

Coach House Church BEACONS

R U N T H E R A C E

21ST MAY 2020

I decided when we went into lockdown that I didn't want to be just counting down the days until 'normal' happened again. I didn't want to feel that I was wishing away the hours and wanted to feel that something positive would come from it all. So, one thing I started was the 'couch to 5K challenge'. I thought this would be a safe thing to try as it was originally designed by someone who wanted to encourage their 50 something mum to get out and try running- so it needed to be gentle and achievable by someone without an athletic history. Just the right thing to try then! The first week, I was so pleased to achieve running for a whole minute without collapsing in a heap. Now, 7 weeks later, I can run- well lightly jog – for 25 minutes- and much to my surprise, I can still breath and am living on this planet.

'By perseverance the snail reached the ark'

I am more the slow jogger than a runner by any description however I am heartened by a quote by Charles Spurgeon, a famous preacher from long ago, who said:

'By perseverance the snail reached the ark'

So, this leads me onto thinking about 'keeping going' about perseverance. There are lots of other words linked to this concept:

diligence, endurance, persistence, steadfastness, waiting and sometimes even patience.

All of these are essential attributes of 'keeping going' of being sure-footed and consistent and continuing to the end.

Life is sometimes described as a race, as something to be endured, with hurdles or obstacles to overcome but with a prize at the end for those who win through the challenges.

One of Jesus' followers, Timothy said:

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. 8 And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing (2 Timothy 4).

Timothy's description gives a purpose to the Christian life as there is an end goal—the crown of righteousness. This is the crown of victory for keeping faithful and striving to live as Jesus wants us, to work towards a more holy way of living, to God's high standards, with the help and guidance of God's Holy Spirit.

Now, we know that language changes over time and if we track back to the original meaning of the word perseverance, to its root, we can see how it is used in different contexts. Back in the Old Testament, the word perseverance is strongly linked to hope. It has the meaning of waiting for something, of a tense expectation of an event.

Psalm 37 talks about being still...waiting patiently for the Lord... those who hope in the Lord...will inherit the land. It doesn't come easily, it isn't achieved quickly.

In this way, perseverance is used to describe the faithfulness of God who delivers his people. It is the sense that God is to be relied upon, that he has a permanence that is in contrast to humans who constantly change their minds. We can put our Hope in Almighty God because he is steadfast, sure and reliable to fulfil his promises.

The New Testament focus is more about the aspect of endurance and persistence, of keeping going against the odds, of being steadfast under pressure and endurance in the face of trials.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:5 Paul is encouraging the Christians he is visiting:

'May the Lord lead your hearts into a full understanding and expression of the love of God and the patient endurance that comes from Christ.'

He recognises that, at times, life is a struggle and that we have to put in patient effort to become more like Jesus. We have to persevere in our battle to make the right choices in attitude, behaviour and how we treat others.

Sometimes we feel that the following quote just sums where we are in life:

'To save energy the light at the end of the tunnel has been switched off'.
If we're honest, we do have days where perseverance isn't exactly on the tip of our tongues. We feel like we're getting nowhere fast and even going backwards. We feel like we are failing at every turn and keeping going towards having a Christ-like identity is nowhere on the horizon.

Hebrews 12 provides us with some guidance and encourages us to keep on:
'Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. 2 We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honour beside God's throne.'

This part of the bible tells us to look at others who have stuck to their faith, who have overcome all manner of difficulties and challenges and who have not given up the race. Look at the Christians around you and get to know their life stories and see how they have persevered with the power of the Holy Spirit who is both our comforter and strength. Read Hebrews chapter 11 which describes the faith of Moses, Noah, Rahab and others whose faith kept them focussed.

The great crowd of witnesses is like the football stadium cheering on the team, the well-wishers at the roadside shouting encouragement. This is the benefit of being part of a church family where we can help and encourage each other, especially on those days when the finishing line is way out of sight.

It also tells us to get rid of those things that are slowing us down. Give our worries and concerns to God who wants to relieve us of our burdens and cares.

Hebrews 12 also instructs us to look at Jesus. He had a choice to make and he chose the extreme option – to suffer the most terrible of deaths, crucifixion as he knew that was the only option for the perfect sacrifice, the only way to re-establish the broken link between God the Father and his creation. As a result of this, Jesus claimed the prize in heaven, the acceptable sacrifice for sinful man, allowing us to have access to a Holy God and a place in eternity with him one day. Describing her experiences in a concentration camp in WW/2, Corrie Ten Boom says:

If it's dark everywhere, you can become so discouraged. You might doubt whether light still exists. But even if you can't see the Lord, He sees you and me. Jesus said,

'And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' (Matt. 28:20). When it's necessary, He suddenly says, 'I'm still here!'

It's much easier to keep going when you see the finishing line, when you know what the goal is. So, let's persevere by putting one foot in front of the other, bit by bit as it says in Philippians 3:14

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

As regards my running efforts, I will get there, slowly, but nevertheless I will get there. Only another 2K to go!

As regards the higher prize in life, let's focus on Jesus who makes the race possible, trust in Almighty God who waits with the prize and encourage one another to keep on 'keeping on'.

Let's finish with this prayer from Jude 1:24

24 Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault. 25 All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen.



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