

Lesson 27: Grow Character 8 – Persevere to Renew Your Church

Introduction

1. In Lesson 3 we noted that there are five important godly character traits required of a Lead Pastor, to renew his church: desperation, humility (being teachable), perseverance, fear of the Lord and urgency.
2. In this lesson we'll address the importance of perseverance to renew a church.

A. Why it is important to persevere

First: it is a chief way we resist the devil

1. The devil's attacks on the Apostle Paul were relentless and withering.
2. Consider one of Paul's references to it ...
3. **2 Corinthians 1:8-9 (NIV)** *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹ Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death.*
4. We often forget that we are called to spiritual warfare
5. And a chief strategy to win in spiritual warfare is perseverance!
6. **Ephesians 6:13-14 (NIV)** *Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place*
7. There are a number of things we employ to help us stand, but in the end, it is the standing firm, the perseverance that wins the day!
8. **E.g.** Mom Loewen – mother-in-law
 - a. She would get sick every Saturday night, get very little sleep and then be too tired to get up for Operation Prayer on Sunday morning
 - b. One Saturday evening she said to the devil: "Go ahead and make me sick if you like. But I am going to Operation Prayer in the morning anyways."
 - c. She attended the prayer meeting the next morning and was never sick on Saturday night again!
9. Satan constantly hopes that God's people will give up – that their circumstances, the tasks set before them, and the daily adversities of life will be too much for them to endure
10. The winner will ALWAYS be the one who doesn't give up!
11. If we stick it out, the devil won't!
12. If he knows that we will endure, he will give up all the sooner
13. Sometimes the only effective weapon, and often the last to be employed, is just saying, "I'll die before I let this thing go!"
14. Or to use the words of Scripture ...
15. **Revelation 12:11 (NIV)** *They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*
16. It is this weapon of endurance that finally convinces the devil that he has to give up
17. Too many Christians quit minutes before the victory
18. Though short, the battle being waged in the realm of man is pivotal for the future
19. Victory is not in question, but who shares in that victory is!!!
20. God has ensured the conquest of the powers of darkness
21. Nevertheless, He has chosen not to leave us out

22. He has delegated responsibility to us
23. He has chosen us as co-workers in the establishment of His kingdom and the destruction of the kingdom of darkness
24. God is waiting for His people to rise up and take hold of the victory He purchased on the Cross
25. If we do not drive back the powers of darkness, they will not be driven back
26. If we do not rebuke the enemy, he will not be rebuked
27. If we do not reduce evil in the world, it will continue to grow.
28. Spiritual warfare is not a fragment of the Christian life – it is the whole of the Christian experience
29. To be a Christian is to be a spiritual warrior
30. Without question, you WILL face spiritual opposition from the enemy as you take steps to renew your church, because the enemy hates renewal.
31. You MUST persevere; you must not give up and drift back towards mediocrity.

Second: it is essential for growing our character

1. **James 1:2-4 (NIV)** *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*
2. Recall that in Level 1, Lesson 19, we discussed why we should grow in godly character.
3. Let's summarize the three reasons:
 - a. Because God requires it (Col 3:5-10)
 - b. Because we shouldn't insult the Spirit of grace (Heb 10:26-29)
 - c. Because godly character traits come with promises
4. **2 Peter 1:4 (NIV)** *Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises*
5. Through what? Through the acquisition of godly characteristics!
6. Nine promises for godly character are listed below:
 - a. Godly character makes us fruitful in this lifetime (2 Pet 1:8)
 - b. Godly character affects the outcome of our prayers (Jam 4:2-3)
 - c. Godly character keeps us from falling away (2 Pet 1:10)
 - d. Godly character qualifies us for ministry (1 Tim 3:2-12)
 - e. Godly character helps us overcome the devil (Eph 6:12)
 - f. Godly character reveals Christ to others (2 Cor 4:10-11)
 - g. Godly character is requisite for experiencing the abundant life (John 15:9-11)
 - h. Godly character is needed to effectively operate in the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 13:1-3)
 - i. Godly character determines our heavenly reward (2 Pet 1:11)
7. Looking at the reasons to grow in godly character, together with their attendant promises, you realize WHY it is so important for you to grow in character, so you can renew your church.
8. And how do we grow in character?
 - a. Through proper response to the daily pressures and irritations of life
 - b. Through proper response to the pressures of dealing with difficult people
 - c. Through proper response to the pressures associated with meeting the needs of our spouses, family and friends
 - d. Through proper response amid suffering and trials.
 - e. Through proper response to God's discipline in our lives.
 - f. And by initiating the process ourselves
9. As you survey this list you realize that to respond properly to all these ongoing and never ending pressures, will require the singular trait of perseverance!
10. Perhaps that is why it is considered one of the chief traits to attain in the Christian life.

