

# Called to Persevere

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[0:00] Good morning. Let's just bow our heads in prayer for a moment. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

! We thank you for this series looking at Christian character.! We pray that you would pour out your spirit upon us, that our characters would be moulded and shaped, that we might become more like you. In your precious name. Amen.

Well, this morning, as you're all aware by now, we're continuing with our series on Christian character. We've looked at living holy lives, showing compassion, resisting temptation, and last week, being humble. Today, we're thinking about being called to persevere. I wonder what comes to your minds when we think about the word persevere. The dictionary describes its meaning as to continue in a course of action, even in the face of difficulty, or with little or no indication of success. I wonder if some of you are persevering with something at the moment, or perhaps you can remember a time in the past when you had to persevere. We all, at some time in our life, we'll be called to persevere if we want to grow in our relationship with Jesus and become more like him. In James chapter 1 verse 12, it says, Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial, because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

I don't know about you, but I find it quite easy to persevere when life is comfortable, and quite easy. But it's when life is difficult that persevering becomes difficult. It's the very nature of the thing.

[2:23] And as James says, it becomes a test of our faith. Are we going to keep going, or are we going to give up? James also tells us in chapter 1 verses 2 to 4, Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. James encourages us to allow perseverance to finish its work in us, to achieve spiritual maturity and completeness.

I'm sure we all of us here this morning would say we want to achieve spiritual maturity, but we don't really want to persevere.

We want life to be comfortable and easy. We don't really want to struggle, do we? When the title of this week's sermon was given to me, I was praying and thinking about the word persevere, and I was reminded of a particular time in my life when I had to persevere, which I would like to share with you, in the hope that it will encourage you in your relationship with Jesus, and times in your life when you have to persevere.

I was in my 20s when I came to faith, and I immersed myself in the life of the Anglican Church where I came to faith. I worked during the week as a full-time personal assistant to a sales director, which I loved doing, and I loved all aspects of church life.

I even became the Deanery Synod representative for a period of time, which was something else. I was very enthusiastic about my newfound faith, wanted to share it with everyone, and wanted to grow in my faith, or so I thought.

[4:23] After approximately five years, one evening when I was helping with the church youth group, somebody came to speak from the Christian organization called Oasis Trust about their work in India.

I was completely gripped. The man mentioned the verse in James 2, verse 17, which says, Faith without action is dead.

At the end of the evening, I wanted to put my faith into action and go to India and work with Oasis Trust. They had a six-month project, working in a team in Bombay, it's now of course called Mumbai, and in Bangalore.

I talked to my vicar, my parents, and applied to the project, and I was accepted to go to Mumbai in October 1994. I was thrilled, and couldn't wait to go and put my faith into action.

Everything was great at first. We arrived in Mumbai one afternoon. The airport was like something I'd never experienced. So many people.

[5:34] This was crowded on a new level. When we left the airport, it was another new experience. The roads, the sounds, the sights, the smells, were all overloading our senses.

It was like being in a different world. There were 12 of us, six in Mumbai and six in Bangalore with two leaders overseeing us who were such lovely, godly, caring people with a strong faith.

There were three of us in my team, Simone from New Zealand, Mariana from Holland, and myself, who was to be the team leader. We arrived at our church in the north of Mumbai, and we met Pastor Shindi and his wife, who we were going to be living and working with.

They told us that, sadly, the accommodation we were to have was no longer available, so temporarily, we were to stay in a small room on the ground floor of the church building.

Our three beds just about fitted in, but we did have an en-suite shower. That is to say, a tap that was high up and a large bucket. It was challenging, but manageable, and we soon settled in.

[6:52] Little did we know we would end up staying in that room for the whole six months as the other accommodation never materialized. We spent our days planning our involvement in the church services, planning our time with children's and youth work, and visiting people with the pastor.

We met a lot of people who had very little materially, but who had such a lot spiritually. It was a very humbling time. Our little room that we shared soon became quite sufficient.

Once a week, we met the rest of the team and spent the day together, sharing our experiences, praying, worshipping together, and generally encouraging each other.

