

## Resistance (Part Three): Persistence

**Steadfast Continuance**

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Good afternoon to all of you! Hope you are all doing well! Hope you had a good week that was a more pleasant week than the week before.

You probably have been watching the Olympic games (some of you at least). I really enjoy watching the Olympics. It is always incredible what those people can do. I do have a message that comes off of that somewhat, although I thought of the topic for this several weeks ago. I had been mulling it in my mind since then. With the summer games going on in Rio de Janeiro, it makes sense to present an illustration that has to do with the Olympics. But this one comes from the Olympics, in 1992, in Barcelona, Spain.

It is the story of a young man named Derek Redmond. He was a fast, mid-distance runner from Britain who had the reputation of being a fast closer—a great finisher. But his literally staggering performance in the 400-meter semifinal of the men's race in the 1992 games will long be remembered.

Redmond had been forced to withdraw from the 400-meter race at the 1988 games in Seoul—and that had happened only 10 minutes before the gun—because he had injured his Achilles tendon as he was warming up. Over the following year, he went through five surgeries to get that thing repaired and to get everything ready for him to go workout again.

As a racer who had shattered the 400-meter record at the age of 19, Derek's convalescence over those months was really frustrating to him. He could not wait to get out there and run. But he could not hobble on that Achilles tendon. So he had to wait. When finally he was able to get back in to training, the 1992 games arrived and he felt it was now his time. This was going to be his stage, his moment, and he was going to show the world just how fast he was. He was going to win the gold medal in Barcelona.

So the gun goes off. Derek gets off to a great start. In fact, he was leading at the 100-meter point and he was just beginning to put it into a higher gear. But, at 125 meters, he pulled his right hamstring and came up lame. After a few steps, he did not think he would be able to go on and collapsed on the track. Writhing in pain, sitting there, he saw the other runners bolt past him and watched his dream—of winning the gold—die. All he could think of was “I'm out of the Olympics. Again!”

But he knew he was made of sterner stuff. He knew he could not stay down, and would not stay down. He might not be able to win, but he could finish. A medical crew was immediately out there with a stretcher and they were going to carry him off the track. But Derek snarled at them and said: “There's no way I'm getting on that stretcher. I'm going to finish my race!” He shooed them away.

And while 65,000 fans in the stadium—and millions on TV around the world—watched, Derek slowly regained his feet. He was in agony—there was pain coursing through that right leg—but he began limping and hobbling toward the finish line. Obviously, he was in the last place; in fact, his competitors were already finished—they had already crossed the finish line. With tears streaming down his face in disappointment, he was determined that he himself would cross that finish line, even

though he knew that he would be in last place and he would be out of the games. This was a semi-final, so he would not move on.

When Derek had fallen though, a very large man, from the top row of the stands, had begun to barrel down the stairs toward the track. It was Jim Redmond, his father. He was disregarding all the security that the Barcelona officials had put there. He was pushing people aside, bumping people to the ground. He was determined that he would get down to the track and no one would keep him from reaching his son.

When Jim finally got down there and put an arm out to support Derek, his son tried to push him away not realizing who it was. He thought there was another person, some official, trying to make him leave the track. His father said, “Derek, it’s me!” And recognizing the familiar voice, Derek said: “Dad, I have to finish this race.” And Jim only nodded. “If you’re going to finish the race,” he said, “then we’ll finish it together.” And so, with those words, Jim put his son’s left arm around his shoulder and together they began to stagger down the track—kind of like a three-legged race.

By this time, the crowd, of course, was focused on Derek—with all the commotion that was going on—and his father too, as they limped toward the finish line. 65,000 spectators rose to their feet and began to cheer. And as he moved toward the finish line, it increased until it was almost painful to listen to. They could feel the young man’s determination to finish the race. As they approached the finish line, the crowd now was in a frenzy, going crazy. Jim released the grip he had on his son so that Derek could cross the finish line by himself. Then he threw his arms around Derek again (because he was probably about to fall down) and they were both crying along with everybody in the audience and everybody on TV. Despite the devastating injury, despite the agony in his right leg, Derek had finished his race (if you want to look it up on YouTube, it is a great thing to watch).

There have been other stories similar to this. You have probably heard them, read them, or seen the videos. In fact, things like this happen actually with good regularity in the elite sports world. There is a reason why these things happen like this. It is because athletes at this level possess certain qualities of character, certain traits, that, truth be told, are actually what separate them from the lesser athletes around them.

In fact, there was a study that was done (I cannot remember who did it) that surveyed elite athletes. What they found was kind of interesting. They found that a high percentage of elite athletes—those that go on to win medals at Olympic games, those who win championships, those who have huge athletic goals that they go out and fulfill; and, of course, reap all the praise for being able to do it—came from families whose parents thought that they were not the best athletes in the house. They had an older brother, an older sister, or some other sibling that was actually a far better athlete—had more natural talent—than the elite athlete had at the time.

