

Some Assembly Required – Part 4, Perseverance

A mile upstream from Niagara Falls, the Welland River joins the Niagara River. Right where they meet, a passenger bridge arches across the Welland. Boaters can navigate beneath it and enter the wide flow of the Niagara. But before they do, they pass under a large sign posted on the bridge's pylon. It asks them two questions (do you remember them from last week?): **Do you have an anchor? Do you know how to use it?**

So many Christians commend to others a life they don't seem to live themselves, posing as tour guides to territory on which they've never set foot. The life they actually live seems to be only a cruel parody of the dreams they've dreamed. They've told themselves a thousand times that it won't happen again. They've repented so many times that it's beyond counting. They struggle often ... regularly ... constantly ... and they ask themselves "why isn't my faith in God enough?"

Over the last three weeks, we have examined Peter's simple yet irritating claim that he knew the answer to this dilemma: "You already have everything you need for life and godliness!" You already have the anchor, you just need to know how to use it. You already have faith, now here's the secret – **"GIVING ALL DILIGENCE, ADD TO YOUR FAITH."** Some assembly is required. You have all the pieces you need, and all the necessary instructions – now, just put them together!

2 Peter 1:1-11 ¹ Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: ² Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, ³ **According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness**, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: ⁴ Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. ⁵ **And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; ⁶ And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; ⁷ And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.** ⁸ For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. ¹⁰ Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: ¹¹ For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We have already discussed adding GOODNESS (not DOING good, but BEING good), adding KNOWLEDGE (not WHAT do I know, but WHO do I need to know), and adding SELF-CONTROL (disciplined ALERTNESS, or paying attention to God and acting in light of His wisdom).

Today, we are halfway through Peter's list of virtues – we have come a long way, but we are far from finished. So it is definitely not time to quit – and that's why we need perseverance (KJV – "patience"). ☺

Be honest – have you ever thought about QUITTING?! Have you ever just felt weary from the battle? Have you ever got tired of praying for a situation that seemed to get worse the more you prayed? Have you ever felt bludgeoned by a work or home environment that wars outright against your faith? Do you ever feel discouraged by church people who, every time the church is about to take a huge spiritual step, manage to get offended about something trivial and become major dead weight? Do you ever feel defeated by your own besetting attitudes, habits and sins? **THAT'S WHY YOU MUST ADD TO YOUR FAITH PERSEVERANCE!**

The word Peter uses for perseverance is HYPOMONE. Literally, it means to stand your ground, maintain your position, stick to your guns, don't let setbacks defeat you. HYPOMONE was mostly a military term used to describe a soldier holding his position on a battlefield. There have always been two situations in which enlisted men wrestle with the temptation to abandon their posts – (1) when nothing is happening and the days stretch on one after another with no change, and (2) when all hell breaks loose and every moment holds a new terror. Either way, Peter says, **IT'S TOO SOON TO QUIT!**

The Christian life is aptly described as a WALK. It starts out with high expectations and even euphoria ... and then reality sets in as the scenery begins to look familiar, muscles begin to ache from the constant exertion, and we realize that our efforts have not produced everything we hoped for. Author Mark Buchanan describes this journey as "an alternation of drudgery and mayhem, the doldrums relieved only by ambushes." Are we actually making any progress? That's why the growing temptation is to abandon your post in God's army.

It's at that very moment that Peter says, **IT'S TOO SOON TO QUIT!** And he should know, because he is writing to a group of people with a boatload of reasons to do exactly that. They are Christians at a time when and in a place where being a Christian is a costly, even dangerous thing to be. People around them are suspicious and hostile toward them and their faith. They are the favorite target for pinning the blame on for everything bad that happens in the Roman empire.

- They live like refugees, like strangers in the world, scattered throughout the earth (1 Peter 1:1)
- They suffer grief in all kinds of trials (1 Peter 1:6)
- They are falsely accused, blamed for things they never did (1 Peter 2:12)
- They are subjected to brutal working conditions (1 Peter 2:18-19)
- They are punished for doing good (1 Peter 3:13)
- They are enticed to sin by those around them (1 Peter 4:3)
- They are abused and insulted when they won't join the sin of others (1 Peter 4:4)
- They are punished for following Jesus (1 Peter 4:12)
- They are harassed and threatened by the devil himself, who wants to eat them alive (1 Peter 5:8)
- They are surrounded by false teachers trying to mislead them (2 Peter 2)
- They are mocked by neighbors who find their faith naïve and deluded (2 Peter 3:3)
- They are disappointed with God, who seems to be slow in keeping his promises (2 Peter 3:9)

Following Jesus has not been a good career move, to say the least. It has not made anyone rich, popular or influential. These people are now oddities and outsiders, objects of ridicule and targets of abuse. And most of their problems are simply due to one thing – they have said YES to God and NO to the world. Peter mentions suffering 17 times just in his first letter to them ... but the suffering he describes could vanish pretty much immediately if these people did one simple thing ... QUIT.

Quit your faith. Quit talking about Jesus. Quit obeying God when it puts you at odds with what everybody else is doing. Quit worshipping when you stick out like a sore thumb. Quit walking in holiness because no one else bothers with that old-fashioned stuff any more. Quit ordering your life's priorities like Jesus is coming back very soon. Just quit, and the pain in your life will go away, or at least diminish.

Just say, "I NEVER KNEW HIM" and everyone will leave you alone ... isn't that right, Peter?! Thank God that Peter had been made wise through his own failings and sufferings – that's why he is so adamant on this subject. "Trust me, I've been through this already – DON'T QUIT!" But Peter, why should I keep at this if it's the one thing wrecking my life? Why? Because it's also the one thing SAVING your life!

PERSEVERANCE only makes sense if you're headed in the right direction. If you're not, you're a fool to persist. But if you are, you're a fool to quit, no matter how hard the journey is. If you have really found the only road that leads to eternal life, IT'S TOO SOON TO QUIT!

The Bible often compares the Christian life to a race or a battle, and these are good metaphors not just because they honestly depict how grueling it can be, but because races and battles have one thing in common. THE POINT IS TO WIN! There is a goal before you. This is not just a random struggle, or suffering for its own sake. EITHER THIS ACCOMPLISHES SOMETHING WORTHWHILE, OR DON'T BOTHER!

IF THIS IS THE ROAD THAT LEADS HOME IT'S TOO SOON TO QUIT
(Illustration: Air Canada satellite terminal at Toronto Airport)

Never give up because of what is ahead ... suffering leads to glory!

1 Peter 1:10-11 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

Hebrews 12:1-3 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

IF THIS IS THE ROAD THAT LEADS HOME IT'S TOO SOON TO QUIT

John 6:60-61, 66-69 Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? ... From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

Suffering provides an opportunity, not to lower our expectations, but to redefine them. Christianity does not provide a supernatural CURE for suffering; it provides a supernatural USE of suffering. God doesn't dispel our pain; He enters into it and accomplishes something miraculous in us.