

## Steps (Week 11) – Pursuing and Persevering

Jason Holleman – November 13, 2013

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My name is Jason. I'm Recovery pastor here. Some of you I know. Some of you I don't know. Let's see. Who do we have in here? Let's do this. Let's talk about some numbers for just a second. We're talking about *Pursuing and Persevering*, so you are persevering. Let's talk about the people who didn't. I have a list of names of people who are not here with us anymore.

That's a joke. I don't have it. Oh, did I not bring it with me? I guess I didn't. I can give you generally the numbers. So this is Week 11. Beginning in Week 8 we had about a 50 percent attrition rate. Week 9 we had about 60. Week 10 we had about 63. Then we expected with the trend this would be about 64. Once we catch the attendance numbers, that'll be about what we would expect.

The reason why that's so important is that like the attrition of this discipleship tool, this class, is the attrition candidly of the faith. It's not the same numbers, because we don't know what they are. Only God alone knows, but the truth is many who say they are Christians at the end of their lives, as we were just saying, will be found not Christians. That's just the reality. What a sobering reality for us to start the deal. Right?

This has never been more pressing for me than the fact that the dude who taught me everything I know about Jesus, literally was there the day I came to faith, taught me for the next 10 years everything I know about Jesus before seminary, taught me everything I know about finances, love, the whole deal, whom I confessed all my sins to, today he is a complete pagan and just couldn't care less about the Lord. That's just a real-world example.

The dude who was there the day I came to faith and was the first guy who grabbed me afterwards and said, "Man, do you know what?" I'm like an eighth grader, completely pagan. All I'm thinking about is trying to have sex with the girls on the front row, and he grabs me and says... The Lord just completely... Oh, is that too much? I'm sorry. We're getting in this thing quickly, aren't we? Let's start the audio right now.

That's all that was on my mind, and then God just completely saves. That was Wednesday. That Thursday I'm like weepy, and just before the Lord I'm just completely done. I feel convicted about all that stuff. Man, that Thursday he grabs me and just says, "Hey, man. I think the Lord wants me to walk with you. I think the Lord wants me to develop you as a pastor. So what are you doing this weekend?" That was Thursday, and that just started...

What's my point? We're going to get to this at the very end when we talk about the parable of the soil. What began in him, what appeared to be belief, I now believe today was not belief. That should be sobering. Right? When we sing the song, "Let me be singing when the evening comes," that's just not, "Man, isn't this great?" No, that's like, "Oh, God, please may we by evening still believe and desire Jesus at the end," because the reality is some of you in here probably will not. When tragedy strikes...

Man, I'm just getting ahead of this thing so fast. We're just done. We're done right now basically. Good night. You're like, "Good grief." I'm just doing it. Do you like that? The shortest Steps study ever. Most of you need that break. You're like, "Oh, God, thank you. We actually thought he was going to talk for an hour." That was last week, I was told.

For some of us, I can't tell you how many times after a tragedy or a circumstance or something hits my soul I think, "Okay, good. I still believe this. I still love Jesus. I still desire to know him. I still desire to pursue him. Praise the name of Jesus." Let's just get into this thing. I love this. *Pursuing and Persevering* is what we're talking about tonight. This is our twelfth week. It's our eleventh session. The first was an intro. We don't count that. That was to kind of lure you into a shorter program. This is what 1 Corinthians, chapter 9, says.

**"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."**

I could talk a lot about just this passage. We kind of live in a trophy generation where all the kids are like, "Look. I got a trophy!" You're like, "You lost every game. How do you get a trophy? You did nothing, just picking up daisies at the end of the field, goals nonstop, and yet you get this huge

trophy." So the idea of pursuing something that wins a prize, a perishable wreath, is kind of foreign to us, because everybody gets a participation ribbon.

Before you email me, I do think that's silly. I want my son to feel defeat and to have no trophy when he goes home. I want him to feel that. Why do I want him to feel that? I want him to see there's actually something toward the idea of work. Even if you work your hardest, it still could end in failure. It's very, very important to me in the Christian faith too.

I don't want him to think, "Man, I don't really love Jesus and I don't really care and I haven't really tried and I don't really think anything of him, but I think I'm going to heaven." No, that's probably not true. The fact that I desire, the fact that I pursue, the very fact that I even care is evidence of belief. In that belief I strive toward the goal.