I was talking to Beth about this as we were coming here. I do not know if you know the story of the Manning family: Cooper, Peyton, and Eli. If you talk to them and ask them who is the best athlete in the family, everybody thinks they are going to say “Peyton” because he has accomplished so much. But they will tell you “No, Cooper is the best athlete.” But he blew out his knee, I believe, and did not get to make a name for himself like Peyton and Eli did. That is true in other circumstances.

Another part of this survey found that not only did the families think that these elite athletes were not the best in their families, but their coaches did too. They thought they were kind of second rate. But something at some point kicked in for these elite athletes and they changed. They took whatever

natural talent they had, even if it was not the best around, and they turned it into something golden. Something about their mental ability made their physical abilities ratchet up into another gear and made them better.

What it is, is that the elite athlete has a mentality that drives him to succeed, no matter what the odds, no matter what the costs, no matter what difficulties they will face on the road ahead of them to their goal, to their dream. They will set their will. They will take whatever it takes. They will do whatever regimen it takes. They will get up at some ungodly hour. They will practice for hours and hours before school, go to school, come home, and practice again for hours. Because they want something more than anybody else and they are going to get it.

We will consider one of these traits today; one that is particularly necessary both for athletes who perform at the highest levels, and also for those of us who wish to attain the greatest goal of all—the Kingdom of God. Because, believe it or not, even though God said that there are people out there who are more noble than you—who are wiser than you, who are stronger than you, who have more talent than you, who could do things better than you, who could become shipshape in no time when you will take a whole lifetime to reach that point—He has chosen you because He sees the elite Christian athlete, if you will, that you could become. He wants you to develop the mentality to take what you have been given and succeed and reach the goal to capture the dream that is before you.

This trait that we are going to be talking about today is also a necessary trait in overcoming resistance. This, by the way, is Part Three of my ‘Resistance’ series, which was not supposed to be a series but has become one. But this trait is actually a primary trait in pushing through the barriers that try to keep us from succeeding and doing what God wants us to do.

What we are going to talk about today is *persistence*.

But, first, before we go any further into the Bible on this, we need to define what persistence is so we get a firm grasp and we all start off from the same place. This is from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and that very august dictionary defines persistence as “firm or obstinate continuance in a course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition.” That is exactly what we saw there with Derek Redmond. Even though he had great opposition and great difficulty in even walking, he pushed through and so he firmly and even obstinately continued his course of action, which was to finish the race.

Now ‘persistence’ derives from a Latin word ‘persisteri’ and that is made up of a prefix and a root. The prefix is ‘per.’ If you have studied prefixes and such in school, you might remember that prefix generally means ‘through.’ But, as it came to be used more, the definition of words that it was a part of became evolved. It came to mean ‘completely’ or ‘thoroughly.’ A better definition of the word is ‘steadfastly.’ So ‘through,’ ‘completely,’ ‘thoroughly,’ or ‘steadfastly.’

The root of this word is ‘steri’ and it comes from earlier root that means ‘to stand.’ There are a lot of ‘sist’ words (consist, assist, exist, resist), and they mean ‘to stand’ or ‘to stay,’ which is also good. Literally then, if we were to use this word, just in its literal meanings from the prefix and the root, it means ‘to remain standing through anything and everything.’ You just remain standing through it all, whatever it is. You remain standing through. You remain standing completely. You remain standing steadfastly. You remain. You just stay there. You are the only one left (as a matter of fact, that is a good illustration to keep in your head).

Everybody has seen cowboy movies. Usually in every good cowboy movie, there is a saloon. It is just a part of the landscape of a cowboy movie. And in a lot of cowboy movies, you are going to have a fight in the saloon because there is a great big plate glass window and that can go smithereens as someone gets tossed out. There is a big mirror against the bar. Things get thrown at it. It makes for great movie or television.

Think about two dozen guys in a saloon. They have been drinking, they are playing poker, and suddenly someone else draws a gun. Pretty soon there is a full-out brawl happening in this saloon, guys punching each other, throwing them down the bar, beers going here and there, whiskies going there, the piano player is still going, and guys are flying around, guys getting knocked out, hats are flying. You have all seen it where it happens. And, of course, there is the guy that gets thrown out the plate glass window and everybody gets all into it. Whether they were sitting peacefully eating their dinner or whatever on the side, everybody gets into the brawl.

After it is all over—after all the glass has finally reached the floor—there is silence and there is one guy left standing. He is the persistent one. He is the one who has remained standing throughout all the difficulty of the brawl. He has proven himself persistent.

That will probably stick in your mind. I hope it does because that is kind of what the word means. It means through all the commotion, all the opposition, and everything that is going on around you—bottles flying, even bullets flying—even though all this is happening, you still remain standing. You are holding your ground.