And we followed a Bible series on faith. I woke up one morning after a couple of weeks and felt completely overwhelmed.

It was baking hot. I was sleeping badly. Some of Simone's behavior was inappropriate. She was flirting with some of the young Indian lads.

[8:03] Marianne was missing all things Dutch and became incredibly grumpy. And according to the pastor's wife, who I shared with, well, it was my problem as I was the team leader, and I had to sort them out soon.

I decided to go home. It was all too much. I have to be very honest and say I wasn't actually homesick.

I just felt I couldn't cope with the challenges I was confronted with in Mumbai. I wanted to go back to my familiar, comfortable job and the home that I left in England.

I rang the project leader, Andy Matheson, and arranged to visit him. He and his wife, a lovely, faith-filled, godly people who I'm still in touch with to this day.

I was sure they would agree to my request and we would sort a flight home. I went to their home. It was as though I saw them yesterday as I recount this.

[9:14] And I put my request to them. Their response and advice and care of me that day has stayed with me for the 33 years since and influenced my ministry in so many ways.

I've had similar conversations with many people throughout my Christian life. They completely understood me being overwhelmed. But in a nutshell, they said the best place for me to be was the place that God wanted me to be.

and that wherever he was, he would equip and help me to cope. And I needed to put my faith and trust in him. I realised at that moment my faith was quite weak.

Andy and Joan prayed and as soon as they started praying, I knew deep in my heart that God wanted me to stay in Mumbai. I had to put my trust in him and give him all my struggles and allow him to help me.

It was a test of faith. He was calling me to persevere. After they prayed, Andy and Joan asked me what I thought God was saying.

[10:32] And I said I believed God wanted me to stay in Mumbai. They said the same. Of course they knew without praying. They were just so wonderfully God, so spirit-filled and God led in the way they handled it.

And they said they would help me stay and support me. And they really did. I left them to return to my small room and all the challenges.

I was encouraged by their response and support but still felt completely overwhelmed and over-challenged. I wanted to put my faith in action but it was quite clear that God wanted to strengthen my faith.

Of course our faith is strengthened when we fully rely on Jesus. Corrie Ten Boom said you can never learn that Christ is all you need until Christ is all you have.

I took it day by day. Some days I took it hour by hour putting my trust in God knowing I was where he wanted me and asking him to help me with each and every task.

[11:47] The feelings and desire to leave and go home were very strong and the enemy was having a field day. Not least when Simone started a relationship with the dear pastor's son.

That was a real challenge. The pastor's wife really had it in for me then because anything that my team did I was responsible for. A few days after I met with Andy and Joan I received a letter.

Nothing unusual about that. We're in the time when there weren't emails of course. But this particular letter was quite different. I didn't recognise the handwriting.

I opened it and it was from a woman called Nancy Gowdy who I had met through a friend just before I left from Mumbai. I was at the friend's house and Nancy came round.

I told her about my forthcoming trip to India and she asked to pray for me and she did. And she prayed in a very discerning way. It was very powerful and it was though we had known each other for years.

[12:59] In her letter she said she had continued to pray for me and God had told her to write to me and encourage me because I was struggling. I couldn't believe it that firstly God would be bothered to prompt Nancy to write to me and secondly for Nancy's commitment in doing just that.

What she told me in the letter has really stayed with me since as well. She said that whatever problems I had and however large they were God was bigger and that in my mind I had to get a big picture of God and give him each of the problems I was facing.

It was just what I needed to hear and it really encouraged me to remember God's bigness and focus on him and not my circumstances.

She also encouraged me to get with God on my own praise and worship him and read my Bible.

Our reading today was from Timothy and is of course part of Paul's letter that he wrote to Timothy to encourage him in his ministry.

Never underestimate the power of encouragement and being obedient to encourage those that God puts on our hearts. Just as Nancy was obedient in writing to me her letter encouraged me to persevere and again trusting God and not my feelings.

[14:41] So from then on I spent more time with God to get a big picture of him in my mind. I looked to him more and more and ignored my feelings of wanting to go home.