So where are we going with this? In this idea of sanctification, there are two parts. There's *mortification*, and there is *vivification*. Mortification is the putting to death those things that rob us of our affections of Christ. Vivification is the filling of ourselves with those things that stir our affections for him. I have a great quote I just found in some reading of D.A. Carson, but before I tell the quote, for those of you who love sports, let's say for just a minute you love the game of football.

I personally don't care much about it. You're probably looking at me and thinking, "I bet this guy played football." I didn't. I was a terrible athlete. I don't really like things I'm terrible at, so I don't like football. For some of you, you might be thinking, "I love football. You're weird." For those of you who love the game of football, how do you pursue the game?

If you're watching it... Let's say you have a work meeting you're late for. You check the DVR like five times. "I want to make sure the game is being TiVo'd. I want to make sure the game is being DVR'd. I just want to make sure it's there." You start to do all the preparations that are necessary so you don't even have to pause the game once you get there. You just pull everything in.

If you have some buddies, you want to...I'll use the word...worship with them as you watch the football game. You pull everything in, and then when the game is about to start and you push that button, you pause to begin this spectacle of idol worship, you think this to yourself, "It's so good." Then you start to text guys, and then you start to do all the things you do. You're just being absorbed fully into the worship moment.

Here's the thing. Who puts in you a love for football? Where does that begin? That's the crazy thing about it. It's just either there or it's not. You could say, "I watched some games with my dad." I watched games with my dad, and I couldn't care less. Maybe you say, "I never watched games with my dad, but I love it." Who put that in you? Why do you love that? Why do you spend all the effort and time to do that?

The reason why I mention that is the faith is likened to the effort and preparation we put forth with Christ. The fact that you love Jesus doesn't come from you. It doesn't come from me, but once we begin to see God for who he is when he reveals himself, he's irresistible. You cannot say no. When God says, "This is who I am," it's on. You cannot say no. Anybody who thinks they can say no has never seen him. You just need to know that.

I wish I didn't see him at the time. I didn't know to know I didn't want to see him, and then when he revealed himself that Thursday, it was on. I could not say no. I love this quote. In fact, I put underneath it, "Like preparing for a football game example." That's solid note-taking right there. I could never write something this awesome, but I'm going to stand on it.

D. A. Carson says, "People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated."

What's my point? Like the game of football, no dude who just loves it says, "I'll pick up the game a little later, or maybe I'll just happen by it as I'm doing whatever." No, we prepare with fervor to watch whatever our team is or to pursue whatever our thing is. Before you ladies start to go, "That's right. Those guys and football..." just fill in the blank. I'm not a woman, so I don't really know what women are into. I have two in my home; one is my wife. But I don't know what your thing is.

For you guys maybe it's something else, but my point is we don't slide and slouch and aimlessly move into godliness. We aim for it. We pursue it. We strive for it. The only reason we do, the only reason we even have a care in the world, is that God puts that care there. It's very, very important. If we do those things so we will love God, that's dead religion. If we do those things because God has put love in us, that's obedience. There's a very big difference.

If I'm doing all the right work so God will find me acceptable, that's legalism. If I'm doing all this work and striving because I love God and because of what he has already done, that's obedience. Do you see how you can slice it pretty thin? One of my professors in seminary, a Greek professor, would always say, "Now I'm about to slice the bologna really thin here. Be really careful how you hold it because it just falls apart on you."

**"Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit..."** If we plan to pursue and be filled with the Spirit and we don't mortify sin, we are being filled with the things that lead us to death. Why do I know that? If you continue to pursue anything in the world and take your fill of it all the day long, you're going to die.

"Oh, yeah? What about water?" Yeah, you could die from drinking too much water. Seriously. I didn't actually believe that when I was using the example, and then I looked up all these cases of people who died drinking water. Google it. You can die from drinking too much water. Who knew? Right? I didn't. What's my point? If you begin to fill yourself with the Spirit, you could never pursue depth or fervor with the Spirit and it ever at one time, anytime, lead you to harm. If you pursue any other thing with that fervor, it will always lead you to death, any other thing, even things you think are good.

