

Persistence

Repeating History

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It has been said that we learn one thing from history, and that is that we do not learn from history. It seems that mankind is destined to make the same mistakes every generation; to actually fight the same wars over and over.

Truly, it is something that is to marvel at.

Today, I would like us to learn from history, but not so much as an historical event, but an historical **attitude** that was present in this country about 150 years ago. It is the attitude of *persistence*.

I would like to take a few minutes to read an excerpt from the diary of a young woman who was on the Oregon Trail. I ask that each of you women put yourself in her place as you listen to this. And each of you men can put yourself in the place of Cornelius, her husband; and you children can plug yourself into wherever you fit as children, because there were seven children. They had a very difficult time. This excerpt is an account of the last effort they had to make before they got into their “promised land.”

This later portion of their story from their diary goes like this:

Elizabeth Smith kept a diary of her trip to Oregon in 1844 with her husband, Cornelius, and their seven children. The wagon train reached the Cascade Range in October. And, when they arrived at The Dalles, the eastern entrance to the Columbia Gorge, the train broke apart, and it was each man for himself.

Cattle had to be driven down the north bank to a point above the rapids, or cascades, where they could be ferried across to the south bank. Meanwhile, women, children, goods, and dismantled wagons rafted down the treacherous gorge. Stores of wind and rain were roaring through the gorge. And already, the mountain tops on each side of the canyon were white with snow.

“It is raining, and cold,” Elizabeth writes calmly in her diary. “The men are making rafts and women are cooking and washing, and the children crying. The Indians are trading potatoes for shirts. The raft was finally finished, made of 40-foot pine logs lashed together.”

Three adults joined the Smiths: gaunt, hollow-eyed Adam Polk, and his wife; and an easy-going giant named Russell Welch. Polk had a suggestion: “It’ll take three men to handle the rafts, so how’s this: You and me, and your oldest boy take the raft through, while Welch and your two younger boys drive the cows along the north bank. It isn’t but 40 miles to the Cascades.”

Smith said, “Good! I agree.” On Nov 2, the raft shoved off, with all the household goods and dismantled wagons lashed to it. But it was so unwieldy that it required combined efforts of all to fend it away from the rocks. They only made a few miles the first day. “It is impossible to sleep on the raft,” she wrote. “We clamber up among the rocks and build a fire to warm ourselves. All night long the wind blows and the waves roll beneath.” The wind never stopped howling through the gorge, and the rains changed to sleet. There was no turning back. Once in the gorge, they had to battle on.

Each day they ventured out into the tossing current, and inched downstream a few miles, and then tied things up again. Somewhere above the cliffs in the whitened timber, Welch and the two small boys were fighting through the mounting drifts. Provisions on the raft ran out the seventh day. Adam Polk stayed in bed desperately ill, and Mrs. Polk was gripped by the fear of the ultimate tragedy to any woman on the trail, “My man is going to die.” The younger children wailed with hunger in the night, and one morning, Smith decided to forge down the river on foot, maybe reaching some Indians or settlers. And Mrs. Polk grew hysterical, “Do not let him go! He will never come back! We will be left alone in this terrible canyon.”

There was only the oldest boy who managed the raft. The women could not help because of the four small children to watch each

moment they were on the raft. And Mrs. Polk stayed with her husband. He was delirious now. They made less than a mile that day. And the waves go over the raft, and icicles hang from the wagons to the water.

Adam Polk expired. He sat up all night while the waves were dashing below. They remained tied to the bank all that day, and the next. On this stretch of the river, they were facing the full sweep of the wind. On the second night, Cornelius' men staggered in, exhausted from the struggle over the rocks and ice-encrusted brush. He brought 50 pounds of beef. He said, "Welch and the boys are down below. They had a tough time in the snow. They killed a red heifer, and I grabbed this hock, and I lit out knowing you were starving. There is a feller running a ferry boat down there, fetching cattle across to the south bank. But we got to wait our turn hauling around the cascades [rapids]...it does not look good.

