

A Simple Guide to Walking on Water: Endurance

By Bobby Schuller

I just want to begin this morning by saying to everyone that's here and everybody that's watching: Life is hard. Whatever it is that you're going through, and very likely you're going through a little something or a big something, but whatever it is you're going through, I want you to know that you and God are going to get through this.

Today, we are going to talk about the importance of perseverance in the success of Christian living. That slow and steady wins the race. Right? We know what Aesop said. There's a guy most of us have never heard of, a financial guy named Dave Ramsey. And I'm a big Dave Ramsey fan. And Dave Ramsey was talking to one of his friends on his radio program, and he asked him this question. He said "what's your favorite book on succeeding in life?" And he said, "If I could give one book to give to people to succeed in life, it would be the children's story 'The Tortoise and the Hare.'"

I have been able, as a pastor, I've had the joy of being able to rub shoulders with lots of people who have succeeded, not only in business but in many other areas: politics, non profits, things like that, and it

seems to be that the most successful people have one thing in common – and that’s perseverance and resilience. There seems to be this thing inside of them that says yes, I may not be the fastest, the quickest, the shiniest, but let me tell you something – I am going to cross that finish line. I am going to get there. And the pace may not be fast, but it will be sure and I will cross it.

And it seems to be that kind of person is an unusual suspect but it’s that type of person that seems to always pull ahead from the crowd in the long run. The one who says slow and steady wins the race. This is something that as a very energetic, joyful, positive, outgoing, gregarious person, this is a weakness for me. And it’s something that I’m learning that the slow, persistent focus on a goal over long periods of time, even years, is ultimately the thing that really wins out. Now that is worldly wisdom. That is something that is available to everyone, if only they’d learn.

But woven into that, I think, is the Christian worldview that says yes, hope and faith is that same thing that is given to me as a disciple of Jesus, that will help me, not only endure to succeed in my business or something, but endure to succeed in the race of faith. That when we’re wrestling with doubts, pain, trials, maybe you just went through a divorce, maybe you just lost a spouse, maybe your kid is sick, or maybe

you just lost someone you love and you're thinking how am I going to get through this? And I just want to tell you, you are going to get through this and all it requires is faith. Faith means hanging on. Faith means not letting go. Faith means taking one more step.

Can I tell you something? Faith is much more about abiding than it is about leaping. Faith is about abiding more than it is leaping. It is about being rooted, grounded, stable, planted. It's about dwelling in God's house and love every day, every morning. Faith is about, every single day, taking one more step towards the goal that God has for me.

That word that Jesus uses in John 15, to abide, is menno, and it means to make your home. It means to rest and relax in the safety and refuge of God, and that's what faith is. That in the tumult of life and the storms of life we keep moving forward because we have faith. We trust in the goodness of God. Amen? And I want you to know God is good, he hasn't abandoned you, he's going to carry you through. And not only that, when you get through, you're going to be stronger, smarter, brighter, more joyful than you've ever been. That's good news. So don't give up because slow and steady wins the race. And don't compare yourself to others. That will poison your life. Just keep moving one foot in front of the other because faith is about abiding and not about leaping.

Jesus, when he talks about what it's like to receive a word from God, he uses the analogy of a seed. There's a sower who's always casting seed. You almost imagine him looking at a farmer throwing seed. And he says some seed lands on the road, and that's when someone has a hard heart, just won't receive the word of God. And some lands among the rocks and it grows up quickly but has no roots, so when trials and pains come, it withers away. And other seed, it lands on good soil but thorns grow up with it, as well, and so it gets choked out, not by pains but by pleasures, by fun, by entertainment, by distractions. But you, you are good soil. And when the seed falls on your heart, the seed will take root in your heart and over time, it will bear fruit.

Think about how long it takes an orange seed to become an orange tree that bears oranges. It takes a long time. Growing up in California, I remember we planted a little avocado tree in our backyard, and it took, I want to say, nine years. Every summer, I was thinking when is thing going to have avocados. It got big and bulky, still no avocados. Finally, the year we moved from my dad's house where we'd lived for like 23 years - avocados!