The word is not used very often in the Bible. In fact, I think I saw that it is only used four times in the *New King James Bible*. ‘Persist,’ ‘persisted,’ ‘persistence’ (or ‘persistent’) are used in the Old Testament and only once in the New Testament. So the Bible tends to use synonyms instead of ‘persistent.’ You will see these often in the Bible. You just probably did not think of them in terms of persistence.

Words like ‘steadfast’ (I mentioned before that ‘per’ means ‘steadfastly’).

Another word is ‘enduring’.

‘Hupomeno’ (the word that means ‘endurance’ or ‘patient endurance’ in the Scripture) can also mean ‘persistence’ because a person who endures is persistent in doing certain things that allow him to endure.

‘Unmovable’ is another word. You are like a rock. You are not going to get moved by anything that comes your way.

Another word is ‘diligent’ or ‘diligence’ often used in the Bible—that you are being diligent. And when you are diligent, you are being persistent in certain things that are going to help you move forward toward the Kingdom of God. There is also its synonym ‘persevering’ or ‘perseverance.’

Another one that I also like is ‘constant.’

I should have added there is also a few usages of words like ‘continue’ or ‘continuance’ that also have to do with persistence.

Now that I gave you that rip-roaring illustration of the cowboy brawl in the saloon, I do not want you to get fixated on the idea of standing. Because even though the word literally means ‘to stand steadfastly’ or ‘to remain steadfast,’ that is not good enough because that is not the way the Bible treats the concept of persistence. As a matter of fact, even elite athletes will tell you that persistence has nothing to do with standing still. It always has to do with moving forward. So maybe a better way to stick it in your head would be ‘staying the course.’

Here you are on a ship or on a boat and you have got all these things happening around you. You have got pirates on the left of you and you have got privateers on the right. You have got all these things, and you are the captain of the ship. You are going to stay the course. You are going to keep on going toward your destination. No matter what waves come up, what hurricanes come up, you are going to stay the course. You are going to keep on going and you are going to move forward no matter what happens.

Now the reason why we have to think this way instead of ‘standing’ is because standing is static. Standing shows no energy. You are just staying in one place. But we need to stay the course and staying the course implies moving forward. So we want forward progress. We want to keep on trudging toward our goal (still standing, of course). But we are walking, we are not standing. Persistence contains the idea of continuing on, of moving forward toward a goal, of diligently putting one foot in front of the other until the destination is reached.

Another way, to put it in a martial sense, is as if you are in a line of warriors that are moving forward toward the enemy. Then, in this case, you move forward one inch of ground at a time until victory is won. It is kind of the idea that is there in Ephesians 6 where he tells us to stand. You certainly do not want to lose any ground to the enemy but you want to take the armor of God and move forward. So it is not necessarily holding one’s position.

I will grant that sometimes persistence allows you to hold your position, and that is fine. But the main idea of persistence is boldly forging ahead in the face of the slings and arrows against you, with opposition springing up at every side; or even moving forward despite the internal resistance that plagues us all—the fears, the uncertainty, the anxieties, what have you that come from inside because our human nature is warring against us. Because it keeps telling us “You can’t do it, you’re not good enough, you don’t have the strength, you’re wasting your time,” and on and on it goes, using whatever it can to keep you from doing what is good and right and noble.

So that is the big thing I want you to understand here about persistence. That, yes, it does talk about remaining standing, but you remain upright moving forward. That is the idea of staying the course, moving forward, not being deviated in one way or another from your goal. You just keep forging on.

Please turn with me to Luke 11. This is the one place in the New Testament where the word ‘persistence’ is used. As I mentioned before, in the Old Testament, ‘persistence’ appears three times in the NKJV translation. It is used twice as ‘persisted’ and once as ‘persistent.’ What is interesting there in the Old Testament is that all three usages of ‘persistent’ are negative. God uses them in describing the persistent sin of a king or the persistent unfaithfulness of Israel. So you can use persistence for the wrong things. And many people do. We have to understand that just because one is persistent does not mean that you are always doing it for the right reasons or for the right goals. You have to make sure that the goal is what you want it to be, that it is actually something that is good and noble.

I want to start in verse 5. Jesus does not use it negatively here. It may seem at first glance that He does use it negatively, but here it is actually positive.

**Luke 11:5-8** And He said to them [these are His disciples; they had come to Him asking Him to teach them how to pray, so He had done what we call The Lord's Prayer; and then He continues on in His thought], "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me ["Go away! I'm sleeping"]; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? I say to you [Jesus says], though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs."

It is kind of difficult to see from the way it is worded here, what He is basically talking about, and commentators argue about this quite a bit: Whose persistence are we talking about here? But from my point of view, in looking at it, I believe He means the persistence of the man who had his friend arrive, and he needed three loaves, and so he went to his neighbor and asks. We are talking about the requester here, not the answerer (the one who is in bed with his children). We are talking about the man outside pounding on the door, and it is his persistence that gets the door open. Why do I feel this is the way it is? It is because of the next verse.

