Character Matters: Week 3, Perseverance

**Series Overview:** We build our lives by the choices we make. We build good character brick by brick, thought by thought, action by action, habit by habit, through daily exercising of courage and determination (Merritt). As followers of Jesus, we are called to live a life that honors him and shows his love to others. We cannot do that without good character. We must do the right thing, no matter the cost. Character still counts. It always has, and always will.

**Week Overview:** Character Matters, Week 3 – Perseverance

* One of the most important attributes of character is perseverance. Through hardships and trials in life, or being obedient to God’s call, it can be safer to just give up and take the easy way out. But with perseverance, we develop a stronger character profile: one that honors God with an obedient lifestyle and finds success and meaning in life.

**Grab the Room (Intro):** Story about staying the course/not giving up

**Tension (What’s the Struggle):** In 2021, we have never had more options in life. From activities we are involved in, to things that grab our attention. It has never been easier to quit something and start new with something completely different. How can we, as followers of Jesus continually live up to the standards that God has for his people? How can we have good character when the call of obedience is more difficult than we imagined? With perseverance.

**Text (+ Supporting Text):** Book of Job (Summary), Night of Jesus Betrayal/Trial (Any Gospel), James 1

**THP:** Difficulties are meant to develop, not defeat you.

**Supporting Points (Not Required):**

* Perseverance requires perspective. We need to keep the end in mind, but also take trials one day at a time

**Application (Call to Action):** Keep moving forward, one day at a time

During WWII, there was a soldier in the American army that was fighting in Japan. His name was Desmond T. Doss. He a private in the army, and he refused to pick up a weapon and use it in battle because of his religious beliefs. Doss was drafted into the army, but he was ridiculed and considered an outcast by his fellow soldiers because they felt like he was abandoning him. He faced major hardships during training from his fellow Americans, long before they ever shipped off to fight in Japan.

Once they got the battlefield, Doss stayed true to his beliefs and never used a weapon in war. Instead, he risked his life to save over 75 men who were wounded and couldn’t move on the battlefield. What makes the story even crazier is that the battlefield was on a cliff with a 90-degree vertical drop, so the only wat to get up or down was to climb on a massive rope. It was an impossible task to even save one fellow soldier on the cliffside, let alone 75. This clip is from the movie Hacksaw Ridge that shows Desmond refusing to give up, to make sure he got every wounded soldier back to safety, simply by saying, “Lord, help me get one more.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pBEnaBYwFI>

That scene in that movie is the definition of perseverance. Desmond could have given up at any point, and his fellow soldiers would have died up on that cliffside. 75 men went home to their families and had lives after one of the worst moments in the history of the world because one person persevered against all odds. Desmond Doss went onto to be awarded the congressional medal of honor, one of the highest honors in this country.

It can be easy for us to look at what Desmond did and simply think that we would have the same courage in a situation like that. But what gave Desmond the strength and courage to keep on saving lives when he could have saved his own at any point was his faith that God was with him, enabling him and giving him the strength, his body needed to complete one impossible task after another. It was his faith and conviction that allowed him to continually have the courage to stay up on that cliffside long after he should have left.

We have been in this series called Character Matters for a few weeks, and the first two weeks we looked at the attributes of character and the legacy that a God honor character leaves behind. The attribute of character we will be talking about this week is perseverance. In week one, we took a deep dive into some character attributes that the apostle Peter describes in a letter to the church.

One of those attributes was perseverance. James, a leading member of the early church has a book in the Bible, and in the first part of it, he has a lot to say about perseverance: James 1:2-4 says consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let your perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

I don’t know about you, but this is one of the toughest pills to swallow when it comes to reading the Bible. Who wants to consider it pure joy when life gets hard? Not me. When we face trials of many kinds, as James describes, it can be easy to simply give up. When life gets difficult, our immediate instinct is to blame or question God. We often say, “God, why would you cause this to happen?” And some well-intentioned people may come along the way and say things like “God is causing this to happen to you because you deserve it.” Nothing could be further from the truth, and here is why: when it comes to the issue of hardships and trials that we deserve in this life, we have to think about something called “theodicy.” Everyone say theodicy.

What theodicy means is that there is evil in the world because of the fall of man, I.e. Adam and Eve. And God allows free will, a choice for us to choose to live for him or the world. So, God is not causing evil things to happen to us in our lives. Rather, he uses these hardships and trials to refine us into spiritually mature people. Because of evil in the world, evil things, terrible circumstances, death, disease, loss, etc., happen every day. But God is not sitting up in heaven waiting to cause harm in your life any chance he can get. Nevertheless, because of sin in the world, these bad things happen. However, God promises us that through every difficulty, suffering, trial, hardship, etc. in this life, his presence is with us and it will never leave us. He provides the peace, comfort, courage, and strength to endure any trials that we go through. And we can come out the other side with a deeper love and understanding of God. He is not causing these bad things to harm us. He is *using* them to refine us.