So many people give up their miracle in the eleventh hour. So many people give up their tomorrow at 6:00 AM right before the sun rises. There are people in this world that will not persevere, that will fall

to the wayside, but you are not one of them. You are stronger than that. You have God in you. You will persevere. You will. You will. And even if you have given up, even if you have quit, you are still alive, it's not too late to get back on that path and keep marching towards the finish line God has set for you. God will carry you through. He will finish the good work that he has started in you. That's a promise. That's what the word of God says. You are soil and the seed is taking root. And remember, the most important part of the growth of any plant is the part that's invisible; the part that's under the soil. God is taking root in your heart and good things are ahead for you.

Resurrection is probably, more than any word, the thing that is at the heart of a Christian world-view. And resurrection says this: we serve a king, king Jesus who can take something that's died and not only bring it back to life; bring it back to life would be resuscitation. He brings it into resurrection. And resurrection means it's better than it was before you lost it. Resurrection means that the thing that died, when he brings it back to life, is better than when it was alive. And faith is the thing that says I see this thing in my life that has died, but I refuse to admit that death is the end of this story. Faith says I will persevere because I believe that I serve a king that will bring this thing back to life better than it was before.

What have you lost in your life, friends? You've grieved it, you've mourned it, maybe you're grieving now, but I want to promise you, I want to give you hope. Resurrection is at the heart of our faith, and resurrection says that whatever you've lost, Christ will bring it back to life in a new, more awesome, better way if only you release your faith. And you don't need a lot of faith. You just need a little. If one percent of you believes God can use that to do amazing things in your life.

Life is hard for everyone, but for the believer, in the hardness, trials, and pains of life that we face, we live from faith, which produces hope, and hope never fails. Hope is the thing that says I don't know how I'm going to get through this, I don't know what's going to happen, but I know the character of the God I serve. I know he loves me, I know he has the power, and he's never failed me in the past. God is faithful. He will carry me through. And he will. He's going to carry you through. So keep hope alive and have faith and take one more step and persevere and do not quit. It is not who you are. You are a winner, you are a succeeder, you are somebody who is given everything you need to cross that line and to enter into the calling God has given you. If you believe it, say amen.

The Christian worldview is all about a view of a positive future for everyone who simply trusts in the Father-ness, the dad-ness, the goodness of our God.

Probably the most egregiously misquoted passage in the Bible is 'God will never give you more than you can handle.' Can I just tell you something? That is not in the Bible. That is a morphing of another passage that says God won't allow a temptation to come into your life that you can't overcome, or something like that. It's in Corinthians, I believe. But it doesn't say God will not give you more than you can handle. Can I just tell you something? I can't handle lots the stuff in my life. I couldn't handle it on my own. In fact I think that saying I can handle this is one of the worst things you can say when you're going through something you can't handle. One of the best things you can say is I can't handle this, but God, you can. That's faith.

When you lose a loved one, if you've lost a child, you can't handle that, but God can. Whatever it is that you're going through, whatever sickness you're facing, whatever loss you're enduring, whatever thing that you're ashamed of, whatever sin that's robbing you of your joy. If you're facing mental illness, whatever it is that you're wrestling with today, and you say I can't handle this, you just might be right, but God can. Trust him and don't give up. He's going to carry you through. If you

have some joy in your heart, say amen. I'm joyful because I know that my God is good. I'm joyful because I know that with all the problems I face in my life, I do not know how to solve them, but I know God does, and I know God will, and I know that it's going to be better than any kind of plan I could conjure up. I know God is faithful, I know he's smarter, I know he cares more about my life than I do, and I know he cares more about you than you do, and that is very good news. Cause you care about you a lot! You sure do! But you know what? God cares about you even more. He cares about you so much. He cares about you as a mother cares for a child. He loves you.