Try protection of your children. Try for the rest of your life just the thing you clutch to tightest, that you aim for, that you pursue with great fervor is the protection of your children, and you will see somebody who is absolutely overwhelmed with anxiety. That leads to death, if not physical death. Any other thing apart from pursuit of the Spirit will lead to death, even good things. Try Bible reading and memorization...

There are three imbalances regarding the Spirit we need to talk through. What are they? Within the spiritual dysfunction that occurs, there's an imbalance of *the gospel ingestion versus the gospel expression*. This is an important point. You have three of them.

The first is *spiritual anorexia*. Spiritual anorexia, trying to do the ministry and mission without taking the time to be in his presence and allowing the stirring and empowerment of the Holy Spirit to move and motivate, is an imbalance that is trying to produce gospel fruit without the proper nutrition. So what do you have? You have puny fruit. To be anorexic is not to ingest the calories

necessary to sustain life. Likewise, with the Spirit, to try to exercise the fruit of the Spirit without ingesting first the Spirit is to be absolutely anorexic.

The most common sign of this in the church is leaders who burn out super quickly, leaders who are like, "Man, I'm in. I'm in," and then are like, "Man, I hate this ministry," people who come in and go, "Man, I really thought so, but this and this..." It's anorexia. They're being killed because there's not enough ingestion. There's not enough being ingested, and you have no ability to exercise it.

*Spiritual bulimia*, the second of the three, is taking in the nutrients but not savoring them. This is going through the motions where there are nutrients everywhere but never absorbing them. If you look at a woman who struggles with bulimia, she will consume calories, but because she purges those calories, there is no time for her body to absorb them.

It's like this idea. It's like, "I'm going to go to prayer meeting, and then I'm going to memorize the passages. I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do my Bible verses. I'm going to go through all these checklists," but the next thing you know, it's just for naught. It's empty. It's just all this routine and rote and all these things. The next thing you know, it's the same problem as anorexia; it just looks prettier. You say, "Oh no, I'm eating. I'm savoring this." All the while you rush and never absorb the nutrients.

What does that looking like? It might just very well be not doing anything for the Lord for a season and just sitting in his presence waiting upon him, maybe just mindlessly journaling about the things you love about Jesus and the areas you wish your life would change and you have no ability to change. It doesn't really sound like something popular. Right? You're not memorizing a passage. You're not feeding the poor. You're not doing anything that looks external. You're just enjoying the presence of God. You're savoring, if you will, the food of God, the Spirit.

The last is *spiritual obesity*. To be honest, we see this a lot in the church as well. Spiritual obesity is ingesting without exercise. It's like letting the fruit stay on the tree too long, and the fruit just rots. Do you know where you see a lot of folks like this, this idea of spiritual obesity? In Bible churches. I'll just tell you like it is.

In Bible churches guys who know everything about the Bible could give you literally an understanding of church history that's unbelievable. Fat heads, puny bodies. They're just fat and bloated with all the things they know, all the experiences they have, all the leadership, and they're

not doing anything with it. They're just obese believers. That's what they are. What's the rhythm we're looking for in this idea of *Pursuing and Persevering*? We're going to continue to get into that here.

The balance then in the gospel is *that we might be filled and then we overflow the gospel into ministry and mission*. We're not going to get into mission. Mission is next week, so we're going to just talk right now just about what it looks like to pursue Christ and to persevere in Christ. Next week we're actually going to talk about what a life looks like that's doing the "gospel out" well, because what this is for you today and what this is for you the last 12 weeks is "gospel in." We are putting a gospel in so you would go and you would have gospel out. That's the hope for you.

1. *Pursuing Christ*. "What are you filled with?" is a great, great question. What is it that consumes you? So you see here in the picture, "Spirit in, fruit of the Spirit out. Wine in, debauchery out." This is the same idea I talked about water. I could put, "Water in, death." It doesn't make as much sense. My point is what you consume and what you place in your mind and what you begin to fill yourself with is what you will express when you leave.

This is super important for those of you who go, "It's just music. Come on. Give me a break. Guys, quit freaking out. It's just a rated-R movie. Good grief. Oh, come on. It's just making out on top of the clothes," or whatever the thing is. Right? Whatever the consuming is... Here's the thing. Here's the deal. Here's the problem. It literally is true. What you ingest is what you will express. That's the important piece to catch.

