you to act un-righteously; you can and must act as a faithful disciple. The world is watching.

Don't Deny Truth To Escape It. When Jesus stood before His accusers who were seeking His death [and Jesus knew that], He was asked to state plainly if He was the Christ. Jesus could have lied and denied it, but He did not (Matt. 26:62, 63). He did not because it was a lie! Jesus was willing to speak the truth, even though He knew it would mean His death. He was willing to face great persecution and suffering for truth.

How about us? It may be that our coworkers, classmates, or even family are looking for reasons to persecute us and make our lives miserable by asking about our faith; what will we answer? We could mumble our way out of it or outright deny our faith to escape what will probably be many uncomfortable and unpleasant situations in the future, but at what price? Friends and brethren, your soul is not worth a "little lie" [if there is such a thing]. The sacrifice of truth for a few moments — or even a lifetime — of ease is not worth the surrendering of eternity in heaven. You — and truth — are more valuable than any lie.

Surrender Yourself to God. When Jesus faced the persecutions from His accusers, Peter tells us He "continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly" (1Peter 2:23). When Jesus went to the cross and just before He took His last breath, He said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!" (Luke 23:46). But Jesus had given Himself over to God long before that day. It was that commitment to God, and the commitment of Himself to do God's will, that took Him through those extremely difficult times and brought Him to the throne on which He now sits.

Friends and brethren, it is only when we commit ourselves fully to the Lord — that is, in both body and spirit — that we will be able to persevere through even the most difficult times. We must commit our spirit to Him with the understanding He will be the one who determines our eternal destination based on our life here on earth; we must commit our bodies to Him in our earthly service to Him rather than our own selfish desires (Rom. 6:13). When we have committed ourselves fully to Him, we will be able to persevere through the most difficult of times and then be able to look back on those difficult times and see them as nothing.

If you're thinking that Jesus went through all of this because it was God's will, you are right; but that does not take away anything from His example. The apostles followed His example in all of these things, too (Acts 4-5), and, doing so, they had the power to persevere. You can, too!

A Moments Wisdom

- You can't let praise or criticism get to you. It's a weakness to get caught up in either one.
- There's a basic human weakness inherent in all people which tempts them to want what they can't have and not want what is readily available to them.
- A great weakness of most humans is their hesitancy to tell others how much they love them while they're alive.
- One of the weaknesses of our age is our apparent inability to distinguish our needs from our greeds.