**Luke 11:9-10** "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."

Jesus is talking about our persistence in doing these things. In the Greek, 'asking' is more like 'keep asking.' Keep seeking. Keep knocking. So He is talking about the persistence of the person who is requesting. What He shows here is that by persistence one can overcome another person's reluctance to help do a good deed. He was trying to feed his friend who had come to him at an odd hour.

Now the word here that is used is very fascinating, at least to me. These Greek words can hold a lot of meaning and I think this is why, when we look at this word for a minute, scholars scratch their heads over who He meant here because of the way it is translated, or what the word actually means. The word is an 'anaideian.' It is Strong's #335 in the New Testament and it literally means (this is why it is fascinating) 'without modesty.' It means 'shameless' or 'impudent.'

That does not sound like something positive, does it? That some person would go and impudently knock on another person's door at midnight for three loaves of bread. He has no shame. He does not care that it is midnight and you have gone to bed. He is asking for some bread.

But Jesus uses the term somewhat differently, much more positively than 'shamelessly' or 'without modesty.' He means something more like 'audacity.' That the man pounded on his neighbor's door with audacity, or even with (if you want to put it in nicer terms) earnest perseverance. He went up to the door and he was earnestly pounding on that door and he was not going to stop until the guy came out, opened it up, and gave him three loaves of bread. Or, if you want another definition for it, 'bold persistence.' That is pretty much how it was.

If you are thinking about other situations in which something like this happened in Jesus' life, you might be thinking of the Parable of the Importunate Widow in Luke 18:1-8. She did the exact same

thing except she was not knocking on somebody's door for a loaf of bread. She was telling the judge, "Hey, someone is doing something wrong to me and I want you to avenge me. I want you to throw him in jail for what he's doing." Of course, remember, that was the judge who feared neither God nor man. And he said, "Man, this lady is bothering me. I can't take it anymore. I'm going to go ahead and rule for her, so I'll get her out of my hair." And so he does. And if you will look in the New King James, if you have one, it gives you the titles of the paragraphs. As you go through, they renamed this parable the 'Parable of the Persistent Widow.'

That was the kind of persistence that Jesus was talking about by using this word 'anaideian.' He was talking about someone who, no matter what (no matter what conventions he might be breaking, no matter what the time, no matter what the situation), he is going to go out and do what he needs to do to accomplish something good. That he is going to put his whole heart into it and boldly persist in whatever action is necessary to make sure that he does good for his friend that came in from out of town.

That is kind of the point that Jesus is leading up to in Luke chapter 11. Of course it goes into verses 9 and 10. We should keep asking. We should keep knocking, keep seeking, not to be a pest. He was not talking about actually being someone who got on people's nerves. That is just the illustration that He used of someone who would go to that extreme. But He is talking about someone going to God with persistence, with boldness, so that he could receive the help he needed to overcome. Because notice how it finishes there.

**Luke 11:13** [He says:] "If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

He is talking about being persistent in going to God for the things that we *need*. Not that God is going to begrudge us anything that we need. But He wants to see us being diligent and persistent in asking for those sorts of things so He can really see how much we want them, so He can see that we are dedicated to growing in character and overcoming and producing those fruits that He wants to see. So this is a mental state that turns into actions in which you do not stop until you reach the goal, until you get what you want (to put it in carnal terms).

But we are assuming here that what you want is right and godly, and nothing will stop you. Like I said, you can take the same attitude of persistence and use it toward something that is wrong. Let us say you want to be the king of the world. Then you would just try to do anything and everything to get what you want, which would entail lying, killing, stealing, whatever. That would not be a good persistence to have.

So, in terms of it being used as a character trait for producing good things toward the Kingdom of God, the goal always has to be right and proper—a godly goal. Otherwise persistence ends up being annoying, sinful, and godless where you just run over people to get what you want. The goal is of ultimate importance here.

So we need to stay the course. We need to keep moving relentlessly forward toward the Kingdom of God, undaunted, despite the opposition, until we reach it. That is what Jesus is talking about here. That is what this word 'anaideian' is trying to tell us. That we have to be "without modesty," we have

to be shameless, we have to be impudent as it were. We have to be *audacious* in pursuing the goal of the Kingdom of God. Very diligent and persistent. I want to give you two illustrations of people in Scripture that were very persistent that it became a part of their character.

Let us go first of all to an Old Testament example in Genesis 26. If you know your chapters, you know who I am speaking about—Isaac. Compared to Abraham, very little is said about Isaac. Isaac just gets a couple of chapters really. He gets thrown in with Abraham in a few chapters and he gets thrown in with Jacob and Esau in a few other chapters. But this chapter is about him and it really shows you the depth of his character.

One of the traits that we see that comes out, in the story of Isaac, is plainly persistence. What we will find here is that Isaac does not let anything stop him. So let us read. I want to start in verse 12. This is after Isaac had gone to Gerar. He had been with Abimelech in Gerar. There was trouble with his wife and so Isaac had a little bit of a problem there.