**"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."** Where your treasure is, is where your heart will be also. Let me tell you why that's important, because what we're talking about is pursuit. Where your treasure is, your heart will be there also. Every one of us treasures something. You show me a person who is overwhelmed with anxiety leading to depression, I will begin to tell you what their treasure is, because it's exposed.

You show me a person who is at peace and with comfort; I will show you his treasure is protected. I'm going to say it again. Those who are just without any fear, their treasure is secure, but you start showing me a person with anxiety, I'll tell you their treasure is exposed. Look in any area of your life. What creates anxiety? Exposed treasure. What is the cure for anxiety? Protection of treasure? No, you get weird people that way. You start having a bunch of preppers.

If our treasure is exposed, we do crazy things. We start building fences and brick walls and doing all these kind of things, and yet the world says, "Protect your treasure. Protect it. Be powerful. Do this," and yet God says, "Change your treasure. Don't protect that. That's dumb to even protect. Don't protect it. Make Jesus your treasure, and you will never walk in anxiety." The more you believe Jesus being your treasure is treasure, the less anxious leading to depression you will ever be.

That's crazy, isn't it? That's like the craziest concept. I remember the first day I heard that. I was like, "You have to be kidding me. Where have people been my whole life? I am super angry right now. Why am I angry? Oh, because my treasure is intelligence. Blah, blah, blah." Right? The first time I heard that it just began to open my eyes to the fact that I am actually a gift to idol-factory making.

I love to create idols that I then like to make treasure that I then like to protect. Man, I am absorbed in anxiety doing all of that. It's exhausting, really. I'm going to transition here regarding treasure, because the reality is for us to make Jesus treasure, you have to focus on him. You have to pursue him. You have to aim toward the goal.

The writer of Hebrews writes this in chapter 12: **"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus..."** That's huge. **"...the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."**

So the goal then is...what? Not to protect our treasure or to see our treasure is exposed and we're filled with anxiety and all these things. No, the treasure, the goal, is to pursue Jesus, and in doing so, in worshiping him, he becomes our treasure. Here's an example. You might be shocked by this, but I'm actually a runner. I just ran a half marathon in March. You're shocked, aren't you? I'm awesome.

I honestly didn't know I could do it. I was just completely fearful I was going to be that guy who was like, "I did it," he gets to mile 11, and he just gives up. Then I'm the guy who ran 11 miles instead of the half I set out. They don't have a sticker for "11.something." I wish they did. That would be awesome. I just remember starting at the beginning of the race. I was just laser-focused on one thing. I was focused on finishing the race.



I ran with two other guys. One of them was Michael Snetzer, and he's a complete beast. I don't know if you know this, but the guy can run for miles and miles. In fact, his running ability should be quantified, not in miles, but by days. He is a freak. That guy can just run. The other guy was a collegiate sprinter at Texas, full scholarship. I think you get my point.

So I'm between two great runners. I'll be running. I have my pace. I know exactly how fast I'm going to go because I'm GPS locked in. So I'm just going. They start to go a little faster. I'm like, "Y'all can do whatever y'all want, but I'm running my race." Then they start to slow back because Snetzer kind of has a fast life so his hips are all jacked, so he's like, "Man, I don't think I'm going to be able to do it." I said, "I'll leave you right now." I'm just running. I am laser-focused on the goal.

Here's what's interesting. It was so cold that day I had a beanie on, almost a balaclava, but a beanie at the time. I had gloves. I had these pants that kind of just pulled off. I only used them for the race. I had all this gear on for the race. As it started, I started to sweat. I was like, "Do you know what? Beanie gone." Do you know what I did? I didn't fold the beanie up and put it in my pocket. I tossed that sucker. I literally think it went straight down into a porta potty. I was like, "I don't care. I'm gone. Whether I bought it at The Gap or at Thrift City, it doesn't matter. It's gone."