So, God just might allow you to go through something you can't handle. And when you do, you're going to have faith, and you're going to be rooted in the knowledge of God's character. Meaning – God is good, God is faithful, even if God is annoying, right? Even if he's annoying. I'm friends with God; I can say that about him. I know his timing is annoying, but coaches are annoying, and dad's are annoying, and the people that push us to be better than we thought we could be, they can be very annoying. But they do it because they love us. They do it because they want us to be stronger, smarter, more joy-filled, more at peace than we are now. God loves you too much to leave you where you are. He's going to carry you through and it will be pure joy.

And that's what James says. So James, in the book of James 1 verse 2 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 perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete lacking nothing." James is a man who has endured a lot. And he is someone that says we as believers, when we go through trials, there is a certain joy in the midst of it because we know that even though this is horrible and painful, we know that a resurrection God takes dead things and makes them even better when he raises them back to life.

These two words here, I think NIV that I'm reading says mature and complete, really wrestles with translating two words telios and holokleros; holokleros. Telios and holokleros are two words that mean almost the same thing, and you struggle to translate them correctly because they basically mean the same thing. Sometimes they're translated as perfected. Sometimes they're translated as mature. What it means is that something becomes whole and complete. Whole. Do you ever feel like there's a part of your life that's missing? Do you ever feel like you have cracks in your soul? Do you ever feel like you're chipped, you're broken, you're wounded, you're used? These are the remedy to that. That something happens in the pain and suffering and struggles of life, that even though it's really painful, it will make you whole. Like if

you like puzzles, you do a whole puzzle and then there's like one puzzle piece missing in the middle and everybody searches the house high and low, and then some kid finds it – I found it! And when you put that one, if you're OCD, you put that one puzzle piece right in the middle of it and just POOM, yes! Some of you feel that way and there's like something missing in your soul. And the promise of the suffering that we face in life is that if we endure it with faith and hope that it will actually cause us to be stronger, more at peace, more joyful, even more powerful in the way that we teach and think and lead. Like a crucible to gold, the pain and pressures of life for a believer, for someone who has faith, only makes you stronger, only makes you more joyful, only makes you more mature. It fills all the cracks and the emptiness.

There's a study done by *Christianity Today*, and they asked these people, "When was the time of your greatest personal growth?" Do you know what the answer was? Unfortunately it wasn't when I went going to church regularly. It wasn't small groups. It wasn't some Bible study class, it wasn't spiritual disciplines, it was suffering. Almost everybody said that the time in which I grew the most was in the midst of my suffering or pain. And can I just tell you pain and suffering don't make you mature. Pain and suffering don't make you better. But faith in the midst of your pain and suffering is the thing that makes you better. Because it reinforces the truth that no matter how hard life gets, God is

on my side, and he will carry me through. And what that does is when you're in the good times, you don't have this nagging sense of worry and fear, what if something bad happens. The crucible of pain and suffering can actually make you stronger and more courageous and more at peace because when things are good, you don't worry constantly about losing the good things. You realize that hey if I lose these things, I know the character of God. He's going to replace it with something even better. He's going to bring the dead things in my life back to life in a bigger, more awesome way than I could have ever imagined. Do you believe it? I believe it for you. Receive it today.

You know I've been running lately because I, towards the end of spring, got to the fattest I've ever been. I was two hundred and twelve pounds, which for me, I know, oh yeah, I know, but for me it was a lot and it was starting to show. I started getting back fat, and it was something that I, you know, and I was all right, I need to start running. And I need to start eating a little better. No more In-n-Out for me for a few weeks. And every time, and I've always been good at running, I've always enjoyed running, and so a few weeks ago I started running again and being in California, I enjoy going down to Balboa Peninsula and running in the morning and it's so nice.

And I always say the same thing before I run. I always tell myself run at a pace that you feel like you can do forever because it's not going to feel that way at the end. If you want to run five miles, if you want to run ten miles, and you haven't run in awhile, you need to run at a pace you haven't run in a long time. You need to like go just a little faster than walking. That's what I do because I'm out of shape.

