

## VIRTUE 10

## PERSEVERANCE

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

—Romans 5:3-5

**A** knight needs both perseverance and patience. Perseverance is staying with a project or battle until it is finished. Patience is tolerating pain or difficulty. As stated by the Reverend Billy Graham, these two virtues are interrelated: “Patience includes perseverance—the ability to bear up under weariness, strain, and persecution when doing the work of the Lord.”<sup>28</sup> Each of these virtues is discussed below.

**PERSEVERANCE**

Many medieval knights had more perseverance than we can even fathom. Imagine this: You are part of a fifteenth century army that has just traveled all day in the hot sun on horseback. You fell asleep twice on your horse during the day’s travel, and you are hungry and thirsty. Your shoulders are aching, and you have a pulled muscle in

your back from last week's battle. While the aching in your back is pulsating a constant, dull throb, the pain is still dwarfed by the stinging pain above your eye from a cut that has become infected. You have no medicine for the pain and swelling, nor do you have a bag of ice for your back. After arriving at camp and looking forward to a night's rest, the enemy makes a surprise attack upon your camp. Your horse is exhausted, so you take this battle on foot with whatever weapon you can scrounge.

After squaring off with your opponent, your swordplay begins, and it turns out that the opponent is an equal match to your ability. The fighting continues. Five minutes pass, and the adrenaline has already burned out of your system. Now you are down to just sheer will. Your shoulder and bicep begin to burn like they are on fire because you have been swinging a three-pound sword to save your life. The enemy keeps bringing the fight like he has rested all day for it, so the fight continues. Then you get injured as he throws an unexpected cut your way, and you feel yourself bleeding. You want to keep fighting, but now you cannot even feel your sword arm. You have no muscle left. You are panting like a dog. Your heart is pounding out of your chest. Then finally, with a lucky blow, you drop your enemy. But then you turn around, and two more are coming.

Can you imagine this situation? It is actually not too far from the truth of what many historical battles were like. Travel was hard and long. Enemies came at unsuspecting times. Many were heavily armed. Many were physically fit even beyond levels of many professional athletes today. You had to fight and persevere or lie down and die. I have engaged in swordplay while wearing armor, and it is amazing how tired you become after just ten minutes of engagement. Adrenaline can take you through the first three minutes of most battles, but then your cardiovascular system has to do all the work. And even if your arms are strong, it is only a matter of minutes before the burning sensation of muscle fatigue sets in from swinging a heavy sword over one hundred times in every direction within just

a few minutes time. You cannot time your rest periods with your opponent's. When he rushes in, you need to defend—ready or not.

But life today is very similar to this in many respects. You come home from a long day at school or work, wanting only to rest, when challenges pounce into your life in moments that are sometimes perfectly timed with your moments of weakness. Perseverance is needed in these moments. To make it through these times, only true perseverance will suffice, and such perseverance is only gained through spiritual means by relying on God's promise: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Perseverance takes many forms. Sometimes we need emotional perseverance—strength to get up and push through just one more day after losing a loved one. Sometimes we need spiritual perseverance to continue in prayer and seek the Lord. And sometimes we need physical perseverance. In other circumstances, we need all three. But God provides to those of us who ask—and when He gives, strength and perseverance abound.

One of the best examples of perseverance can be taken from a short mention of a warrior named Eleazar who was one of King David's three "mighty fighting men":

Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite, one of the three mighty men. He was with David at Pas Dammim when the Philistines gathered there for battle. At a place where there was a field full of barley, the troops fled from the Philistines. But they took their stand in the middle of the field. They defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the Lord brought about a great victory (1 Chronicles 11:12-14).

Second Samuel 23:9-10 fills in even more detail about this particular battle and explains that Eleazar "stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword." Now that's perseverance!

## PATIENCE

The Bible is filled with advice regarding patience. Without patience, tact, and foresight, an ancient knight's life would go to waste. And the same goes for today's knight. Consider the following verses on patience:

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2).

A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly (Proverbs 14:29).

A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel (Proverbs 15:18).

Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city (Proverbs 16:32).

It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way (Proverbs 19:2).

A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense (Proverbs 19:11).

Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone (Proverbs 25:15).

If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest (Ecclesiastes 10:4).

Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools (Ecclesiastes 7:9).

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you (James 1:19-21).

According to the verses above, patience (or the lack thereof) can have a powerful impact in many areas of our lives. Patience can create a situation of mutual understanding (i.e., help to build consensus), avoid foolishness and folly, turn away and disarm anger brought about by others, contain and subdue your own temper and anger, avoid dissention, calm a quarrel, help you overlook an offense, and even sway rulers and leaders.

So how do we gain this priceless virtue of patience? Patience is *grown*, not acquired. It is *slowly cultivated* in our lives, not microwaved. God can (and does) *give* us patience and wisdom as a fruit of His Spirit; God also desires to *grow* our patience by *passing us through difficult circumstances*. Consider the following Scriptures:

For our light and momentary troubles are *achieving for us* an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:17-18, emphasis added).

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything (James 1:2-4).

These passages deliver two important truths. First, God wants us to grow and mature, especially in areas of perseverance and patience. Second, He gracefully allows us to endure trials and tribulations that *build* these assets into our lives. They are often His tools to shape and refine these timeless virtues into our character. If we could actually see the incredible benefits that will come from patience that is being built in our lives by the “light and momentary troubles” (2 Corinthians 4:17), we would be truly grateful.

Blessings always seem to come after applying patience. Even if we do not receive the reward immediately, we will in the long run because we traded the stressful situation for a heap of character and wisdom that will help us through similar situations later in our lives.

### *REFLECT*

Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

—Acts 14:19-20

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

—James 1:12

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 3:12-14

The reason a true knight gets up after he falls down in battle is because he knows that his life does not end on this earth.

***RESPOND***

1. Why is perseverance important?
2. How effective will a person's life be without perseverance?
3. How can patience shape a person's life?
4. How does suffering lead to perseverance?
5. Why does a modern-day knight need patience?
6. Think of a recent time when you lost your patience. How would the situation have turned out differently if you had remained patient? How can you stay patient better next time?

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