Then I started heating up some more, and I was like, "Gloves. Where did I buy them? It doesn't matter. Gloves gone." I am laser-focused on the race. "Pants, sweatshirt...gone." Right? Here's what's interesting. This is absolutely true. I couldn't make this up. There was a point in the race as I was running there was so much stuff littering the road. If you've ever been to a race, you know there's just stuff everywhere. It's like, "Good grief, man. Who comes behind us and gets all this stuff? I want that job. 'Man, look at this. This is awesome. Will that fit me? Yeah, perfect.' That's what I want to do."

For a second there I was running, and as I would run, my eyes would be taken off the goal, and I would begin to look to my right and to my left and go, "Man, that's a pretty sweet jacket." There are multiple times I almost deterred from the race to put on a little jacket or something. I thought about it, and then I kept going, "Holleman, you're not shopping. You're running a half marathon. You don't even know if you can finish it."

I'm telling you, man, I kept going, "Holleman, eyes... Come on." I'd pull in, and I'd start running some more. Why is this so important? To be honest, man, every one of us starts this deal with such

encumbrances, entanglements, sin. In fact, do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to read the verse again.

**"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [those who have gone before us] let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."**

I'm not exaggerating here. We finished the race. It was awesome. Toward the end it was beautiful. Do you know what happens in races? This was my first I had run since high school, and so I didn't remember this, if they even did this in high school. As I began to run, all of the dudes that ran before me started pulling back out, medals on, and just were standing by the side of the road just watching us go. "Come on. Let's go."

This metaphor breaks down big time when you start thinking they come back from the afterlife and come and start running with people. I'll just say they were standing at the finish line. I love that. They were just clapping, cheering us on. I just couldn't help but to be absolutely overwhelmed with emotion. As I'm sitting there, I'm just like, "Man, to think I almost grabbed that Under Armour jacket."

I wasn't even thinking about the Under Armour jacket. It was awesome. It probably would've been a medium, and let's be honest. My 6-year-old probably couldn't wear that Under Armour jacket. Those guys in skinny jeans... Anyway, here's the deal. As I'm running, those guys are just clapping for us. It was a beautiful thing.

Do we for any moment believe that's not the case for us today and all believe this verse is not almost an exact replication of what the writer of Hebrews is saying? What are we talking about here then? If we talk about the wilderness and we talk about the children of Israel, we're talking about treasure. So everything before Christ, possessions, people, power, physique, position, all that we are before Jesus we are completely dependent upon it. Why? Because it's everything we have. If you don't have Jesus, man, you tout treasure. Right?

If I wasn't a believer in Jesus, man, I'd be going for money and the brand-new 2014 Corvette that just came out. That is a beautiful car. I would slave. My fingers would be bleeding, just to be seen

behind the wheel of that car. I don't even know if I'd like to drive in it as much as I would like to be seen in it. How wicked is that? Right? This is me looking at it as a believer. I can't imagine not having the call of Christ upon my life and the focus of Jesus.

Yet without Jesus all of these things you see here are a dependence. We cling to those things. They are treasure. It affects our identity. It affects our worth. It affects our value. It affects our confidence. With Christ, following belief in Jesus, power, people, personality, prosperity, possessions, all of it is something to be stewarded.

Here's something often we do. We have this guy. He's a nonbeliever, so he acts like a nonbeliever. Nonbelievers should act like nonbelievers. People who think they're Christians who act like nonbelievers are probably just nonbelievers who think they're Christians. It's actually, I think, simpler than we make it. Just because a dude tells me he's president doesn't mean he's president.

So you have this guy here who is acting like a non-Christian, doing all these things, and the truth is Christ saves the guy. Then he's transformed into the image of God. He begins to walk. Often what happens is they take their focus off of Jesus who is the author and perfecter of the faith, and they begin to mark themselves by what it is they either are doing or are not doing.

Here's what's crazy about that. You have all these things, so let's say your life is defined by the gathering of wealth. Let's just say you're a baller. Whatever you touch turns to gold. You're like an alchemist from the 1800s. It's amazing. Everything, like if it's business or whatever it is, it's just gold. Amazing! You're just this dude, you're this business guy, turns to gold, and then you come to faith in Jesus. What often happens? The person takes their eyes off of Jesus and begins to go, "Uh-oh, am I loving money too much? Uh-oh, am I pursuing money too much? Uh-oh, am I doing this?"

