

Perseverance

“Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” Hebrews 12:1

Perseverance may seem quite a quaint, old fashioned word in this day and age. More currently we would probably use terms like ‘resilience’ which has a much more positive tone and sounds like we are in control. We may use ‘endurance’ which conjures up images of intrepid explorers attempting to reach the South Pole in unspeakably difficult conditions.

All of these words have something in common since they represent the qualities that are needed and expressed during times of adversity, suffering and the array of challenging circumstances that life throws at us, but each one captures subtle differences.

For example, resilience speaks to the ability to adapt in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy and stress; to successfully cope, to bounce back and to recover – even to grow through it.

Endurance is the ability to bear up courageously under suffering, pain, loss and difficult circumstances. Its root is the word ‘durare’ meaning to harden, which seems to relate to the need for toughness and strength to endure or could relate to the fact that prolonged adversity may result in the sufferer becoming hardened.

The difference being that both resilience and endurance seem to be required when something happens *to us* – an unchosen and unwanted experience such as trauma, serious illness, persecution, injustice, loss or, as in Ukraine, being caught up in a war zone etc. The pressures and stressors come mainly from outside of ourselves and are unbidden. The quality represents the person’s response to those external situations and how they deal with them.

Perseverance, on the other hand, appears to be an inward quality and a chosen attitude. Definitions contain these aspects of perseverance:-

- To continue steadfastly in
- To give unremitting care to
- To apply oneself diligently to
- To adhere firmly to
- To attend constantly to
- To hold fast to

There is a sense of intentionality, since it is something that we choose to do. It also has something to do with the time span, since perseverance is about the long haul, not just getting through the immediate challenges that face us then moving on.

The spiritual application of perseverance is always to do with continuing to walk with Christ and in the scriptures is frequently used in relation to prayer. Perseverance requires simple, patient, continual dependence on Christ. It is a gift of God and only possible in His strength.

“Christian perseverance is only a quality in the believer because initially it is a gift of God. It is by His power that those who trust in Him are “guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”” 1 Peter 1:5 (Quote from New Bible Dictionary.)

In our culture today where everything moves on so quickly and where change and novelty are valued, perseverance doesn't sound very 'cool', in fact it probably sounds a bit negative. Next year we celebrate our Golden wedding anniversary. If one of us was to stand up and say “Well we have persevered for these last 50 years” It might not sound like a very joyful marriage and yet by God's grace marriage for 50 years does take perseverance, if you think about the definition. It represents that inner chosen quality and attitude that is required in order to live out those vows and commitments made so long ago and to keep on steadfastly, diligently, unremittingly and with constant attention firmly holding fast to loving and caring for that other person and the relationship you have together. It is easy to see why the scriptures use marriage as a picture of our relationship with Christ.