**Genesis 26:12** Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. . .

Does that ring any bells with you? Remember Jesus' parable about sowing and reaping? Well, hundredfold was the top one and Isaac reaped a hundredfold.

**Genesis 26:12** . . . and the Lord blessed him.

So it is very clear here that Isaac was a good man, a righteous man. He was trying to do things God's way and he was also a very successful man. He reaped a hundredfold and the blessing here is said to have come from God.

**Genesis 26:13-16** The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous; for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him [this is where things start to go downhill]. Now the Philistines had stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and they had filled them with earth. And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."

This is how much God had blessed him. It says he had lots of servants. Of course, if he had great herds and great flocks, he needed a lot of people to help him. So he had a huge entourage as it were, all these people depending on him, and he got so mighty, so powerful, so rich and prosperous that it made the king of Gerar envious and fearful that Isaac was going to become the ruler of the land. He would be the one that people would turn to. He would take over. So he peremptorily orders him "Out of here! Leave Gerar. Go further away."

**Genesis 26:17** Then Isaac departed from there [Any arguments? No arguments. Isaac just simply picked up and left.] and pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there.

So Isaac moved himself away. I do not know exactly how far away, but he moved himself away from the city and just got out of Abimelech's environment there. He was not cheek by jowl with him, he was a little further away.



**Genesis 26:18** And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the names which his father had called them.

Isaac had to dig several wells out there because he had large flocks, large herds, large amount of servants. He had a lot of thirsty mouths to fill with water, and he needed a well. We need to understand this is southwestern Canaan. This is down toward the Negev. They might even be in the Negev and it is very dry. It is semi-arid or absolutely arid, which means there was no water coming out of the sky and there was no water coming through the wadis. It was dry. He needed to dig a well. Groundwater was the only option. So he dug wells to feed this horde he had with him.

**Genesis 26:19** Also Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there.

Interesting words: Running water. It was not just a seep well, it was a spring well. This was running out. God was blessing him, you might say.

**Genesis 26:20-21** But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek [which means 'quarrel'], because they quarreled with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also. So he called its name Sitnah [which means 'enmity'].

There was a lot of strife going on.

**Genesis 26:22** And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, "For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

'Rehoboth' means 'spacious' or 'roomy.' And so we have the three wells here—Esek, Sitnah, Rehoboth. Two of them were quarreled over and finally get to Rehoboth, and everything is good—they have room, they have peace, they have water. And what does Isaac do?

**Genesis 26:23** Then he went up from there to Beersheba.

He left. I do not know why he left. Nobody knows why he left. Perhaps a good reason would be that there, in the valley of Gerar, he could not trade very well. He had lots of flocks and herds. That was money on the hoofs as it were. That was his stock in trade. He needed to go to a place where he could sell what he had and buy what he needed. So he went to Beersheba, which was on the caravan route. It makes sense to me. But he gave up a good well. Rehoboth was a good well and they had plenty of space when he left.

Notice that when he goes to Beersheba, the very next thing that happens:

**Genesis 26:24-25** And the Lord appeared to him the same night [the same night as he arrived in Beersheba] and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake." So he built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well.

He set them to work digging a well. How many wells is this now? He had a lot of people, a lot of livestock, and they needed the water.

**Genesis 26:26-27** [After all this] Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath, one of his friends, and Phicol the commander of his army. And Isaac said to them, “Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?”

“I had it good there in Gerar, things were going nice. I was rich. I still am. I had this land that I could use, and I was cultivating it and making a hundredfold of this and that and the other thing, and my flocks and my herds were all prospering, and you had to send me away. It could have been a good relationship. Why are you coming to me now?”

**Genesis 26:28** But they said, “We have certainly seen that the Lord is with you.”

We have noticed how much you have been prospering and how you have water, and everything that happens around you just happens to go swimmingly (A little pun there!).

**Genesis 26:28-29** So we said, ‘Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord.’”

They saw that he was doing good and that God definitely was with him.

**Genesis 26:30** So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank.

He threw a big party for them and welcomed them back with open arms after he had dressed them down a little bit earlier.

**Genesis 26:31-33** Then they arose early in the morning and swore an oath with one another; and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace. It came to pass the same day that Isaac’s servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, “We have found water.” So he called it Shebah. Therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

‘Sheba’ means ‘oath,’ Beersheba means ‘well,’ so this is ‘the Well of the Oath.’

Very interesting story here. Isaac clearly was persistent in digging wells. But we need to notice the progression of events here so we can get kind of an understanding of what is going on here. So I am just going to reiterate as quickly as I can.

Isaac gets rich and powerful. So, in fear and envy, Abimelech says “Get out!” So Isaac leaves from Gerar. He goes out and digs a well which has running water. This is the first thing. He has opposition, he leaves; he digs a well, and then the next thing is there is more opposition. The herdsmen of Gerar quarrel about it. They contest it. So Isaac leaves again. He moves a little further away and digs another well. And then that one is quarreled over, so he has to move again. So he digs another one, which they do not contest this time.