Third: for the salvation and spiritual growth of others

1. **2 Timothy 2:10 (NIV)** *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.*
2. The Lord foretold that it would cost Saul (Paul) much suffering, to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, kings and people of Israel.
3. **Acts 9:15-16 (NIV)** *But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*
4. He was following in the steps of Christ, of whom it was said ...
5. **Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)** *... who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*
6. What was the joy set before Him?
7. The answer becomes clear in Isaiah
8. **Isaiah 53:11 (NIV)** *After the suffering of his soul, he will see the result of the suffering of His soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.*
9. Jesus persevered through the agonies of the Cross to justify many!
10. The knowledge of that brought Him joy and spurred Him on in perseverance
11. Jesus in turn, expected the same of Paul; Paul passed this expectation down to Timothy; so that it has come down to us too.
12. We all have a responsibility to persevere and endure for the salvation and discipleship of God's elect.
13. I wonder how many people won't be in heaven because of Christian leaders who gave up and quit – who didn't persevere in the face of opposition from the board or church, or some other challenge?
14. In light of today's cultural pressures against the Truth and against Christ's Church, consider how many won't make it if you don't renew your church.
15. I have often said, "Someone is hanging on your nail, so be careful to remain firm!"
16. When we give up, quit or fall, so do those who are "hanging" on us. Persevere! Stand firm! Endure!

Fourth: it is the only way we complete everything we have been given to do

1. God has a unique plan or race or purpose for each of our lives.
2. God planned WHEN in history each of us would be born, as well as WHERE we would be born.
3. According to v. 27, God's purposes for this included His desire for people to be saved.
4. In Ephesians Paul tells us that God has a plan for us, which He expects us to complete
5. **Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)** *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*
6. God has a unique race for you to run
7. **Hebrews 12:1 (NIV)** *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*
8. Concerning David, Luke said ...
9. **Acts 13:36 (NIV)** *For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed.*
10. Often His plans or race for us include trials and suffering which might threaten to derail us
11. Concerning this, think of God's plan for Paul's ministry life ...

12. **Acts 9:15-16 (NIV)** *But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*
13. Yet, despite overwhelming hardships, opposition, persecution and difficulties, Paul's goal throughout, was to persevere and complete the task given to him
14. **Acts 20:24 (NIV)** *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.*
15. At the end of his life Paul looked back with satisfaction, knowing that he had indeed completed the mission, given by the Lord!
16. **2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NIV)** *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*
17. Yet, many today quit their callings and assignments along the way – we are a generation of quitters.
18. We quit our places of leadership; we quit on our marriages; we drop out of church; we quit praying; we get hurt and discouraged and quit.
19. Many start – that's the easy part. But fewer finish!
20. Yet, God calls us to PERSIST! He calls us to finish what He has given us to do!
21. **E.g. Paul Harvey:** It was October 20, 1968. The scene: Mexico City, Olympic Stadium. The time, 7.00 P.M. The closing ceremonies had just been completed. The spectators and athletes, still warm from the euphoria of the celebration, were gathering their belongings to leave the stadium. Then the announcer asked them to remain in their seats. Down the boulevard came the whine of police sirens. From their vantage point, many in the stadium could see motorcycles with their flashing blue lights, encircling someone making his way toward the stadium. Whoever it was, he was moving slowly. Everyone remained seated to see the last chapter of the Olympics take place. By the time the police escort got to the stadium, the public address announcer said that a final marathoner would be making his way into the arena and around the track to the finish line. Confusion was evident among the crowd. The last marathoner had come in hours ago. The medals had already been awarded. What had taken this man so long? But the first sign of the runner making his way out of the tunnel and onto the track told the whole story. John Stephen Akhwari from Tanzania, covered with blood, hobbled into the light. He had taken a horrible fall early in the race, whacked his head, damaged his knee, and endured a trampling before he could get back on his feet. And there he was, over 40 kilometres later, stumbling his way to the finish line. The response of the crowd was so overwhelming, it was almost frightening. They encouraged Akhwari through the last few metres of his race with a thundering ovation that far exceeded the one given the man who, hours earlier, had come in first. When Akhwari crossed the finish line, he collapsed into the arms of the medical personnel who immediately whisked him off to the hospital. The next day, Akhwari appeared before sports journalists to field their questions about his extraordinary feat. The first question was the one any of us would have asked, "Why, after sustaining the kinds of injuries you did, would you ever get up and proceed to the finish line, when there was no way you could possibly place in the race?" John Stephen Akhwari said this: "My country did not send me over 11,000 kilometres to start a race. They sent me over 11,000 kilometres to ... finish one!"
22. How much more important to finish the race that counts for eternity!
23. How much more important to complete the task of renewing your church!

