

11/20/11

Six Words Every Relationship Needs #6 - Perseverance

- Have you ever heard of these personal showers girls have before someone in their tribe is married?...I'm not going to speculate on what goes on at such gatherings—the whole topic is completely off limits...
- but would you agree with me that in fairness to what the Scripture teaches about equality, that there should also be a shower for the guy...and I know sometimes they have these tool showers now where you get some screwdrivers or a tool-box...that's really not what I'm talking about...
- I mean the kind of event where the groom-to-be is presented with the kind of large power equipment every man needs to carry out his responsibilities at home...
- for example, every man needs a backhoe...because some days you wake up and feel like digging something up...I can't explain it – it's just a primal instinct from deep inside...but you just need to dig a big hole that day and it's not right to deprive a man the equipment necessary to accomplish that task...
- and of course you need a jackhammer – because other days you wake up and something deep inside says – I need to break something today...and the process needs to be relatively dangerous with big chunks of stuff flying around...
- I've always thought this would make a nice shower gift too...because getting the ladder out of the garage or the basement is inconvenient and there are a lot of ladder related accidents you know – but not with one of these babies...the uses for a bucket truck are practically endless...
 - and by the way, for the purposes of stewardship—I am certainly not suggesting that these pieces of equipment would have to be brand new...I think I speak for most men here when I say that we would be willing to accept items from the secondary market...that's just the kind of sacrificial beings we are...
- and I'm really just scratching the surface here – dozens and dozens of items fit under this heading along with the need, of course, for a large building to safely store all of these items...
- one item I have to mention if we're going to talk about essential power tools, especially this time of year...is...
- isn't there just something about this time of year that makes you want to go in the woods and start cutting things up?...
 - every guy needs a chain saw – and if you've been around our church for any period of time, you know that I've had a rather colorful relationship with chain saws over the years...
 - My dad and I used the first one I had to cut the trees down along the edge of the ravine where we built our house...and then we framed our house and were working on different things and one night I left it in the garage but it was before the garage door had been installed and someone stole it...
 - that was over 18 years ago and I'm still bitter about it...
 - even though 2 weeks ago I stood right here and taught what the Bible says about forgiveness, if the guy who stole my first chain saw came up to me today and admitted what he did and asked for my forgiveness, honestly I'm not sure could do it...without taking the saw and cutting a few limbs off him...that's how deep the pain goes...
- then I bought my second chain saw and that one worked fine until I had the unfortunate experience of cutting some trees down behind our house and cut one that was supposed

- to fall into the ravine but instead it fell on our house...that was a bad day, but it did allow us to go ahead and put larger gutters on the back of the house like we had been discussing...
- well unfortunately the sage continues...
 - because last weekend I was out in our woods and there was a huge tree that had blown partially over and needed to come down...
 - and I can't fully explain what happens in a man's brain at a time like that...but there's something about the challenge...it makes your glands secrete this hyper-competitive hormone that defies logic and reason...
 - and I knew that the tree was under a lot of pressure because of the way it had fallen...and if you're not careful, as you're cutting, the pieces actually come back together and it wedges your saw and it won't run and you can't get it out...
 - of course that's only going to happen to novice chain saw guys who aren't as good at it as me...at least that's what I told myself until I was almost all the way through the tree when it rolled and just totally bound up my saw...
 - now, here's what you're supposed to do at that moment – go find another guy with another chain saw he received at his power tool shower and have him cut your saw out...
 - that's what you do if you're smart...what I did was to take my saw handle and try to work it out of the bind by pushing the handle up and down...
 - which was fine, until I heard this crack...where I broke the main piece the holds the bar and the chain to the saw...a piece that I have subsequently learned if broken, costs practically more than the price of a new saw to replace...
 - so I'm happy to announce that I'm now the proud owner of my third chain saw...
 - now, here's why I tell you that crazy story...do you ever get tired of things breaking?...
 - of items in your life not enduring...constantly needing to be fixed or replaced...sometimes, if not frequently, due at least in part to your unwise choices?...
 - compare that to what God's Word says about the enduring nature of His attributes and provisions...
 - **Psalm 104:31 - Let the glory of the LORD endure forever; Let the LORD be glad in His works;**
 - **Psalm 145:13 - Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.**
 - **Jeremiah 10:10 - But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, And the nations cannot endure His indignation.**
 - **Psalm 111:3 - Splendid and majestic is His work, And His righteousness endures forever.**
 - **1 Peter 1:25 - BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER.” And this is the word which was preached to you.**
 - what a contrast to the many things in our life that don't last very long – either because of the way they were made to begin with...or because of the way we treated them...
 - now let me ask you this – when it comes to your relationships – are they more like the character of God...or like me and my chainsaws?...I think we need to talk about that...
 - with that question in mind, please open your Bible to Hebrews 10...page 174 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
 - this morning we're concluding our study on **Six Words Every Relationship Needs...**
 - we have some advertising pieces for the outreach series that starts next Sunday on **That Crazy Family of Yours...**so I hope you'll plan to be with us and bring some friends along...

