

Steve,

In Response to your question:

Is perseverance an additional fruit of the Holy Spirit or is it a description of the act of allowing the Spirit to pull us through our trials?

Perseverance is our part in the process of sanctification. It is our going out to war in battle array. God's part is to provide victory. Perseverance is a virtue, not a fruit of the Spirit. We hold our ground until God shows up with the deliverance. It involves making godly choices and sticking to them, not wavering, standing firm against temptation, standing firm in our faith. God's Spirit can assist us in our persevering. Also, we can pray for help, especially if we feel that the temptation is of demonic origin (Command satan to be gone in Jesus name!). If we do not persevere in our Christianity, we lose - and often whatever we are struggling with will overtake us and rob us of our Christian walk. This is where you get your Christian who is an alcoholic, or who uses profanity, or who fools around on his wife or who has lost his faith. A lack of perseverance can be lethal to a Christian's walk, so it is really important. It is how we finish strong in the faith. A really good verse on this is 2 Peter 1:5-10:

⁵Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge,

⁶and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness,

⁷and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.

⁸For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.

¹⁰Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;

Perseverance plays a crucial role in walking in the Spirit and crucifying the flesh - saying no to the flesh and yes to the Spirit. It also plays a crucial role in training in righteousness. Just as we trained in sin before we were saved, now we are to train in righteousness so that when the tough times come (temptation or testing for example), we can fall back on our godly training and win. You can't train without perseverance - it is an essential element to successful training in anything, especially in godly living.

I guess one of the biggest keys to persevering successfully is wanting to persevere more than you want to give in, give up or give out. It is the seat of our desire that makes it or breaks it. That is why Psalm 37:4 is so key. We must delight ourselves in the Lord, in His ways, in our faith in Him, in walking in His Spirit, in His Word, in His church, etc. This delight fuels our ability to persevere against all odds. It empowers us to overcome. It gives us the edge we need to stand against temptation, ridicule, etc. If you can discover a way to fire up God's joy in the lives of your bible-study group at the compassion center, I believe you will notice a dramatic increase in the success rate.

Also, God's Spirit, God's word, fellowship with believers and other things like these help immeasurably in persevering - these things also help us want to persevere more than we want to give in or give up. They help us remember God and what He has done for us. They remind us of our faith. They help us to practice His presence. They encourage us.

Without God's indwelling Spirit, I don't think we can persevere for very long against the major sins in our lives, especially in today's world where there is no social pressure to live a righteous life. And even if we are successful on the outside (without the Spirit), the inner craving is still there (Like the Pharisees - clean on the outside but not on the inside). The Spirit of God changes our desires so that it becomes a joy to keep His commandments rather than a difficult thing. We may have to do righteousness out of compulsion for a while (perseverance), but if God's Spirit is working in our lives, He eventually shows up and changes us forever and the perseverance pays off in the form of godliness (we have developed a new godly habit through training/perseverance). The Spirit of God makes Psalm 37:4 a reality - we truly delight in the Lord. Delight in God/Joy in the Lord really is at the core of successful Christian living. This joy/delight in God is given to us when we receive the Holy Spirit at rebirth. Now Joy is a fruit of the Spirit - no mistake. It is this same joy that enabled Jesus to persevere to the point of death on the cross (Heb 12:2) - very powerful stuff. We need more of it. Think of ways to instill this joy in your men at the compassion center - it is key to their success.

Finally, perseverance takes for granted that faith, moral excellence, knowledge and self-control are in place - these things are foundational to successful persevering, which leads to godliness, brotherly kindness and love. That is, perseverance without one of these is usually misguided. For example, attempts to persevere without self-control fails almost always. Without faith or knowledge, you may end up persevering in the wrong direction - away from God instead of towards Him. Persevering without moral excellence has us persevering in evil rather than in good. Etc. These things are foundations upon which successful persevering can be built upon.

This 2 Peter verse could become very foundational to your studies with the men at the compassion center, equipping them for successful living. Also, a study of the word joy from a concordance is quite revealing, especially the times it occurs in the New Testament. It is the joy of God within us, planted and activated by the Holy Spirit, that enables us to successfully deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him for example.

So what can we do to encourage God's joy/delight in those around us?

We delight in the Lord ourselves, rejoicing in all things. We live out His joy before them in a fellowship relationship.

We pray for God to manifest his joy in their lives. We ask Him to make it real on a daily basis. To activate that joy in their life. We ask the Holy Spirit to do His part in their life.

We teach the truth - God's word inspires joy in the believer.

We pray with them - corporate prayer can be a great source of godly joy.

We let the presence of Jesus be felt by those around us. Just as John leapt for Joy in his mother's womb in Jesus presence, so do we when we are in His presence today. Especially at new birth. (Of course Herod had a different reaction, so we must be ready for that too unfortunately.)

Being born again is a joyful thing, not a solemn occasion. Let's make sure people understand that. It is not about what I am giving up, but what I am gaining - the biggest of which is eternal life. While the death to self can be like a funeral, it doesn't have to be. It too can be joyous when guided by the Holy Spirit. The biggest downer is when I fail, not over what I am giving up.

I could go on, but it is late and I have to drive to Ft Smith tomorrow. Call me if you want to discuss further. There are lots of verses supporting all of the above, I just didn't have time to write them all down. Also, forgive any typos or fragmented sentences - the above is un-proofed. Your bible study is looking awesome. I think a dose of crucifying the flesh (saying no to the flesh/yes to the Spirit) and perseverance (standing firm while I wait on God's deliverance) will be a good addition to the study.

One final thing - persevering does not always mean winning the battle every time - we may lose some battles along the way. Persevering sometimes means getting back up to fight again, until the victory is ours. Proverbs 24:16 speaks of this.

Also, a verse that may be a real encouragement to your men is Philippians 1:6:

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a
good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ
Jesus.

We can rest in knowing that God finishes what He starts, and that it is God who is at work in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Phil 2:13). This can be a great source of encouragement in times of failure. God finishes what He starts.

Yours In Christ,
God's Man,
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