



May 22, 2022 ~ Psalm 119:81-96

OPEN

We know a couple who owned a beautiful Akita breed of dog. Boaz was big and powerful. On a wilderness backpacking trip Boaz engaged a porcupine. True to his breed, he continued to fight until he dispatched the porcupine. But Boaz was riddled with quills. Now, that is “dogged determination”! In His Word, God calls His people to persevere. It is this character quality that I want to explore today. As I have been recently reading through Psalm 119 I have been **pondering perseverance**. In the New Testament we find that the term “perseverance” is translated into English in a few ways: “perseverance” “patience” “endurance” “patient endurance” “steadfastness”

Psalm 119 is a great example of Hebrew poetry which is comprised of “thought rhyme” or parallelism, rather than rhyming sounds. Thoughts echo, contrast, or complement in order to restate, compare, or expand what is written. Such poetry has elaborate form yet loses less in translation. The psalms also connect so well because “*At their face value...these are psalms straight from life: from the battlefield or ‘the cave’...*” (Tyndale OT Commentaries: Psalms 1-72, Derek Kidner, IVP, 1973, 17)

Psalm 119 is crafted in eight-verse sections, each alliterated with the successive letter of Hebrew alphabet. This longest chapter in the Bible is vastly different in historical setting and literary form than apocalyptic epistles, yet the message is the same: “hang in there!” (Revelation 3:10). Today’s text is just a small slice of the psalm – just 16 out of the total 176 verses.

Psalm 119 reveals the reality and relevance God’s Word in distressing times. “*This is a psalm, not only of law, but of love, not only of statue, but of spiritual strength, not only of devotion to precept, but of loyalty to the way of the Lord.*” (Expositors Bible Commentary - vol 5: Psalms, Willem A. VanGemeren, Zondervan, 1991, 736-737) Let’s consider what Psalm 119 says to us about the disciple of perseverance.

DIG

A. Perseverance requires intentional engagement with God – vv.81-88

In these verses we have 1 of 22 strophes (structural sections of a poem) from Psalm 119. What we discover is a very deliberate and intentional approach.

“I have put my hope in your word.” (v.81b) However, there is an additional factor at play when we are seeking to persevere – “my soul faints.” (v.81a).

• The commitment

Note the phrases that show intentional engagement: *I wait for Your word; longing for Your word; I do not forget Your statutes; I did not abandon Your precepts; I may keep the testimony of Your mouth.* We are not called to patiently endure in a vacuum – the call is to press on to know Jesus Christ. “*I want to know Christ...Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*” (Philippians 3:10,12)

• The context

Always we will find that where there is intentional engagement with God, there is a context of conflict and opposition. “*The arrogant have dug pits for me, people who are not in accord with Your Law. All Your commandments are faithful; they have persecuted me.*” (vv.85-86) We are not called to patiently endure in a vacuum – there is something (often opposition) through which we are called to persevere.



In verse 83 the psalmist identified as a “*wineskin in the smoke*”. Investigating this expression yielded differing explanations. Some see this as a method used by winemakers to condition the wineskin or wine itself. Others simply see this as dried, withered, useless wineskin.

Whether this refers to reconditioned or decommissioned wineskin, we know the devastation and disillusionment of “smokey seasons” of life. The pandemic conditions were “smoke in our eyes” – have we persevered?

B. Perseverance requires supernatural empowerment by God – vv.89-96

What gives me pause is not whether I *should* persevere – that is a clear expectation from God! But it is the manner in which we do so. What fuels true perseverance? Do pig-headed, stubborn folk fulfill this command more naturally than those who are more compliant in character? The simple answer is that God is the author of patient endurance. Here are three important considerations in these verses.

- **Rethinking time**

“Your faithfulness continues throughout generations” (v.90) Perseverance is possible because God’s faithfulness spans generations! God is not limited to the immediate – He is eternally active in our world.

This is a much different way of marking time that we have been conditioned to do. We live in a world of lightning-fast download speeds. But we are plowing and planting. God’s Kingdom is not mechanically downloaded but unfolds in His sovereign, eternal plan!

- **Rethinking power**

“If Your Law had not been my delight, then I would have perished in my misery. I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have revived me” (vv.92-93) Perseverance is not just passivity but an active anticipation for God to act. In Romans 8:25 we read, “with perseverance we wait eagerly.”

- **Rethinking activity**

“The wicked wait for me to destroy me; I will diligently consider Your testimonies.” (v.95) Perseverance is not mindless, self-sufficient activity. The answer to our stress and strain is the Scripture! In His Word we are nurtured and sustained in our service for Him! If you took Philippians 2:3a how different would your schedule look? Hebrews 12:1 states, “let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

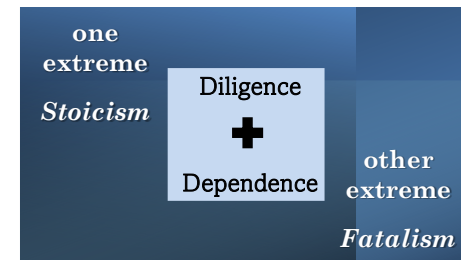


In Romans 15:5-6 we discover that God *gives* endurance, encouragement, and unity “so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In other words, perseverance is not just “tying a knot at the end of the rope and hanging on”! As God causes us to persevere, we are propelled further in fulfilling His mission!

REFLECT

Is God calling us to be Boaz? Are we to be merely mindless, repetitive, and doggedly determined? No! God has called us to a delightful tension of **diligence and dependence** which involves joy, freedom, and peace.

Take some time to consider whether you are experiencing the blessings of patient endurance. “You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.” (Hebrews 10:36)



Consider two dangerous extremes when it comes to perseverance.

- **One extreme – stoicism**

This is a misunderstanding of diligence and intentional engagement with God. The stoic approach to perseverance is to conclude it must be accomplished by self-sufficiency – perhaps even a sense of martyrdom.

“Hilary of Tours diagnosed our pastoral busyness as *irreligiosa sollicitudo pro Deo*, a blasphemous anxiety to do God’s work for him.” (**The Contemplative Pastor**, Eugene Peterson, Eerdmans, 1989, 17-18)

Of course, not every problem we faced must or will be solved this side of heaven. And we need to be able to unload that concern to our Creator.

- **Other extreme – fatalism**

This is a misunderstanding of God’s power. Some religions live by the notion that their god is so “other” and distant that he is disengaged with human existence. By faith in Jesus Christ, we have relationship with God who is very much active and alive. We need not worry but trust. As Corrie Ten Boom said, “Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength.” There is no separation between God’s commands and care – they nurture and sustain us as we diligently depend upon Him (v.149).

Wherever we look in Scripture, the follower of Jesus is called to persevere. We particularly saw this in our study of the seven ancient churches in Asia Minor (Rev 2:2,3,19). But the message is relevant for us today to hold, keep, believe, and overcome (Rev 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21).

How will perseverance take hold in our lives? Wonderfully and mysteriously, perseverance is **all of God** yet it also **fully engages us** in His Kingdom work. And remember, the possibilities of perseverance are endless, as we read in verse 96, “your commands are boundless” (v.96).