Fifth: it is how we endure to the end and are saved

1. In the OT we observe this plainly in the life of Job

2. Satan charged that the only reason Job had integrity was because God had blessed him so abundantly
3. He asserted that if these blessings were removed, Job would not maintain his righteous behavior
4. The Lord granted Satan permission to assault Job with a barrage of disasters calculated to test Job's integrity and loyalty to God.
5. In the first volley, Job lost all his possessions and, tragically, his sons and daughters. Devastating!
6. Yet, see Job's steadfast response to this attack ...
7. **Job 1:20-22 (NIV)** *At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship ²¹ and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." ²² In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*
8. Upon his return to the courts of heaven God asked Satan if he had noticed that Job had maintained his integrity. See Satan's response
9. **Job 2:4-5 (NIV)** *"Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life. ⁵ But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face."*
10. God relented, permitting Satan to afflict Job up to, but not including the taking of Job's life.
11. Satan went out and afflicted Job with painful sores.
12. At this point, Job's wife broke and 'threw in the towel.'
13. **Job 2:9 (NIV)** *His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!"*
14. But not Job!
15. **Job 2:10 (NIV)** *He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.*
16. Job's faith had been tested and found to be genuine
17. Many, like Job's wife, leave God when His blessings are removed
18. What they show is that they loved God for His blessings, not for Who He is; they loved the blessings, not the Blesser.
19. Peter summed it all up like this ...
20. **1 Peter 1:6-7 (NIV)** *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*
21. Not everyone who starts out on the narrow road, which leads to life, finishes.
22. It's not the ones who set out in the Christian life who are saved, but the ones who endure to the end
23. While we emphasize the start, the Bible emphasizes the completion. Listen to what Jesus said ...
24. **Matthew 10:21-22 (NIV)** *"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. ²² All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."*
25. Here's another example from Jesus ...
26. **Luke 21:16-19 (NIV)** *You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ All men will hate you because of me. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By standing firm you will gain life. Eternal life!*
27. This is why Jesus said, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"* **Matthew 7:21-23 (NIV)**
28. We're not talking here about sinless perfection – no!

29. What perseverance means here is that no matter how often you fail, and no matter what happens to you in life, you don't give up on following Jesus!
30. **Proverbs 24:16 (NIV)** ... *for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.*
31. Notice in this verse, it is a righteous person falling – but he doesn't stay there. He gets back up again!
32. He doesn't give up on his trust in God; he doesn't leave the faith.
33. That's perseverance at work, and we're called to persevere until we die ...
34. **Hebrews 12:4 (NIV)** *In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*
35. Just before this the author of this letter had just told them to fix their eyes on Jesus, "who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God." **Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)**
36. Now he exhorts His hearers to do the same!

Sixth: our reward is based on persevering

1. **2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NIV)** *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*
2. Paul persevered, having finished his race and kept the faith
3. And he pointed out that reward was awaiting him as a result
4. The Hebrews writers said it succinctly ...
5. **Hebrews 10:36 (NIV)** *You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.*
6. Perseverance assumes opposition or resistance
7. **James 1:12 (NIV)** *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*
8. James says that the one who perseveres and remains steadfast under trial is blessed because he will be rewarded with the crown of life, which explains why James tells us to consider trials a joy (1:2).
9. The Lord affirmed the church in Smyrna similarly ...
10. **Revelation 2:9-10 (NIV)** *I know your afflictions and your poverty--yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*
11. How could the Spirit, speaking through John, possibly say that the Christians in Smyrna were rich, while knowing poverty, slander, imprisonment and other persecution to the point of death?
12. The answer lay in the Lord's promise: "I will give you the crown of life" (v. 10).
13. When Jesus exhorted them to be faithful even to the point of death, it was another way of saying, "persevere" or "remain steadfast."
14. Giving up on a difficult ministry; retaliating against people who are mistreating you; withdrawing from active participation in worship and fellowship; compromising moral standards; disobedience; turning away from a walk of fellowship with the Lord – all these responses to adversity assume that escaping the trial is of more value than gaining the crown of life.
15. Concluding that is contrary to what Scripture asserts.
16. When a Christian's spouse is unfaithful and abandons the marriage, is Christ still worth obeying?
17. When a Christian's financial security is threatened or wrecked, is Christ still worth trusting?