"We will make it," Elizabeth said. The next morning, they could make no headway against the wind. The following day, [it] all came..., and they drifted to the point where Welch and the boys were waiting their turn to ferry the cattle. Cornelius was still weak. "I ain't sure I can handle the pole. The current is swift, here. We're the last ones at the ferry. Maybe we could persuade the ferry man to take us and the wagons beyond the cascades. We already owe him for taking the cattle across, and then we will owe him even more." And Elizabeth said, "But think about how much land we will have when we get to the valley." The ferryman agreed. Now, at the cascades [rapids] they assembled their wagons, and prepared for the five mile haul around the rapids on a road that was all rocks and bottomless mud.

After three days, their turn came, and the road was almost impassable. Mrs. Polk had gone on with another family, and Smith and Welch had gone on with the cattle, eager to arrange for another boat below the cascades to take them to the valley.

"We started this morning," Elizabeth wrote, "around the portage. It rains and snows, and I carry my baby, and lead another through the

snow and in water up to my knees. In the late afternoon, the children collapsed.” She had the boys unhitch and abandon the wagon. The oxen carried the little children into camp below the cascades. Smith was alone there. He had built a windbreak, and the family crept in, wet and chilled. “Where’s the boats?” “They’re gone,” Smith said. There was not room for us. Welch has gone on with the cattle, and he will be back with the boats.” And when it turned colder, Elizabeth with her own body, protected her three youngest from the snow.

When daylight came, Smith was too weak to move, and Elizabeth sent the boys back for the wagon. She built a fire. The third day passed, and the fourth. They had lived on beef alone for 10 days. And now there was only bones.

She caught occasional glimpse of the valley, and on the 5th day, “I had froze or chilled my feet so bad that I cannot wear shoes. I must go barefooted. The whole care of everything falls upon my shoulder, and I am not adequate to the task.” Welch came on the 9th day, and they carried Smith down to the boats. And the others made it alone. A little woman [Elizabeth Smith], very thin, carrying her babe, and leading a two-year-old, and bigger boys bringing others, walked through the snow. “Look at that,” Welch whispered, “She’s barefooted!”

On November 27th, 1844, Elizabeth Smith and her husband, and her 7 children made it into the Willamette Valley.

Brethren, this excerpt from the diary of Elizabeth Smith shows only the final chapter in what was a tremendously arduous trip across the country to get to her “promised land”—their place of safety, if you will, and it does not show all the hardships that were required, but just the last set of hardships that they had to face.

It showed the family’s great desire to leave the world they were in. Through great trial and hardship, endurance and persistence, they would plod on until they reached their goal.

The world around us knows the value of endurance. Everybody cheers for it. People know that endurance and persistence are required to accomplish goals. Every business knows it; anybody knows it.

Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's, had something hanging in his office. It was entitled, Press On. I want to read that to you:

Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not do it. Nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not do it. Unrewarded genius is a proverb. An education alone will not do it. The world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination, alone, are omnipotent!

We can see what is being said here. This is what gets the job done. In fact, it sounds like something that apostle Paul said. Turn to Philippians 3.

Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

Paul is saying, "Christ has called me for a purpose, and I have laid hold of that, and I have got to be perfected."

Philippians 3:13-15 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind.

In Matthew 24:13 Jesus Christ said, "He who endures [or persists] to the end, shall be saved." In Luke 21:19, Jesus Christ says, "By your patience [you] possess [save] your souls." He means that by your steadfast enduring you are going to save your lives. This is what is required.

Now, to persist means to continue firmly in some course despite opposition or difficulty; to go on resolutely in spite of opposition, importunity, or

warning; to remain steadfast in a specified character. So, the synonyms are: to continue; to endure; to persevere; to remain; to lay hold of; to stay; to insist; to maintain.

Why is this so vital?

The world cheers for perseverance. At the Olympics, when you see the runner who has stumbled get up and continue on, the crowd is just thrilled to see the perseverance that the man exhibits. When the runner comes in but is not running, he is just walking, maybe even the last one in that race, but he finishes the race, the crowd goes wild cheering him on. They recognize what that took (before all). When a businessman starts up in the ghetto with nothing, and deals with crime and other problems, somehow (through perseverance) he brings his business out, and might someday become a nationwide chain of something, other business men notice and say, “Look at what that man did. He started with nothing, and yet he brought it to success by his perseverance.”