What happens? Everything about his life is determined by who he was and if he's thinking too much about that thing. A dude who looks at pornography, the guys just is overwhelmed with...what? Not Jesus, but if he's doing this or that, not pursuing Christ, but, "How long has it been since I've engaged or how long has it been since I've looked at these things online?" Who then becomes functional god? The stuff.

Often one of the biggest tricks of the Enemy is to just lock you up in stuff. Instead of your treasure being Christ and Christ alone and everything else is like gloves you're just going to discard in the race, you begin to ask the question, "Should I have discarded those gloves or not? Uh-oh, what do I

need to do to protect this?" Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to take these gloves off, and I'm going to stick them in my pants right here. I'm going to dangle these gloves here, and then my hat I'm just going to hang it off of this right here.

The next thing you know you're running the race and you look like the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man. You're just huge, with stuff all over you. "I've held onto it. I'm still running." What do the Scriptures say? "See it gone, that which so easily clings to you." Man, I can't tell you how many guys will just say... I'll say, "Man, hey. How are you doing?" It is not, "Man, I've been pursuing Jesus. I love Jesus. Man, I have just struggled, but my eyes are focused on Christ."

A dude says this to me: "Man, do you know how long it has been since I've engaged in *this* behavior. Do you know it's been a whole week since I've done *this*? Or, "Do you know what? I've been sober for *this* long." Fine. You've been sober that long. I threw my gloves back three miles ago. I haven't thought once about them. I literally haven't even thought about the gloves. It was trash as compared to the goal, the race, and the prize, which is Jesus.

Don't be like the one who says, "I'm a Christian. I don't do all these things. I'm fearful of all these things. All these things are the things I'm no longer doing. Look how long it has been. Look how much distance is between me and these things." Who is not being talked about? Jesus. Who is not being looked at? Jesus. Who is not being focused on? Jesus. What's being focused on? The stuff.

When I run a race... I should say if a runner runs a race and says, "Hey, man, I got rid of this. I got rid of this. I almost grabbed this. I jumped over this. I did this," you'd be like, "Man, that's the weirdest runner I've every met." "I got rid of my gloves at mile 11." You should be like, "Man, that makes no sense. That guy is off."

If a guy says, "Man, I ran a race, it was hard, and I completed the prize: Jesus. I finished it to the end. I tripped. I fell. I had two bathroom breaks." That's just personal. I had a little, sweet 5-foot-nothing woman jump in front of me, and I literally thought about just pushing that little toilet over. That's how much I needed to go.

It's fun. I died to it, but I could have. I was powerful enough to push that thing over, and she couldn't have weighed but 90 pounds. Man, I figured with the liquid that's in the bottom of it and her weight, I could've easily pushed and toppled that over. You might think that's odd, but it just shows you what a sinner I am. Even that... Hear me. I'm actually telling the example for an actual reason.

Do you know how often our race is inhibited by others and it's their fault? Do you know what I could've done? "Well, the woman got in front of me, so I had an accident, and I had to go home, just a little accident. I had to stop the race." No. She is not going to stop the race for me. I will hold it and find another place.

My point is...what? Do you know how many folks in here say, "I'd be much happier, I'd be much more filled with joy, if it wasn't for him? I'd be so much more trusting of God if I didn't have all these kids. If it just wasn't for this debt, man, I would just have this race done"? It is as foolish as to say, "My race wasn't completed because a 5-foot-nothing woman beat me to the restroom." You might not think it is, but it's absolutely true. All of this within the wilderness defines our treasure.

2. *Persevering in Christ*. Philippians, chapter 3, beginning in verse 8: "**Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ...**"

This is the idea of me focusing on Jesus versus the things I am doing or not doing, this idea of law, focusing on Jesus by grace and not focusing on the things of the law. "**...the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.**"

This is the idea of "No, no, no. Who attains the resurrection from the dead?" Believers in Jesus, those who finish the race. Perseverance of the saints is this idea theologically. Faith works itself out in a million little things. The whole sum of the parts so when you add all these things up, what does this point to? This is really, really important, because we're about to make a turn here, which is, what do we do with suffering then? Because not everything is as simple as the 5-foot-nothing woman beating me to the restroom.

