

Perseverance

Objective

To learn about the importance of perseverance and understand why we should not give up on our spiritual walk no matter how daunting it may be.

References

Holy Scripture

Scriptural Verse

“Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord - that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (**James 5:11**)

Lesson Outline

Definition of perseverance:

- ❖ Steady persistence in adhering to a course of action, a belief, or a purpose; steadfastness.
- ❖ To persist in or remain constant to a purpose, idea, or task in the face of obstacles or discouragement.

What are the characteristics of it?

- ❖ Steady – Stable, unswerving, disciplined not haphazard...Done with a plan and forethought.

1 Corinthians 15:58

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord”

Colossians 1:23

“If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister”

- ❖ Persistent – Something we go after unceasingly, always working to achieve our goal. Never growing weary or bored.

In the parable of the judge and the widow (**Luke 18:1-8**), God describes the persistence of the widow that caused the unjust judge to feel weary and say:

“Because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me”

So, if the unjust judge said so, how about the just God? He will do more for us; as He said:

“And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily”

- ❖ Purposeful – We have to understand the course of action. We must map out the path to our success so we can follow it. There is a course of action, not a random series of events, but a plan.

Psalm 17:3

“You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and have found nothing; I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress”

Daniel 1:8

“But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself”

- ❖ Based on conviction – Things that are worth doing are not the mainstream. There is no peer pressure to love your enemies. Instead we must be convinced and convicted of that which we strive to achieve. Unless we are truly convicted of what we are doing we will quickly give up when obstacles arise.
- ❖ Expecting obstacles – One of the biggest reasons that people fail to achieve is because they go into their endeavor expecting that it will be easier than it really is. While we can't predict every obstacle that is in our way, we do know by the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, that the way and the gate are narrow and few find it. We have to be ready for a prolonged fight if we want to succeed.

Acts 14: 21-22

“And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying: We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God”

Path to Perseverance

1) Know the goal and why it is important.

The goal is to become Christ-like, in all the fullness of perfection that He was.

2) Understand the means to the goal.

St. Shenouda said to his monks before his death: “Do not neglect the worship, prayers, and fasts, but persevere in them at all times so that you may be companions of Christ, and by keeping these you will not lack any good thing, either here or in the world to come.”

St. Paul described this as a word of discipline saying:

1 Corinthians 9:27

“But I discipline my body and bring [it] into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified”

Our bodies are natural bodies that desire pleasure and physical gratification in any and every form. But God said:

Proverbs 14:12

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”

This is the reason we fall into temptation. In times of temptation, the devil momentarily convinces us that a sin we know to be wrong is OK for one reason or another for ME and at THIS particular time. It might be OK because I am tired and can't be expected to discipline my body when I am tired. Or perhaps I am lonely, or am having other social or financial pressures, or poor health. The devil uses all these external factors and burdens in our lives to apply more pressure on us to sin. In the moment of sin, it looks right to us, but its end is the way of death. This is why discipline is so necessary. Discipline is a pre-emptive strike against sin. It is not saying I am going to wait until the temptation comes and then I will battle, instead it says I am going to prepare for temptations and wage the fight from before it even comes.

Daily Bible reading and prayer is transforming. It is the armor of God that we put on that shields us from temptations, brings us closer to God and inline with the purpose He has for us. Discipline is about go above and beyond what is expected or required. Fasting is a type of discipline in that we abstain from food that is not sinful. Eating is not sinful, and eating meat in particular is not sinful, but by depriving our bodies we learn to control them and when temptation does come we will be all the more able to resist it.

However, discipline requires a lifetime of perseverance. Continually battling against our fleshly nature and bringing it into subject. Not allowing evil and destructive thoughts to take hold of our minds. Not giving into to repeated and seemingly un-ending sexual temptations, temptations to hate, envy, lie, cheat, etc.

3) *Know the obstacles*

Tribulations

Matthew 13:5-6, 20-21

“Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away...But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles”

This refers to the people who started with excitement. They were committed and ready...they had the spirit St. Peter had before the Lord Christ's crucifixion.

Matthew 26:33-35

“Peter answered and said to Him: Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble. Jesus said to him: Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times. Peter said to Him: Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” And so said all the disciples”

It all seemed too clear and easy in his mind. He simply would not leave the Lord. He had a real passion, and was sincere in his words, just as we also are often sincere when we desire righteousness and to overcome sin and temptation. The result for St. Peter however was denying the Lord.

The World

Matthew 26:7, 22

“And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them...Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful”

This group was not ready for the narrow road. They quickly stumbled because they were drawn back to the life they used to live. They remember what it was like without the constant struggle and they miss it.

The deceit of immediate success

Success is not immediate. If it were, perseverance would not be necessary, but the Lord Jesus Christ told us that we must persevere indicating that it will not be straightforward and easy. The road will be filled with many obstacles...some of which might be completely unexpected; the death of a loved one, a great financial loss, a health problem, a relationship on the rocks, a strong disappointment, etc. All these things God allows in our lives to test us and increase our ability to persevere despite them. Obstacles can HELP us persevere:

Romans 5:3

“We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance”

Consider any soldier that fought in war. During war time, he was strong, healthy, athletic, agile...everything that a soldier needs to be so that he can fight and not get killed. After the war is over, fast-forward 20 years. After living a cushy comfortable life, not training daily like he used to. His body shape, health, and ability are probably very different than what they once were. By persevering in the midst of trials, we strengthen ourselves and develop a godly character.

2 Peter 1: 5-7

“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love”

Believing we have achieved the goal prematurely

One reason we fail is that once we achieve some success, we believe that it has become intrinsic to our nature.

Examples:

- ❖ Someone who exercises, becomes strong, then forgets how he used to be weak and thinks that he will always remain strong...he stops exercising and falls back into weakness.
- ❖ King Solomon – the wisest man in the world that also turned his back on his God.

Conclusion

Know God. It is His will that we all achieve righteousness and we can be sure that He will help those that seek Him with a sincere heart. Don't feel that you are alone in any struggle. He walks before you.

Activities/Discussion Points

1. What are obstacles that we face that weaken our perseverance?
2. Think of a situation in life that you persevered in and enjoyed the fruit of your work. What motivated you? How can you apply this to your spiritual perseverance?
3. Discuss examples of saints who were models of perseverance.