But, despite the peace and the space to live there, he soon moves to Beersheba and there God appears to him. He tells him not to fear and promises him great blessings. Almost immediately, very soon, Abimelech comes to him and makes a peace treaty by oath with him. That very day his diggers find water, the Great Well of Beersheba that lasts for centuries and centuries, able to provide water for a whole city.

We have action and opposition three times (maybe even four, depending on how you count it). There are the three wells, but he did have opposition there in Gerar when he was wealthy, so you might throw that in there. There is something that goes on and then there is opposition to his action. And then God appears to him, gives him strength, gives him comfort; and then immediately he is rewarded, and he digs another well and it is full of running water.

It is just an amazing thing these wells and water are so tightly associated with Isaac. I tried to bring this out a little bit as we went through here. But although Isaac faces all of these problems—opposition from the Philistines and Abimelech; opposition from the herdsmen of Gerar; opposition from others that are there, probably other herdsmen of Gerar, all of this is taking place around him; all this confrontation, quarreling, who knows there might have been fighting (one place was called ‘enmity’; we do not know if they actually got to fisticuffs or not)—Isaac seems so calm through this whole thing except when he dresses down Abimelech at the end.

But in all these things—all these wells that are being dug and everything and having to leave—he never lashes out. He never uses his awesome power of his wealth to get his own way. That is what Abimelech was afraid of. That Isaac would be so powerful that he would just defeat them and take over. But he does not. He simply says something to the effect of “Okay, if you’re going to be so rude and rash about these silly little wells, I’ll go somewhere else.” And he goes. He uproots dozens or hundreds of people and maybe the thousands of sheep, goats, cows, bulls, and what-not that he has got on the hoof, and he goes somewhere else. He never argues. He just leaves. He picks up and he leaves.

And what does he do? He starts the process over again. He digs a well and gets the water that he needs to give his thirsty people and animals. So he has to move three times because of other people’s envy, fear, and greed. But he seems never to have complained. Picked up and left. Found another place to dig a well.

We have to understand that, as I mentioned before, in that area, being waterless was a life-and-death thing. There was a life-and-death situation. You had to have water and you had to have it quick. A person dies in just a few days without water. What about all those sheep? His wealth would go away in a few days without water for those flocks and herds.

But Isaac took it, as far as the Bible is concerned, without any anger, resentment, bitterness, or lashing out. He just picked up and left. He bore it with patience. He kept moving on. Is that not what persistence is, where you keep moving on—despite the opposition, despite the slings and arrows thrown at you; despite anything negative that comes in your path? It is interesting that not only did he keep moving on, he kept digging wells of water, one of which we know for certain was a well with running water. We are seeing Isaac’s persistence. We are seeing Isaac’s attitude that was not angry, not lashing out.

God revealed Himself to him personally. It says He *appeared* to him. And He comforted him, He strengthened him, and He blessed him for this attitude that he had. And, as a reward, He gave him peace with his enemies and an inexhaustible supply of water in Beersheba.

We should really think about that in terms of its spiritual connotations, such as in John 7:38 where Jesus says He will give rivers of living water. And what happened there in John 4 in Jacob's well (that was not Isaac's well; it was Jacob's well)? He promised the woman there at the well. Wells are springs of living water.

What we are seeing here are clues of Isaac's character. That he is someone to emulate in terms of opposition and persistence. He did not get all upset when things went wrong for him. He moved away and dug another well. I think maybe the most reassuring thing in all of this is what God said to him after He saw what was happening. He saw what Isaac's reaction to all this was—how he had persevered and persisted in his attitude. He said: "Do not fear. I am with you." It seems like Isaac could have been doing it all by himself—digging the wells, moving away. It could have been seen like it was all Isaac. But it was not. It was because God was with him.

So we have to think of that in terms of when we face opposition, when we face the bumpy part of the road, when somebody comes up against us. What does Jesus say on the Sermon on the Mount? He says, "If someone slaps you on the right cheek, give him your left also." Do not get upset. Do what needs to be done and move on. You do not need to fight back. Trust in Him. He will give you the victory ultimately.

Of course, it took Isaac three or four wells to finally get the victory but that is how it works. Just one time is not enough. That might just be a coincidence that you did the right thing. Usually you get a test over and over and over again, and you have to be persistent in the way you handle it—in a good way—because you know the Kingdom of God is down the road. You know that God is trying to produce the character in you that is going to be pleasing to Him. So you have to keep on keeping on. You have to keep moving forward, doing what is right, persisting in godliness, and let Him take care of it. And if you have got to move on, you would move on. But you dig another well.