And again, the soldier that takes the hill when it is impossible, when all odds are against him, every soldier looks, and cheers, “Look at that! I wish I could be like that!”

I cannot help but think of David with Goliath, when he went down to Goliath, took him on, and won, Israel roaringly cheered for the victory! It was certainly because of David’s persistence to do what was right.

Of course, even we, as small as we are, with nothing great behind us, can bring praise from those around us by our quiet persistence in doing what is right in God’s way. They may not understand, but the consistent way that you live your life, they know that there is something special about you. And so, they can even thrill to that. The world understands that the one who persists is going to fight against all odds.

I had a friend named Spiros Redos who came from Greece. We were out fishing one day, and sitting on the beach, and he had this small oil company, and I said to him, “Spiros, how did you get started?” Well, my father gave me 85,000 dollars, and I came to this country, and got an office, and a small plant.” (You might not think that \$85,000 was much money but this was in

1951 when \$3,600 a year was a good beginning salary.) “I got my office, and I sat down in my chair, and I waited, and waited, and waited. Pretty soon there was no business and pretty soon there was no money, I had gone through the entire \$85,000, and I thought, ‘I have just got to do something.’” And so he started to persist, calling on customers, and made a schedule, doing everything he could to make his business a success. He was not a success until he started to persevere.

There is a lesson for us. What gave the Smith family of 1844 (above) the determination and persistence to make the trip? I mean, this was no small trip. They had seven children, the oldest ones were probably teenagers, they likely had a farm, and the boys were there to help, they were probably successful where they had been. And they had a pretty good idea of what the trip entailed. It was no small trip. They knew when they left Independence, Missouri (which is probably where they left) they would be facing 2,000 miles in a wagon, four to six months of difficult terrain with many sharp inclines, and a lot of dangerous water crossings. They knew that the Indians would run off their cattle if possible, and it was also possible that they would kill them, stealing all they had. They knew that the way would be hard, and they would not have a doctor, or any other kind of help close by, except themselves, and maybe those close by in the wagon train.

With all this facing them, what made them go forward? It was their vision! It was a vision of a better life. You see, without vision, you cannot persist.

Did you catch what Elizabeth's vision was? Did you catch it? It was really something! Remember above when her husband came back, and he said, “I am unable to handle the pole and the raft, the current is too swift; maybe we can persuade the ferry man to take our wagons down to the cascades. We already owe him for taking our cattle. Think how much more we will owe him?” And she said, “Yes, but think about how much land we will have!” You see? That was her vision. “We are going to have land for ourselves and our family.” That is what prodded them forth.

Now, I am sure that not everybody who came had the same vision. I mean, the gamblers came, and the blacksmiths, and so forth. But they all came because they had a vision of a better life. And this is why they left their home, came forward out west.

Turn to Proverbs 29. In the New King James Version, it says, “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint (v.18). But in the King James Version, it reads, “Where there is no vision, the people perish [are lost].”

Now, our President in a State of the Union Message might give a vision to the country. “These are the goals that America needs to pursue. . .” And he would urge the people to all join hands, and participate to accomplishing this or that goal.

In the business world, today, companies give their employees vision in the form of objectives to be accomplished in the coming year. And they have that sort of thing for a vision.

A family might envision buying their first house, and because of that they might make stringent spending rules, where they are going to save their money for this purchase.

Then, if the country, business, or the family keeps their eye on the goal, and works hard, they will probably accomplish what they envision!

You see, the word “vision” in that Proverb comes from the root, *chazach*, meaning, “To gaze at mentally; to perceive; to contemplate.” That is part of it. The other root is, *chazown*, which means, “to dream, or have a revelation.” So, we are indicating here that vision means much more than just an objective or a goal. This is much more than a company forecast. This refers to God’s revealed plan for all mankind. It is the understanding mixed with faith in God of where we are going and the purpose for our creation, and how God wants us to live. That is the vision God wants us to have. That is the vision that is going to give us the spiritual energy to persevere. If we do not have the vision, then we are going to cast off restraint. If we cast off restraint, we may not be in the Kingdom of God.

