

Purpose in Perseverance

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:4)

Scripture: James 1:2–8

Song: “Am I a Soldier of the Cross”

For three years, I researched and wrote continuously until it came time for my doctoral defense. Along the way, I had my share of frustration and doubt. But the more I pressed on, remembering my goal and praying for strength, the more I recognized God’s strength in me. I could have quit when things got hard, but I would have missed this gift that lies in perseverance.

James knew that his fellow Jews were facing severe testing of their faith through persecution. He urged them to see the big picture rather than just their present situation. Hardship and desperation could lead them to trust God in deeper ways than if all went well for them all the time. In difficulty, they could develop a maturity of faith by experiencing firsthand God’s presence, promises, and provision.

Rejoicing is not a natural human reaction to facing what may seem like insurmountable circumstances. The key is perseverance, knowing there is purpose in pain, teaching in trials, and peace and contentment in the destination—the place where we can look back and celebrate the strength and encouragement that comes from God’s unbounded, gracious hand.

Father, help me to have joy in times of trial, when my faith and trust can grow the most, so that I may eventually reach an unshakeable maturity. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

January 12–18. **Tricia Kline** lives in Pennsylvania. She holds a PhD in Bible exposition and is a teacher, author, and award-winning journalist.

Restoration of Relationship

Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. (Jeremiah 29:12)

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:10–14

Song: “The Love of God”

My husband went through a rebellious season as a teen. For a time, one of the results of his choices was a strained relationship with his parents. To this day, he credits their continued love for him and their example of steadfast trust and faith in God for his eventual return and the opportunity to patch things up between them. In his darkness, their faithfulness shone like a light that led him home again.

The only perfect example of faithfulness, however, is found in God. As Jeremiah prophesied, the Israelites faced exile for their rebelliousness. They had chosen to walk away from the safety of their covenant relationship with Yahweh. However, His promises to bless them would never fail. As a result of God’s steadfastness toward them, the Israelites knew that if they truly desired to love and obey Him, they would find Him waiting with open arms.

God’s character is still the same today. He does not abandon those who call on Him and seek Him with their whole hearts. This truth is especially seen in Jesus Christ, who bridges heaven and earth for all who put their faith and trust in Him. No matter how far you may have strayed, His desire is for you to return and to know eternal hope.

Father, thank You for never leaving or forsaking me and for always making a way for my relationship with You to be restored. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Peace Through Prayer

Do not be anxious about anything, but . . . present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:6)

Scripture: Philippians 4:4–9

Song: “Sweet Hour of Prayer”

In the sixteenth century, John Welch became a popular preacher during a time of great spiritual awakening in Scotland. Amid political and religious turmoil, he served in some of the most dangerous and dark places. But rather than cave to anxiety and fear, he turned to prayer. He was known to spend as many as eight hours a day in prayer, even waking in the middle of the night to pray for his country. He spent so much time on his knees that he struggled to walk! As a result of his dedication, people remarked about the power that accompanied his life and ministry.

The apostle Paul wrote of the great possibilities available to believers who recognize the Lord’s presence in and around them. Gentleness and calmness mark those who understand that God is near and ready to meet their needs. Not only should believers not be anxious, but they are also to replace any fear with a positive action: prayer.

We may not be able to spend eight hours a day on our knees, but we can learn to turn regularly to God in prayer. There will always be something in the world to worry about, but by bringing our concerns to God, thanking Him that He is near and hears us, we can experience His all-surpassing peace in every circumstance.

Father, thank You that You hear me when I pray. Help me to remember always to trust in Your presence and to experience Your peace. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Reaching for Refuge

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. (Psalm 61:2)

Scripture: Psalm 61

Song: “In the Secret of His Presence”

I had the privilege of babysitting some of my nieces and nephews in their toddler years. The progression from crawling to walking was always a fun milestone to celebrate. As they were becoming a little more independent, they still seemed to understand their vulnerability and need for a place where they could feel secure. So they could often be found standing on wobbly legs, arms reaching up to be held.