The digging of the well, I think (if I just throw in my little two cents here about all this), is that the well was a symbol, if you will, of a connection with God. Isaac never allowed that connection with God to falter. Even though he was in desperate straits at times, he was always trying to dig back to God as it were—get God's help, get the resources that he needed from God.

Of course, water is a symbol of God's Holy Spirit. So he was strengthened by those things. He knew what he needed to do.

Now a New Testament example, if you will. Let us go to Mark 14. Of course, if we are in Mark, we must be talking about Jesus who is the best example of persistence of all time. But what is interesting is that Isaac is a type of Jesus Christ. Just as Abraham is a type of the Father, Isaac is a type of the Son. So here we have Jesus showing Isaac-like character, but in a much more dire situation. This is His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, and you will see that he does something like Isaac three times.

**Mark 14:32-42** Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here while I pray." And He took Peter, James, and John with Him,

and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch.” He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.” Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Again He went away and prayed, and spoke the same words. And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. Then He came the third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.”

Let us go now to Luke 22 just to catch something here that is not in Mark’s account.

**Luke 22:41-44** And He was withdrawn from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, “Father, if it is Your will, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

I do not know why Mark did not add that in there. That was certainly a detail that I think I, as a writer, would have included in there. But Mark did not add that in there which is, to me, very surprising.

But here we have three times that Jesus has to come back to the disciples and say “Why are you sleeping? Can’t you pray with me one hour?” But He, also three times, went and prayed the same prayer.

Just like Isaac dug three wells, Jesus prayed three very heartrending prayers which, at one point, He began to sweat blood because He was in such agony and turmoil of spirit. But He persisted with God and God sent an angel to comfort Him. It is funny, you can see, even after that, that is when He sweat the blood—even after He got the comfort—because perhaps sending the angel was an affirmation to Him that, yes, He had to go through with this. Because the angel did not stop anything, He just came there and comforted Him. He still had to go through it.

But He persisted in prayer. And He asked certainly that God would take the cup from Him, that He would not have to have Him go through with the horrendous crucifixion that He knew was coming the next day. But He said, “Not My will, but Your will be done.” He was persistent. He was being importunate. He was asking, seeking, and knocking.

He was doing what He had told His disciples to do: To be persistent in prayer. But this was something that could not happen any other way. The life of the Son of God had to be given for the sins of the world. But God gave Him strength. Not only did He give Him strength, but He made Him understand that if He went through with this, that He would make peace through the cross. Is that not another thing that happened with Isaac? God gave Isaac peace with his enemies.

And, of course, that peace is not going to come to full fruition until the Millennium and later on the Great White Throne Judgment. But He was given peace. He made it possible through His own

sacrifice which He was determined to do—because it was a great part of His Father’s plan, part of the goal, part of the purpose, of what He was there to do.

And, like Isaac, Jesus was not only given great peace, He was given great reward because now He is King of kings and Lord of lords, and all power and authority has been given to Him. He took what Isaac went through and ratcheted it by infinity and showed us what we need to be willing to persist in in order to reach the same place He has reached already. Not easy. Not easy at all. But we see that it can be done.

What we learn here is that persistence, in the way of God, is hard. It is not easy. We can even go so far as to say persistence in the way of God is *never* easy. To do what is right, to do what God wants us to do in the face of opposition in this world, which we have not come in contact with in any great way yet although we have, maybe in personal situations, been opposed by various ones out of the world. Right now, more often than not, it is the opposition from our own flesh that gives us the problem. That will always be the case.

But to do this, to do what is right, to do what God wants us to do, takes *grit*. It takes great *boldness*. It takes *sacrifice*, a lot of sacrifice, to be willing to give up things that we cherish, things that we really would rather hold on to. It takes *determination*. And, as we see here in the life of Jesus Christ, it requires *pain*. A lot of times it is mental pain, emotional pain. Sometimes it is physical pain.

Think of those elite athletes. Do you think they just waltz through all their practice hours? No, they have to give up hours and hours and years of their lives to fulfill their dreams. They have to give up friends. Think of the gymnasts who have to work at their skills when they are little kids. Most of these Olympians are teenagers or in their early twenties. They do not have much social life when they are in training.

They have to eat differently. They have to be in bed early. They have to watch everything that they do because if they do not, they are not going to reach their goals. And I have not even talked about the injuries that they have to overcome, the pulled muscles, the soreness that they have to endure all the time. They have to push their bodies to the limit to be able to do these things. That is not easy to do.

Most of us, if we were in the pool with Michael Phelps, would not even start. Because we know how terribly we would lose. But there are people out there who welcome the challenge of beating Michael Phelps in the pool. Ryan Lochte tries. Compared to all the rest of us, he is great. The second-most medaled man in Olympic history from America, and we do not think he is very good because Michael Phelps beats him soundly most of the time. But there are people out there that are willing to take up the challenge to try to beat him, and they will beat their bodies to a pulp in order to reach that goal.