And there was this moment where like a couple weeks into it, I started to feel pretty good, and I was like well maybe I should go faster. No, run at a pace you feel like you can do forever. And this like kind of buff guy, like I'm like kind of jogging, and he kind of blows by me. He's running, too. And I was so tempted: I can go that speed. I'm like no, I have my principles. It's the tortoise and the hare. So I just kept going. And he disappeared. And then about fifteen minutes went by and I saw him ahead of me and was doing this thing, like running and then stopping like this, walking and then running and then stopping and doing this. And then I'm getting closer and closer, and he's huffing and puffing, and now he's just like he's dying, and I'm just like "bye."

You know we try to hurry and make things happen. We try and force things. We feel like God's put a promise in our heart. We try and manufacture it. Sometimes we just need to go at a pace we know we can go at forever. Sometimes, in the pace of life, we go too fast and we get

burned out and we don't persevere because we try to take on more than we need. And you know can I just say, God is strong enough to take on a lot of the stuff you're trying to take on that you just don't need to take on. Sometimes, sometimes you just need to decide that in the race of life, that life is a marathon, not a sprint. That in this life it's about putting one foot in front of the other. And can I just say I believe that you are a spiritual marathon runner. And marathon runners don't quit when they feel pain, they don't quit when they feel tired, they quit when they cross the finish line. That is who you are. You are going to press through, you are going to get through this, keep one foot in front of the other because your miracle is so amazing that all God asks is that you don't quit. Don't give up. Don't cash it in. Keep moving. Take one step in front of the other and you will have the victory. That is from the Lord.

You know in the book of Abraham, or the book of Genesis, Abraham gets this promise from God at 75 that he's going to be the father of a great nation. And his name Abram, at the time, means great father. And so he's given this promise. And ten years go by and nothing happens so finally Abraham and his wife Sarah decide that well Abraham's going to sleep with Hagar, her servant, so they try to sort of force this miracle. And Ishmael is born, and the Ishmaelites, his descendents become a great sort of problem for Israel because they try and force God's miracle. And even after Ishmael, it's still another 15

years, when Abraham is 100 years old, that he finally delivers on a promise.

Don't try to force a promise from God. Just keep one foot in front of the other. Be at peace with where you are and you'll see God will bring you to victory.

Can I just give you just one more piece of advice as I finish here? You know my grandpa used to say never cut a tree down in winter. You know that saying? In the winter, and this is true in Oklahoma especially, or if you come from any cold place, in the winter every tree looks dead. They all look dead. And then only in spring do you really see which trees are alive and which trees are dead. But the farmers used to say you never cut down a tree in the winter because you never know which one is dead or alive.

So for you who are watching at home, never cut a tree down in winter. Never make a negative decision in a low time. Never make your most important decisions when you're in a bad mood. I think of all the times and mistakes that I made, the things that I said, the decisions I made because I wasn't feeling good, cause I was moody, I just was having a bad day, and can I tell you, very often we derail or we detour our journey because we make big decisions when we feel like junk, when we

just feel terrible. And we all know, we've all been moody. We've all been hungry, right? I once saw a T-shirt that said, "I'm sorry for what I said when I was hungry." We've all been there. But I want to encourage you the big part of having faith, I think, is recognizing that moods are a part of being human, and we just shouldn't make negative decisions or big decisions that impact our life when we're not feeling good. We should make those decisions when we're feeling joyful, when we're feeling optimistic, when we're feeling faithful, that's when you make those decisions, and watch as that helps you persevere in your life.

Friends, you're going to do it. You're going to get there, you're going to cross the line. Don't give up, don't quit. Your victory is coming! Emerson said that a hero is no braver than any other man. He's only braver five minutes longer. Don't give up the miracle that God has for you. It's coming. It's coming. Slow and steady wins the race. You and God will get through this. That's a promise.

Lord, thank you so much for what you've given us. We are so filled with joy and faith and we release our faith and we say, Lord, that today we're going to relax, we're going to walk in every moment unhurried, we're not going to make decisions when we're feeling moody. Lord, we pray that you will give us wisdom, perseverance and joy every day, and you have. Lord, we love you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.