

PERSEVERANCE

By Steve Schmutzer

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I have a tiny note taped to the top right corner of my computer screen. It's from a fortune cookie and it reads, *"Your hard work will pay off today."*

Since I'm an entrepreneur who is cursed with big visions, hard work is my life. While I place zero credibility on fortune cookies, I can use the passive encouragement.

There have been plenty of times since I put that teeny piece of paper there where I've wanted to rip it off and throw it away! Those few words seem to have mocked me more than they have motivated me.

On a few occasions I have been tempted to abandon my core principles, and say as the world does, *"It's all about luck and being in the right place at the right time."* In other words, it's much easier to feel the victim. It's tempting to believe my choices have no impact on my circumstances.

So, I find the words of James 1:2-4 particularly arresting. You know – that stuff about being joyful in trials, persevering, and becoming mature, and so on. Sometimes, when I read that, I just want to punch a wall. Don't lie. You've been there too!

But, I saw something new in those verses a few days ago. It's not really new; it was just new to me then. It's the word *"must."* What is especially significant is *"must"* follows the word *"perseverance"* in verse 4.

Together, in that order, they underscore a pretty strong point, especially in light of the fuller phrase: *"Perseverance must finish its work."* It's the Scriptures saying, *"Nothing good comes easy, and it's going to take time and trouble. Deal with it!"*

In today's "me-first" mentality where so many people feel entitled to something they don't deserve or qualify for in the first place, perseverance becomes rather unpopular, especially when it's associated with uncomfortable circumstances. But this is the inspired Word of God we're wrestling with here, not progressive ideologies. If I'm the believer I claim to be, I had better accept that God and man don't usually agree.

So here's a question: *"Why is it necessary that 'perseverance' finish?"* The answer is straightforward. If we are to achieve spiritual maturity, then perseverance is part of that process. As such, it must be allowed to complete its work and have its full effect. If it doesn't - and if we run from the discomforts we encounter along the way instead - then perseverance is basically absent and it cannot complete its God-ordained task.

Someone once said not to trust anyone that didn't walk with a limp. This underscores that the best lessons are the hard-earned ones. Properly graduating from the school of hard knocks makes one wise. Perseverance doesn't give you the limp; it helps you get past it.

I admit it, perseverance in the face of challenges is no easy road. Perseverance is required when we make bad decisions, and when bad decisions are made by others against us. Perseverance will be necessary when we make good decisions, but there is no immediate reward for doing what is right.

Perseverance is essential when the right decisions you make expose the wrong decisions others make. Perseverance preserves a right course in stormy relationships, and perseverance is an absolute requirement if any great ambition is to be realized. Anything good, proper, worthy, enduring, noble, virtuous, trustworthy, sincere, upright, and....righteous, will require perseverance. *"Deal with it!"*

In the end, I have a choice to make. Nobody else can make it for me. God has called me to persevere, and I can accept or reject that call. If I reject it, I'm putting myself on His throne and I'm telling Him to scoot over since He doesn't have my perceived best interests at heart. I will surely suffer for that decision.

If I accept His call, then I choose to rest in the peace that I am growing into the maturity God has prescribed for me. It's about His way and His plan, not my way and my plan. His plan for me may not necessarily be the one I would have chosen or the one He has chosen for everyone else, but someday – if I faithfully persevere - I will come through to the other side, *"....perfect, complete, and not lacking anything."*

Starters are a dime a dozen, but finishers are rare. For the Christian, it's all about finishing well. It's all about getting to glory and hearing "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:23). It's all about perseverance!

We always want the best for ourselves, and honestly - God wants that too! It's just that we have one idea about what that is while God may have another idea.

It is our perseverance that says to God, *"I want your way and not mine. Do what it takes to make me what you most want me to be."*