- but in our current study, the first five words we've looked at have been **grace**, and **encouragement**, and **loyalty**, and **forgiveness**, and **transparency**...
- and I hope all of us can point to specific steps we've tried to take in the last month to make those concepts more a part of the way we relate to those the Lord has placed around us...
- this morning we want to land the plane on this study by looking at a characteristic that is equally important and necessary as the others we've examined...it's the issue of **Perseverance**...
- **read Hebrews 10:32-11:2**...now if you know your Bible, you know that this next section is frequently called the Faith Hall of Fame...stories of great men and women whose lives were especially characterized by endurance...by perseverance...
 - it's a fabulous collection of tales for sure...
 - but the conclusion comes in chapter 12, verse 1---and this is where I'd especially like us to focus this morning...**read Hebrews 12:1-3**...
- so we're talking this morning about perseverance...and with the time we have remaining, let's think about **3 steps to developing relationships that endure**.

I. Be Challenged by the Example of Faithful People around You.

- that comes from this phrase...**v. 1 – “since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us...”**
- now, what does that mean?...
- it's one of those phrases that has led to all sorts of interesting speculation among the people of God...
- so folks believe that men and women in heaven actually observe what is occurring on earth...they're sort of in the grandstands, so to speak...cheering us on, or maybe yelling at the refs (no, that's probably not it)...but some believe that is what this passage is talking about...
- I can't imagine anything more boring than being in heaven where you now know what it is like to experience an existence without the curse of sin...yet being forced to go to a game every day where you're watching people break their chains saws over and over...
- that is why it is so important for us to interpret the Word of God in its context...

A. The “great cloud of witnesses” in verse 1 is referring back to the faithful men and women whose stories are told in chapter 11.

- and please think through the argument of what we read...
- the book of Hebrews is written to Jewish men and women, many of whom have genuinely trusted Christ but some who had been around the gospel and even the activities of the church without truly repenting followers of Christ...
- but for both groups, the newness is wearing off...and the challenges involved in being a Christian were becoming more significant as the persecution of the church increased...
- and some of these people were actually thinking about quitting...about throwing in the towel...about going back to the temple where the worship was more familiar and accepted and safe...so...

B. The context is men and women who are struggling with perseverance.

- **Hebrews 10:35-36 - Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.**

- and some people face that in their relationship with God...others face it in their relationship with people...

- some individuals go through relationships faster than I go through chain saws...

- there's no perseverance...

- so someone hurts you, and now they're off the Christmas list...

- or someone disappoints you, and they get cut off...

- or someone else is rude, or mean, or insensitive...or you blow up at them, or give them the cold shoulder...

- and by the way, I'm not in any way minimizing the significance of the disappointment, or the hurt...

- but the question before the house is – does God want us to find ways to persevere in times of trial or not?...

- I wonder how many of us might be tempted right now, or some time recently...to just give up on another person or situation out of frustration and anger...where the Spirit of God would say to us..."do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised."

- and if that's the case, one of the keys is to look around at faithful people around you and say in your heart...if God can help them persevere, God can help me...

- that's one of the great benefits of being part of this stewardship celebration tonight...

- you'll be around a number of people who have learned the art of endurance...they have been serving God and serving the people in their life for a long, long time...

- there will be people with us tonight who have been married for over 60 years...you want to be around people like that...and do you think they could tell a few war stories?...of course they could...but they'd also tell you they're glad they found ways to communicate and works things out...

- there will people tonight who have been at this church practically from the day it started...and they're still here...part of a great cloud of witnesses intended to give you hope...

- we'll have some missionaries with us tonight who serve God in incredibly challenging ministry assignments – but they're not quitting...they are asking God to give them perseverance...

- now, please keep this in mind as well...

C. Often perseverance is the result of handling a hard time well.

- see, you don't go through the drive through at McDonalds and order a sack of endurance and say, please hurry up because I'm in a rush this am...

- Romans 5:3-4 - And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;

- and I realize that you might say – but I don't know what to do when one of these relational challenges hits...I don't know what to say...I don't know how to respond...

- add this thought from later in this same book...