18. When a Christian's physical health is crippled, is Christ still worth adoring?
19. When a Christian's family member is killed, is Christ still worth serving?
20. When a pastor's decisions to lead a church to renewal are misunderstood, slandered, or opposed, is Christ still worthy of our devotion and obedience and faithfulness?
21. As persecution rises against Christians, even in Canada, is Christ still worth our allegiance?
22. Even if we lose everything else, is Christ still worth honoring, and is the crown of life still worth the perseverance in faithfulness?
23. The answer is decisively yes!
24. In this regard, I am reminded of a stanza in the song by Isaac Watts, "Am I a Soldier of the Cross?"
Must I be carried to the skies
On flow'ry beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?
25. Exactly. So how do we persevere?

B. How to persevere

First: consider the cloud of witnesses

1. **Hebrews 12:1 (NIV)** *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.* (also Job's perseverance noted in James 5:11).
2. The word "therefore" connects verse 1 with a list of noteworthy heroes of the faith in chapter 11.
3. In Hebrews 12:1 the scene shifts to picture these heroes in a stadium surrounding the track, observing us run the individual races marked out for us
4. They are witnesses in the sense of bearing testimony that the race can be run successfully and that the rewards are great.
5. God gives us life and starts us in the race.
6. We are all here for a purpose and that purpose is to live our lives in fulfillment of God's intent for us
7. This requires not only an understanding (hearing) of His will and plan for our lives, but also perseverance to carry it out.
8. Intentionally considering the lives of those who have run before, will greatly strengthen our resolve to keep on pressing forward too.
9. That is why reading and meditating on the races run by saints recorded in Scripture is so profitable
10. And that's why reading good Christian biographies and autobiographies is so beneficial.
11. These stories inspire and motivate us to press on to complete our Christian calling.

Second: throw off whatever hinders

1. If you want to finish, strip off anything that slows you down, simplify your life and only do what really counts. Don't get distracted.
2. **Hebrews 12:1 (NIV)** *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*
3. Moses laid aside the prerogatives of royalty for the sake of his God-given assignment
4. **Hebrews 11:25 (NIV)** *He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.*
5. We too must throw off whatever may hinder God's plan for our lives, even though it may be right and fine for others.

6. Joseph properly ruled in Egypt, but for Moses it was a hindering weight.
7. Other weights might well be ambition, careers, anxieties, hobbies, wealth or fame.
8. Each runner must honestly judge what hinders him or her, and resolutely lay it aside, even though others seem to be unhindered by the same thing.
9. **E.g.** In January 2008 a businessman, Ted F (present MP) and member of another church, began attending my MPL.
 - a. After several visits he stayed behind morning to talk privately with me
 - b. He asked if I missed my flying career
 - c. I responded simply saying, "I try not to think about it. I'm grateful to the Lord that I could have the career for several years, but now I have a different calling."
 - d. He nodded and asked, "Would you like to fly my airplane?" I had no idea that he even flew.
 - e. By noon he sent me a color photo of the plane together with the particulars and again repeated the offer.
 - f. I hesitated – in fact, I did not respond to him for the next two months. Why?
 - g. I told Fran that I feared that this would be a temptation which would draw me away from the task the Lord had given me.
 - h. I prayed much about this, eventually concluding that the Lord wanted to bless me in this, so I could use this to bless others too.
 - i. I didn't start flying the plane until late August, nearly seven months later.
 - j. Today, I can say confidently say that it has NOT been a distraction, as the average amount of flying each year, for the last 10 years, has been approximately 24 flight hours per year, or 2 hours per months.
10. Notice that I carefully and prayerfully considered the possibility of distraction. Why?
11. Someone said: "We cannot run well in an overcoat!" So true!
12. What is it that distracts you from your life mission? What distracts you from fully renewing your church?
13. **E.g.** The U.S. Women's Softball team won the gold medal in Atlanta's 1996 Olympic games. They lost only one game. In the 5th inning against Australia, Danielle Tyler hit a home run over the center-field fence. She floated around the bases with a rush of adrenaline. When she was greeted by a swarm of well-wishing teammates at home plate she let the excitement distract her focus and she did not touch the base. When all of the yelling subsided, the Australian team quietly appealed to the umpire who dramatically called Tyler out. Rather than scoring a run, Tyler's blast over the fence netted her team an out. As it ended up, had the lady slugger stepped on home plate, her team would have won 1-0. Instead, in extra innings, Australia scored to win the ball game.
14. Don't let that happen to you.