Even into adulthood, this need for safe arms to hold us remains. David understood that his refuge was in God alone. He understood his vulnerability when away from God’s presence, his need for God, his rock (or protection) to lift him to the shelter he longed for. Much like a toddler who runs to a loving parent for that sense of security, David had confidence that God would be there to lift him up, draw him close, and keep any threats at bay.

The Lord is always near and ready to scoop us up into His arms. We only need to call to Him, knowing He is greater and more powerful than we are. As we recognize our weakness and vulnerability and learn to trust in His compassion and faithfulness, we can experience safety and shelter in Him.

Father, I realize that I need to be in Your presence to truly be secure. Always remind me to call out to You as David did and to find safety in Your arms. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Seeing in Secret

Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:6)

Scripture: Matthew 6:5–15

Song: “Audience of One”

My mom is one of the most selfless people I know. She is often quiet, blessing others behind the scenes. She has been a patient, listening ear, and a friend for many. She is a steady example of what it means to trust God for every need. Able and intelligent, she never draws attention to herself but instead works hard to serve others. She probably has not gotten the thanks or notice from others that she deserves, but I believe her heavenly reward will be great.

Jesus had to remind His listeners that the good we do on earth—giving to the needy, fasting, and praying—is not so that we can be praised by those around us. Such selfish inclination results in shallow reward, if any reward at all. But God knows the heart. And when hearts are focused on loving and serving Him, even when no one sees, they will receive eternal rewards. (See Matthew 6:19–21.)

What is our motivation for living out the Christian life? Do we want to appear holy and righteous before others, or do we want to deepen our relationship with God? Do we want to speak words to earn respect from our peers, or do we want to commune with our Creator? The real reward is knowing God, even if that means we remain unknown by the world.

Father, please keep my heart pure and humble, wanting not to seek praise for myself but to bring glory and praise to You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Standing in the Gap

“Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?”
(Genesis 18:23)

Scripture: Genesis 18:23–33

Song: “Lord, We Come Before Thee Now”

Having rescued a number of my own pets and volunteered for rescue organizations, I’ve met many passionate individuals who work hard to find families for homeless, abandoned, and abused animals. These people regularly put a call out to those who may be willing to help. Many innocent animals have been saved because these people intercede on their behalf.

Abraham was also an intercessor on behalf of the innocent living in the increasingly wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. God’s coming wrath upon these cities was justified, but the conversation between God and Abraham revealed two things: the importance of intercessory prayer and God’s willingness to be merciful to those who ask. Just as animal rescuers appeal to others who are willing to show compassion, Abraham appealed to God, who has shown repeatedly throughout human history that His desire is to save.

While we are also called to be intercessors before God on humanity’s behalf, the perfect intercessor was Jesus Christ—God in flesh—who took our deserved punishment upon Himself so that all who trust in Him can be saved. To those who believe, He also gives the Holy Spirit, who continually intercedes for us before God until we reach our eternal home. (See Romans 8:26–27.)

Father, You are both just and merciful. Thank You for hearing my prayers for mercy and for Your work to save. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Comparing and Confessing

“God have mercy on me, a sinner.” (Luke 18:13)

Scripture: Luke 18:9–14

Song: “Thy Mercy, Lord, Is What I Need”

At my first job interview (for my hometown newspaper), I was only 19 years old and didn’t have much of a resume. I graduated near the top of my class in high school, but just because I got better grades than others did not necessarily mean that I could do the job I was interviewing for. All I could say was that I was a novice but hungry to learn. Fortunately, they took a chance, and I ended up getting that entry-level job that began a decades-long journalism career.

When it comes to our resume of righteousness, we really have nothing to offer God either. The Pharisee in Jesus’ parable thought he could approach God with confidence simply because he was not as “bad” as others and because he outwardly followed the law. The tax collector, however, called out for mercy rather than giving excuses or proposing that he was not as bad a sinner as some others were.

As Romans 3:23 states, no one is good enough to ever meet God’s holy standards. Only hearts full of pride would think so. When we stand before God in prayer, humility results in justification because in realizing that we have no right to stand in God’s presence, we acknowledge our need for His mercy. Mercy is the path toward salvation through Christ—the Way, Truth, and Life.

Father, help me to always have a humble and thankful heart that trusts in Your grace. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.