Some of us in here are in some real suffering and some real circumstances that are quite painful. What does suffering do? If you look at the chart here, you see this idea that suffering presses and pushes a person to begin to root themselves in the Spirit or begin to root themselves into self, begin to root themselves into Christ or root themselves into the flesh, the world, and the demonic.

This idea, this category of the flesh, the world, and the demonic, comes from Ephesians, chapter 2. When you begin to look at this, pressure produces fruit, and a heart rooted in one of these two things will be the outworking of what is expressed. It's very, very important in our lives, because if you see this rightly, you will see suffering actually produces righteousness for the Christian. It actually divides the person who is not.

Man, just before I got up here, a dude grabs me in the hallway, and he says, "Hey, man, I just want to let you know I got fired a few days ago."

"What?"

"I did, man. I just absolutely let my boss have it, and he fired me right on the spot." The guy has been working for this guy for 10 years. He was like, "I just let him have it, and I got fired."

"You have to be kidding me. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I have no idea. My sin just got ahold of me."

"Man, let me just tell you something, brother. I recommend, regardless of what the future is for your employment there, that you do the right thing, that you root yourself in Christ and not self," because this guy didn't sign a noncompete, and he's like, "I could take every one of his customers, and I could absolutely destroy this guy. There are competitors that are begging that I work for them."

"Well, just because you didn't sign a noncompete doesn't mean you have the right to harm him even if he's wrong."

"I know, but everything in my flesh wants to say, 'Oh, really? Well, I'll destroy you.'" But a heart rooted in the Spirit and Christ says, "So what if I'm powerful or able to do this? That's not what Christ would have. Christ didn't come to be served but came to serve."

Do you know what he did? He went back, and he repented for his anger and repented for what he said. He didn't ask for his job back, none of that stuff. He just said, "Hey, I just want to let you know my heart was really wicked, and I want to do some wicked things. I just want to repent before you." Do you know what crazy thing happened? His boss hired him back.

His boss said, "Do you know what? I've been absolutely fearful and overwhelmed with fear that you were going to go and take all the customers. In fact, I didn't even realize you never signed a noncompete until you came back. I had no idea, so I fully expected this was going to be a long, drawn-out legal battle and it was going to be unbelievably messy for everybody." Do you know what? It would've been.

Yet a heart that is rooted in Christ produces...what? Gentleness, peace, goodness, joy, self-control, faithfulness, love, patience, kindness, but a heart that is rooted in self produces...what? It produces anger, lust, addiction, control, fear, anxiety, and depression. Where your treasure is, your heart will be there also. We could just put on this treasure.

If you're treasuring the things of God, you're treasuring Christ. All pressure, all suffering, will reveal where your heart is rooted. It's very important. You tell me a guy who's a great guy. "He's a really, really great guy, but man when that guy hit his car, he went berserk." You're like, "Ah, sounds like he really loved his car." Everybody goes, "Yeah, he probably really loved his car," but just put that in any other circumstance.

This wife, this woman is really, really great until you start telling her her kids aren't any good at anything. You see the gloves come off. She turns into a psycho. Where do you think her treasure is? As we begin to see this, I'll never forget as I am... Every time I teach this, I always think about a grapevine I had in Greenville.

I lived in Greenville, Texas, for a number of years. I had this grapevine. It was the oldest grapevine in Hunt County until a guy cut the entire thing down. I have since forgiven him, but it was, however, foolish on his part. There were years and years I cultivated this vine. This vine just wanted to go this way the whole time.

As it was going, it wanted to grow toward the shade. I don't know if you know anything about grapevines; they don't do well in shade. It kept wanting to grow toward the shade, and I would just cut the thing off. I'm tell you I would cut that thing off, and that thing would just sprout and continue to just go toward the shade every time.

I'm like, "Fine." I'd just cut that thing again. Just as I'd cut it, it's like the vine was like, "Really?" and just would kind of continue to grow. It was huge. The base of this vine was the diameter of an NFL-

sized football. It was massive, a huge football. It just wanted to go to the shade, except one day I just cut that sucker. I was like, "What are you going to do now?" sort of just talking to it. Good gardeners talk to their plants, and those who are off...