Third: throw of sin that entangles

1. **Hebrews 12:1 (NIV)** *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*
2. If good things can hamper the race marked out before us, how much more will sin hamper it?!
3. Sin, like shackles, entangles and impedes our progress forward. We must rid ourselves of it!
4. There are different ways in which sin can entangle us
5. First: personal sin entangles us
 - a. For example, if a pastor is a habitual people-pleaser, he will be shackled from pleasing the Lord, when the Lord asks the pastor to do something that wouldn't please the people (at least initially so).

- b. That would be a sin entangling the pastor from completing the race God has for him.
- c. So, we must intentionally throw off sin in our lives!
- 6. Second: guilt from past sins shackles us
 - a. Some dwell on guilt from past sins and have never forgiven themselves.
 - b. Paul had every reason to be filled with regrets.
 - c. Prior to his conversion, he was a religious terrorist who participated persecution and even murder.
 - d. Do you think he struggled with the past – he certainly did.
 - e. But he knew he better get out of there if he were to fulfill God's call on his life.
 - f. **Philippians 3:13-14 (NIV)** *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, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*
- 7. Third: unforgiven sins of others may impede us
 - a. Some may be distracted by resentment from things that **others** have done to them.
 - b. They're stuck in the past and therefore can't persevere to complete what they've been called to do
 - c. Don't let memories manipulate you. You've got to forgive, because Christ forgave you.
 - d. Don't play the 'victim' card. Don't sit in the infield of the track because someone tripped you.
 - e. There's no reason to play the victim, when Christ has made you a victor!
 - f. In Christ, you have the ability to live in victory.
 - g. You don't have to live a defeated life anymore.
 - h. That excuse will not hold up when you stand before Christ.
 - i. If you don't forgive and release your bitterness, you're still stuck in the past
- 8. Get on with the future because that's where you're going to spend the rest of your life.
- 9. It's a brand new day! You run for the finish line!

Fourth: fix your eyes on Jesus for empowerment

- 1. **Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)** *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*
- 2. How does this help us?
- 3. He Himself ran this race – He knows how to run it perfectly and complete it.
- 4. He too laid aside every weight that could hinder that race.
- 5. That's why He empathizes with you (Heb 4:15) and can give you much wisdom in running your race.
- 6. However, there's more than just wisdom and modeling insinuated here – there is also empowerment!
- 7. Moment by moment, day by day, week by week, month by month and year by year, as we look to Him, we shall find the necessary strength to us, to persevere and complete the race.
- 8. This isn't just theoretical, but intensely practical!
- 9. **Ephesians 3:16 (NIV)** *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.*
- 10. It is His very life imparted to us, which we need to run the race!
- 11. Which is why Paul said, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." **Philippians 4:13 (NIV)**
- 12. As we come to Christ the Vine, His life will flow into ours reviving us through nutrients such as love, joy, peace and hope

13. But His life will also impart to us properties such as perseverance or steadfastness, which will help us to stay the course in the face of stiff opposition and resistance.
14. Which is why the writer to the Hebrews said ...
15. **Hebrews 12:3 (NIV)** *Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*
16. One of the things I pray for personally and for which I have asked our Prayer Partners to continually pray for in us is: physical, spiritual, emotional and mental stamina.
17. Those are specific elements for perseverance and steadfastness.