- **Romans 15:4 - For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**
- see, where does the perseverance come from?...
- an important part of that answer is – through knowing the Word...
 - “through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures...”
- see, some people are too busy sending a nasty text or a flaming e-mail when they ought to shut all of that down...and at that very moment say – I’m not going to say anything else – I’m not going to do anything else – unless I’m sure that the way I’m about to respond is honoring to God and in line with His Word...
 - and while you’re going through that process (and remember, this is a process)...you can follow the example of godly people you’ve met (if you’ve opened yourself up to those kind of relationships – having a great cloud of witnesses)...and you can open your Bible and please mark this down...your heart will be more open to the life-changing principles of the Word of God for sure...
- see, slow down...shut it... **Romans 14:23 - whatever is not from faith is sin.** (cf. the holding principle)
- and then use this relational hiccup as an opportunity to contemplate the model of other godly people and the truth of the Word of God...
- **Psalm 119:71 - It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.**
- now, let me ask you this – are you surrounding yourself with a group of godly people who can model for you what it means to develop endurance in your relationships through the application of biblical principles even when it’s hard and maybe even when you really don’t feel like doing so?...
- and as a result...you have hope in your heart because if God helped them endure...He can help you as well...
- I cannot emphasize that principle enough especially from the perspective of what is required to develop long-term strength and stability and health in a church family...
- younger people (either chronologically or younger on the Lord)...finding ways to surround themselves with godly examples...and even saying...I want to step into that person’s shoes...
- cf. trying to emphasize that yesterday at LN set-up day – letting some of the old war-horses sit in lawn chairs and drink bad coffee in styrofoam cups and essentially saying – you guys did your part and we want to develop the same kind of endurance...
 - so sure there are going to be problems and challenges when we serve together...
 - but if God helped you endure, he’ll help us as well...
 - that is part of transferring truth across the generations...
 - and one of my concerns as a pastor is whether or not this next generation is capable of long term commitment, and endurance, and perseverance...
- now, all of that is important...but it leads to the question – am I supposed to pull this off by myself...in my own strength?...that’s why the next section of the test is so very important...

II. Keep Your Eyes on Your Savior Who Persevered for You.

- following the example of other people is only valuable to the degree to which their lives point us to our Savior, and help us keep our eyes on Jesus...
- **“v. 2 – fixing our eyes on Jesus”**

- don't you love that picture?...
- and here's what that means...

A. Carefully evaluate your focus during a time of “relational tension.”

- see, there are many potential wrong goals when someone disappoints you, or hurts you, or mistreats you in some way...
- think about that – to what does your mind typically gravitate?...
 - I'm going to hurt them back...I'm going to make them pay...I'm going to gossip about them or discredit them in front of others...
 - I'm going to cut them off so they can never hurt me like that again?....
 - there's all sorts of objects on which we can place our focus...
- and what does this text say we are supposed to do?....fix our eyes on Jesus...
- times of relational tension are the perfect opportunities to follow and thereby become more like our Savior...
- **Romans 8:28-29 - And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son...**
- the principle is – frequently it's at that very point of relational tension where a person is poised to take a significant step of growth toward Christ-likeness that they bolt because of the pressure and discomfort of the situation and go find some other friend, or other partner...or other whatever...and immediately what happens is, the relational maturity meter resets...and what might feel like something that is really good for a period of time is really just the familiarity of doing the same thing over and over again...
- that even happens with pastors...
 - many pastors stay in the same church for a period of time...and when the pressure comes, they bolt...[or in church speak, God calls them somewhere else]...and then things get tough there...and they bolt...
 - and they pastor about 5 different churches for 8 years each and at the end of their ministry career they think they have 40 years of ministry experience when that's really not true...
 - what they really have is 8 years of ministry experience 5 times over...
 - and that same principle is true of any relationship you can name...
 - perseverance comes from becoming more like our Savior...

B. Remember that Jesus is both the author and perfecter of your faith.

Hebrews 12:2 - fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- the kind of persevering faith we're talking about this am finds its source in our crucified and risen Lord Himself...
- and I realize you might say – but wait a minute, you said we are thinking about this in its context—weren't the people mentioned in chapter 11 OT saints – how could Jesus have been the author and perfecter of their faith?...
- what's the answer to that question – because Jesus is the eternally preexistent second member of the trinity...
- as my theology professor John Whitcomb used to like to say – Jesus' birth in a manger in Bethlehem was one of His more recent accomplishments...
- that's why Paul said...

- 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 – Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

- which leads to several questions, doesn't it?

1. Have you ever trusted Christ as Savior and Lord?...is he truly the author of your faith, or does the impermanence of so many of your relationships over the years demonstrate that you've not yet become a follower of Christ?...
2. As a Christian, are you committed to perseverance, and is that obvious by the way you stay in there and try to communicate biblical and solve problems with the people in your life?...

III. Remember that there is no Such Thing as Short-Term Endurance.

Hebrews 12:3 - For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.