*This paragraph has been edited and finished based off of theodicy feedback.*

**Difficulties are meant to develop, not defeat you.** Persevering through trials means that through the suffering of our situation, we do not abandon our faith. It means that we do not simply give up on believing God’s promises when it appears that he is out to get us. Because when we endure these trials, and persevere with faith through them, we begin to understand more about God. We trust him more, because we know more about his nature and we in turn worship and love him more.

There is an intimacy with God that we experience only when we go through hardships in this life because we are forced to give up control and complete depend on God. We are forced to cry out to the Holy Spirit for strength, for peace, for comfort. And when we do that, help is provided. But that intimacy isn’t found unless we persevere through difficulties and sufferings in this life.

We have a danger of missing out on wonderous blessings from God beyond our wildest imaginations if we give up when we face trials in life. This is why James says consider it pure joy when you go through trials. A few verses later, James comes back to the idea of persevering through trials. James 1:12 says, “Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood that test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

That sounds pretty similar to what we read a few weeks back in 2 Peter. We will one day be welcomed into the kingdom of God and be rewarded for how we honored God with our character, how we spread the gospel and made disciples, and how we persevered through trials and sufferings. We will receive the crown of life. Guys, perseverance requires perspective. We need to keep the end in mind, but also take trials one day at a time. As followers of Jesus, we need to remember what awaits us in eternity but also realize that persevering through trials now makes that reward better than we could even begin to imagine.

So, when trials and temptations in this life come our way, persevere. Do not give up, do not abandon your faith. Rather, consider it pure joy because the Holy Spirit is with you, and he will provide you with what you need. Cry out for strength, for peace, for comfort, and you will experience an intimacy with God that cannot be found anywhere else than when he is sitting with you in the midst of a trial. Keep moving forward, one day at a time, and persevere.

**Kylee:** You did a great job of keeping a really hard topic (why do bad things happen) concise and to the point. Also, I have to give a shoutout for tossing some theology teaching in there. I appreciate that you don’t shy away from an opportunity to teach students even the simple word “theodicy” and what it means. I think if a student was interested in learning more that is helpful for them and the ones who just want the basics won’t get confused. One thing to consider adding, James 1:12 has some big promises in it. He mentions that those who persevere are blessed and will receive the crown of life. While you mention it, I think you could really dig into just how great and other worldly the blessings of God are including eternal life. Really give them a reason to want to persevere.

**Aaron:** This is a tough topic. Well done. I think there definitely needs to be a personal story at the end. Whether that’s a recorded testimony or the person preaching shares from their own life, we need something to really drive this home. One little note, not sure how helpful mentioning “theodicy” will be in this message. Because you didn’t dive very deeply into the definition of the word, it may cause more confusion than anything. Sorry I keep saying this, but I would love to condense the THP. Maybe... Difficulties are meant to develop, not defeat.

**Micah:** Great job sorting through a script that could have gone in a million directions. This feels like it’s missing a few things. 1) A story/testimony of someone (or us) persevering through a difficult situation. Could be a good opportunity to highlight a student. The THP needs to be reworked. We need some application at the end. What are some real-life situations that students find themselves in? How can we equip them to persevere through those? What role could gratitude—for instance—play in helping our students persevere through tough times? What if we gave everyone a challenge of keeping a gratitude journal for the rest of the series? I like where this script is headed.

**Scott:** Heavy topic. Way to jump in! I think making the landing more applicable could help. Think of ways that most students need to persevere: in finally being devoted to reading scripture, to maintaining boundaries in relationships, having hope that they’ll get a handle on their depression, in juggling the busyness of life. I think if we want students to hear more than a motivational teaching, we need to give them a way to do something. If we can help them clearly see where they need perseverance and help equip them (maybe through life groups), we have a better chance of the message making the impact we want it to. I think this could also be a great opportunity to elevate the boring and mundane. Sometimes we think perseverance is big, grand gestures and missions. But the most impressive perseverance can be in the stuff that seems so ordinary. Or even run with that and make it a lesson in stewardship. Persevere through the small stuff to strengthen that muscle and go bigger.

You could run for a bit on theodicy and redemption. Really bring home that God uses every opportunity to walk beside us and strengthen us.

**Disaster Develops**

Kent: THP work.... Develop During Defeat, Develop the Defeat... something more concise and then expand on the idea of that concise statement. Agree with above thoughts ona. Personal story, testimony from a student... that would bring the whole point home.

I think there are lot of response type of ideas to choose from but also tangible application we could go with. Maybe get some supporting scripture to reinforce the point.

Harrison: THP shortening “difficulties develop you.” Loved the script man. Reminding people to hold onto that scripture when trials come at the end or having them write it somewhere so they can go back to it. One idea for more scripture and more story-based scripture could be Hanania Azariah, and Mishael about to go into the furnace. They were facing a trial and perserving because they had a trust in God. God will always deliver us from trials, either from the trial (not going in the fire), through the trial (going in the furnace and coming out fine), or by the trial (a final deliverance into his presence, death by fire).