The oddest thing happened. I just began to watch it begin to sprout and grow toward the light, and it thrived. This grapevine is probably thinking, "This guy hates me. I keep trying to grow for him, and he keeps cutting me off. What a gardener!" Yet how often are we upset with God when he continues to slam doors in our face? How angry are we with God as we go, "Why can't I go this way?" and God just says, "I'm going to cut you off"?

We pretend like it's any different than this vine wanting to grow toward the shade. Here's the funny thing. That vine will grow all the way down the length of the fence, but in the shade it will never produce fruit. That's the craziest part about it. If you put just a tiny little vine that goes the other way in the sun, and it will be bountiful of fruit.

So God makes no mistakes at the way he prunes believers. Often a way in which he does so is suffering. This idea is from Matthew 24, beginning in verse 10. **"And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end..."**

This idea of the parable of the soils in Luke, chapter 8, is so imperative. As you look at the parable of the soils, there are a couple of things that are absolutely noted. As the sower begins to throw seed, which Jesus later says is the Word of God, you see a couple of environmental things happening. You see the bird of the air begin to take the seed straight from the ground as it begins to sow along the path. The birds just pluck it out of the air. Jesus says in this parable the bird is the Enemy. It's Satan.

Other seed begins to go on rocky soil, and it begins to grow, but there's no place for the roots to go deep. There's nowhere for the roots to go. What appears to be awesome growth at the beginning will not endure. Why? The soil is terrible. The soil is the condition of the heart. So it begins to grow, and you think, "Man, that thing is going to live." You just watch it. Maybe in a good rain it looks great, but when there's not a whole lot of rain, that thing just starts to look withered. You go, "Those roots must not be very deep."



The third environment is soil that the seed falls on and begins to grow and then the thorns and the thistles begin to crowd out this seed. I have this literal problem right now in my backyard, trying to grow winter rye. I have these thistles that are just growing faster than the winter rye, and the winter rye will not take. It will kill it. Why? The Bible says thorns and thistles are the cares of the world, the cares and pursuits of pleasure. It will just begin to crowd out this seed.

The last is...what? Good soil, where the seed begins to grow, and it begins to produce ten-, forty-, sixty-, eighty-, a hundredfold. Which one of the parable is a Christian? There is only one, and that is those who go to good soil. The truth is the seed that falls upon the soil where the thorns and thistle crowd it out doesn't live. The rocky ground where the seed doesn't grow, where the roots don't grow deeply, the seed doesn't live. In a place where the bird of the air snatches the seed and goes on, the seed doesn't live on.

So this is why I'm so fearful of comforts of the United States. The pleasures of the world are more abundant in the United States than anywhere else. Look around. I'm terrified of that, because the truth is Jesus gives us this parable, and Jesus never makes a mistake. Maybe we don't have the right translation. He gives us the translation. Go to Luke 8. Read it for yourself. He commentates this passage himself, and so here's what I hope for you.

My hope is that you will pursue Jesus in such a way that you are laser-focused. Everything else is just thrown off. The encumbrances and hindrances are thrown off. The second is when suffering and turmoil and tragedy befall you... And it will. You're either coming from it, in it, or going to it. Welcome. It comes for us all, every one of us. My hope is that you will see it as one thing, endurance, that you will see it as one thing, as pressing you to see what your heart is rooted in.

Then reality is if you begin to wake up and you say, "Wow, today I love Jesus. I'm grateful for that," that you can say when the evening comes, "I finished today loving Jesus, and though I might not wake tonight, I pray mercy be new in the morning," this idea from Lamentations, chapter 3, because the truth is the fact that we love and pursue Jesus is a gift from Jesus.

It just is. It's an absolute gift. If we did all these other things without the gift of Jesus, it's just dead religion. If we do these things because Jesus put love and belief in us, it's obedience. When tragedy hits you and in the midst of it there's joy and you pursue Christ, that's good soil. Let's pray together.

Father, that's what we pray for. We just pray that you would give each of us just power by your Spirit to endure and to be able to walk in faithfulness and be able to walk in the reality that, God, we are in a world that is filled with turmoil and difficulty and the reality that post-Genesis 3 world is a dangerous and difficult and hard place and the fact that we walk through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil is because you, God, are good. Would you help us? Enable us by your Spirit to focus, to pursue upon Jesus, and persevere in the midst of this world. In the name of Christ we pray, amen.

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