I am just trying to give you an idea of what persistence may require of you if you want the goal of the Kingdom of God. So it is here in this arena, if you will, where the majority of Christian suffering takes place in trying to be persistent in doing what is right. Because when we step forward in faith to do what God wills, we ought to know that it is going to *hurt*. It is going to hurt one way or another. But if we want to reach the high calling of God, to enter the Kingdom of God, we will have to be persistent—we will have to take whatever licks come—and follow Christ’s lead wherever it takes, whatever the opposition.

If you will, please go Hebrews chapter 3.

**Hebrews 3:14-15** For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

Those people who rebelled were not willing to continue steadfastly forward and they paid the price.

In I Corinthians 15 the apostle Paul has, throughout the whole chapter, given us a vision of what is coming—our goal: The great Kingdom of God and our resurrection into it. He says:

**I Corinthians 15:58** Therefore [this is his concluding statement about the resurrection from the dead and your being in the Kingdom of God:], my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding [that is moving forward and reaping the fruit of that] in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

It will be rewarded just as Isaac’s work was rewarded, and like Christ’s work was rewarded.

So persistence is a unique mental strength that is essential to combat the fierce power of the repeated rejections and numerous other obstacles—the *resistance*—that sit and wait for us as we go along the way toward the Kingdom. How can we make it a part of our character?

Most people have persistence. I have mentioned this before. Most people have some kind of persistence. But they do not use it enough or they fail to develop it. But, most often, the problem is that they are employing persistence to the wrong ends. They do not have the right goal. They do not love the goal enough. They do not want the goal enough.

But we can make persistence a part of our character if we establish a few foundational conditions. And these are steps that can be followed by everybody. I have got four quick steps here that we can begin to put into practice.

1. Have a clearly defined goal. Not just any goal, one that you desire with all your heart (of course, I am talking about the Kingdom of God). What is the first and great commandment? You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your might, with all your soul. If you truly love God, you are going to truly want to be in His Kingdom. The more you want something, the more determined you will be to attain it. So we have to do like Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:33: Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these other things will be added to you. That is the goal.
2. Have a clearly established plan that you can begin working on immediately. The plan is right here: Follow God’s Word. But for us this would be the work of overcoming and growing, producing the fruit that will bring God glory because that is what He is looking for. Remember John 15:1-8. It is the fruit He wants to see, and He is going to prune us to make sure that we produce it. So when you are early and new in the church, you start with things that are fairly simple, like having a steady schedule of prayer and study so you can get habitually into the way of God and you start beginning to overcome certain easier things to overcome (because you are certainly not going to face the hard things right away; if you do, you are probably

going to fail). But have a steady plan that you are applying so that you can get to those harder things like gossip and being critical and judgmental about people. Those things *can* be overcome. But we need to have a plan. We need to start thinking of things in process.

3. This is another thing you can do between your ears. Make an irrevocable decision to reject any and all negative suggestions. By that I mean anything that might come up that tells you “You’re not going to make it,” “You can’t do it,” “The Kingdom of God is beyond you,” “You’re a bad person,” and on and on. You know that you have been cleaned by the blood of Christ and He is with you. You can be confident and positive that God will not let anyone snatch you out of His hand. So we must be positive, confident, sure, and faithful. Do not give any conscious attention to conditions or circumstances that appear to indicate the goal cannot be reached. Kick them aside because that is the Devil talking. That is the Devil saying “You can’t make it. You’re not good enough.” In Philippians 4:8, Paul tells us to think about what is noble and just and pure and lovely and good and virtuous and praiseworthy. Anything else—all these negative things that get thrown at you—is the work of the Devil and the baggage of sin. So keep your eyes high and on the Kingdom of God.
4. This is an important one for all of us that we all have to do together. Take encouragement, support, and assistance from those who are on the same path. We should be doing this for each other: Giving each other the hope, the positive criticism, the help, and certainly the hugs and the shoulders and whatever it takes to help somebody who is going through a hard stretch. Hebrews 10 :25 commands us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Why? So that we can exhort one another. It goes on and says, “especially as the Day approaches.” As things get worse, we are going to need each other for whatever little bit of encouragement and help that we can give. Because we are all on the same road and we all want to get there.

Let us finish in Romans chapter 2. Paul writes here. I am breaking into the middle of a sentence. He says:

**Romans 2:6-7** [God] will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality.

That is us. That is the job that we have been given. And what does he say here? It is the *persistent* ones who will reach it. Eternal life will come to those among the called who by patient continuance—by persistence in doing good—continue to seek for honor, and glory, and immortality. It is the persistent Christian who will be among the firstfruits of God. Those people will let nothing get between them and the awesome goal of the Kingdom of God.

It is because they love God and greatly desire the eternal life that He offers that makes them face trial, opposition, suffering, and even death, to lay hold of the crown of righteousness that Paul spoke about in II Timothy.

So I ask you: How *persistent* are you willing to be in the Kingdom of God?