I shared my faith with the Indian people we were ministering to and this helped to increase my faith as we saw prayers answered wonderfully on a daily basis.

I also asked God each day to fill me with his Holy Spirit aware that we are like buckets with holes in as we go about each day his Holy Spirit leaks out of us so we need to be refilled and I learned God has an endless supply.

I also read God's promises in the Bible which increased my faith. I have chosen four verses that I believe God wants me to share with you today.

I'm going to read them and I'd encourage you to really listen to them. You might want to close your eyes because I believe there are people here this morning who God specifically wants to hear these verses.

[15:54] Joshua chapter 1 verse 9 Isaiah 43 verse 2 Acts chapter 1 verse 8 Isaiah 55 verse 8 for my thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways my ways declares the

Lord. The Bible is full of promises and I really would encourage you to make the time to read them and commit them to your mind and your heart.

I don't think it's a decision in you deciding to do that if you went home today and started reading God's promises it's probably the best thing that you can do in your relationship with Jesus. You won't regret it. If you want to argue with me about that please do see me after the service. I'm happy to discuss it further. Gradually the desire to leave India decreased and I can remember waking up one morning again it I can picture it so well and I felt a new person.

The anxiety and stress of being overwhelmed had disappeared the desire to leave had gone and Simone had ended her relationship with the pastor's son and was all out for Jesus.

[18:23] What an answer to prayer that was. I had a fresh peace and joy like I had never known and God's presence was just so tangible.

I wanted to praise and worship God out loud. I didn't because I was sensitive to my team and I knew singing was not my top gift.

I felt so full of the spirit and so thankful to God for his faithfulness and love and I was so pleased that he helped me to persevere and to stay.

I didn't know at that time but 33 years later I can see that God did a powerful work in me in India and in helping me to stay.

There were many times in my life afterwards in going to Bible college being ordained in the Church of England having a curacy in Gloucester and my job as a team vicar that I know God called me to all of those things but sometimes I wanted to leave but being obedient to him and persevering in what he called me to do always won the day.

[19:41] That time in Mumbai laid the foundation for me to put God's will above my feelings. I would always encourage you to do the same.

Be obedient to God's call give him your best and he will do the rest. Just before the end of my time in India the six months Andy Matheson asked to meet with me and again I remember the meeting as if it happened yesterday.

It was a divine meeting. He basically asked me to come back to India to be the secretary to the director of Oasis India in Bangalore.

I was thrilled to be asked after all that had happened. We both and my church family back in England agreed that God was calling me to do this and so when the six months was completed I returned home and raised money to return to India for 12 months.

I was and am to this day so thankful to God for calling me to India and for helping me to stay there. I'm thankful to Andy and Joan for their wise counsel and support of me and thankful to Nancy for her wonderful encouraging letter.

[21:05] They all helped me to get with God on my own and build my personal relationship with him which in turn helped me to persevere in staying.

It strengthened my faith enormously and enabled me to be obedient to him. I want to close with some questions for you to consider to perhaps pray through and reflect on.

Firstly where in your life is God calling you to persevere? Now is the time to spend more time with God asking him to fill you with his spirit to strengthen and equip you to persevere?

Do you need to read your Bible more to be reminded of God's faithfulness and promises? If so when are you going to make the time to do that?

Secondly is there someone you know who is struggling with perseverance at the moment who you can encourage with a letter with a text a phone call an email or even a visit?

[22:20] Who is God calling you to encourage to persevere at this time? Just as Paul encouraged Timothy with his letter and Nancy encouraged me with hers.

let's just have a moment's quiet as we think about these questions and everything else that I've shared this morning and then I will close in prayer.

Heavenly Father when life gets tough and you call us to persevere help us to remember that we are not alone you are with us and your love surrounds us.

May we also remember that your Holy Spirit strengthens and upholds us and your promises will never fail. Help us to be obedient to your call on our lives and allow you to strengthen our faith.

please help us to be an encouragement to others who are struggling to persevere. May we encourage them to put their faith in you and be obedient to you.

[23:47] We ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour Amen. Amen. Amen.