Fifth: resist discouragement

1. Do you get tired and discouraged?
2. **Galatians 6:9 (NIV)** *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*
3. You will reap a harvest ... **IF** you don't give up!
4. The devil wishes to discourage you so that you'll give up and quit.
5. When I am discouraged I'm saying, "It can't be done."
6. That's the exact opposite of saying, "I know God can do it because He's said"
7. The Bible says you need to resist discouragement.
8. Nothing really worthwhile is ever easy. It always takes persistence.
9. **E.g.** In 1923 leading up to the 1924 Olympics, Eric Liddell (Chariots of Fire) ran the 440 in a competition between England, Ireland and Scotland. When the gun sounded, there was a lot of shoving to get in front to the inside lane. Liddell tangled feet with J. J. Gillies of England and tumbled to the track. He sat there dazed for a moment, not knowing whether he could get up, when the official screamed, "Get up and run!" He jumped to his feet and took off after the pack, which was now a full twenty yards ahead of him. In a quarter mile, that's a big distance to try to make up. In his unorthodox style of running he took off after the pack. He pulled into fourth place ten yards behind the leader, J. J. Gillies. With forty yards to go, he pulled into third place, then second. Right at the tape he passed Gillies, stuck his chest out, won the race, and collapsed to the track in total exhaustion.
10. What discourages you? Child? Marriage? Can't have children? Job loss? Finances? Health? Opposition?
11. I want to say something to you that may sound mean. I say this in love.
12. If you're living in discouragement, that's your choice.
13. Discouragement is always a choice. You don't have to be discouraged.
14. Discouragement comes from thinking discouraging thoughts; but you can change your thoughts any time
15. What will you choose to focus on: your purpose or your problems; God's power or your weakness; Christ or your circumstances.
16. Instead of looking at that huge disappointment, you can choose to look at God's goodness yesterday, His presence today, and His promises tomorrow.
17. People of faith choose to fight discouragement.
18. They consciously remind themselves: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." That's what faith is all about.
19. They remember: "I will never leave you or forsake you."
20. It's a sin to dwell on negative thoughts! Did you know that?!
21. **Philippians 4:8 (NIV)** *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.*

22. Not to think on right things is disobedience. And disobedience is SIN!
23. Those negative thoughts are self-fulfilling. You dwell on them. Then you become discouraged. Then you quit running! You're out of the race!
24. And it often happens just before God was about to use you as an instrument to deliver your church miraculously across a "Red Sea!"
25. Inside you're saying, "God, I just can't take it any more!" But you can!
26. You can take even more, because God is with you!
27. Recall what the Hebrews writer said ...
28. **Hebrews 12:4 (NIV)** *In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*
29. You've got to rely on Christ, or you'll drop out of the race!

Conclusion

1. There's one more thing I wish to say: people who are in the race of faith, help others finish their race.
2. **E.g.** The 1992 Olympics in Barcelona featured memorable moments of sports history. Derek Redmond of Great Britain was on the way to fulfilling a lifetime dream, that of winning a gold medal in the Olympics. He had earned a spot in the semi-finals of the 400 meter race, and as the gun sounded to start the race, Derek got off to a great start. He was running the race of his life, and the finish line was in sight, when suddenly he felt a stab of pain in his right leg. He fell face first to the track with a torn hamstring. The race was over for Derek. He struggled to his feet before the medical team could reach him. Though every runner had passed him, he began hopping forward, tears of pain and disappointment streaking his face, determined to finish the race. Suddenly, a man plowed through the security guards on the sidelines and ran onto the track. He raced up to Derek and hugged him, "You don't have to do this," Jim Redmond told his weeping son. "Yes I do," Derek answered. "Well, then," his father said, "we're going to finish the race together." Derek's father gripped his son around the shoulders, and they faced the finish line, resolutely waving off the security men who hovered around them. They limped and hopped together, Derek's head sometimes buried in his father's shoulder, and stayed in Derek's lane all the way to the end. The watching crowd gaped at first at the unusual scene. Then one by one, they rose to their feet, and began cheering and crying at the son's determination and the father's support.
3. I will say one more tough thing – but with gentleness.
4. Are you a shoulder to help someone to the finish line, or are you a foot to trip someone and keep them from reaching the finish line?
5. Reach out to another pastor to help him get up and get on with the race of renewing his church!
6. When I come to the end of my life, I want to be able to say: "I finished the race. I did what You put me on earth to do. I wasn't just a selfish little clod. I gave my life away. I helped other people. I didn't just think about me. I did what You put me here to do."
7. **Acts 13:36 (NIV)** *For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep.*
8. **Don't quit CR mentoring! Don't quit doing the HOMEWORK! Don't give up discipling your Core!**
9. **Galatians 6:9 (NIV)** *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*
10. **Persevere to renew your church!**

HOMEWORK

Information

1. In your CR Workbook, write down something that stood out to you, from the lesson you read.
2. List six reasons why it is important to persevere? Describe each briefly.
3. Name five things you can do to help you persevere. Describe each briefly.

Application

1. Write down examples of how you have persevered.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit if there is an area you are not persevering in.
3. Write out a short practical plan for how you will grow in perseverance.
4. Ask the Spirit for ideas and for empowerment in this each day.
5. Write out a prayer, committing yourself to completing CR mentoring, doing the Homework and discipling your Core Leaders.

Implementation