What is casting off restraint, then? It effectively means to go slowly back into the world. How is it manifested? It usually starts by compromising with the time you normally give to God. In other words, if you are going to set so much time aside in the morning to pray and study, if you compromise, pretty soon you find you do not have time for it, and the prayer and study starts to

go out, to diminish, to dwindle. And when we start to neglect overcoming, we start to feel that, “Well, God understands that I’m not strong; I’m just a human being, and Christ died for me, and I’m sorta weak, so I don’t really have to put my back into working at it.” You see? That is part of casting off restraint.

We start to make different friends; we start to go to the movies we should not see, and perhaps we are no longer careful with tithing, and maybe we do not attend services as often as we used to.

I had a close friend who was an elder, and other people that knew him said that he was just a fine man. I thought he was too. But he kept going up in the company. And the higher he went, the less time he had for the church. He used to come early and stay late. As he went higher in the company, his habits changed to coming later, and leaving earlier. He was losing the vision and was beginning to go backwards. He eventually left the church.

What is the result when we lose vision and cast off restraint? Turn to Deuteronomy 1.

Deuteronomy 1:20-30 “And I said to you, 'You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us. Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged.' "And every one of you came near to me and said, 'Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come.' "The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from each tribe. And they departed and went up into the mountains, and came to the Valley of Eshcol, and spied it out.

They also took some of the fruit of the land in their hands and brought it down to us; and they brought back word to us, saying, 'It is a good land which the LORD our God is giving us.' Nevertheless you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the LORD your God; and you complained in your tents, and said, 'Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver

us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, "The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there."

"Then I said to you, 'Do not be terrified, or afraid of them. The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes. . . .'

Here they had this tremendous record of what God had done—plagues, the parting of the Red Sea; the water out of the Rock; everything! But still, they faltered.

Deuteronomy 1:31-32 “. . . and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.' Yet, for all that, you did not believe the LORD your God.”

When you cast off restraint, when you quit focusing on the vision that God has, you quit believing God.

Deuteronomy 1:34-35 "And the LORD heard the sound of your words, and was angry, and took an oath, saying, 'Surely not one of these men of this evil generation shall see that good land of which I swore to give to your fathers.'

Deuteronomy 1:39 'Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, who today have no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it.'

You see? When you cast off restraints, and you lose the vision, you quit persisting; you will not fulfill the destiny that God had for you. That will be the result. That is why your vision and persistence are so important.

Now, the Smith family had a vision. And during the trip to Oregon, they were constantly sharing the vision with others. As incredibly difficult as the trip was, I suppose that every night when the wagons pulled over, and the

men went out to tie up the stock, and they were talking like, “You know, Charlie, when I get out there, I am gonna have so many acres, and I am going to plant this, and that; and I brought seed or saplings of my apple tree all the way here from our home...”; or whatever the thing was that they brought. And the women, as they sat around the fire, or while cooking and preparing their supper, I am sure they talked too, like, “I cannot wait to see our new life. It is going to be so exciting! I have heard the country is so beautiful and marvelous!”

You see? That is what we need to do too! And we do!

Malachi 3:16 Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name.

That is what we do. We call each other. That is why our phone bills are so high.

Malachi 3:17-18 "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "on the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him." Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

You see? It is most important that we encourage each other. This is part of what being on the trail is like—toward the future; toward the Promised Land.

It is vision that drives the engine of persistence. Without vision, there is no persistence. But what drives the vision? This is something we find in Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:1-3 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

In other words, we understand that God hung the earth, especially for us, He created it, He spun it. That was revealed! That is part of the vision!

Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

Abel understood what God wanted and he lived that way. He persisted even unto death.

Hebrews 11:5 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

They had vision! And they persisted in the calling they were given, just like we heard earlier today.

It is vitally important that we protect the vision that we have been given by God through Mr. Armstrong. And, if we allow ourselves to be in any attitude or in any circumstances, or in any environment that causes faith or vision to dim, that is a warning sign we should be changing because it is going to take us off the trail. It will just bring distress to us and our families.

I do not think I ever really asked this question until I got to thinking about persistence, "Does God have persistence?" He *does* have persistence. God the Father has persistence. In John 3:16 He persisted in His plan in what He predestined. He gave His only begotten Son. He was persistent in what He was doing.

Turn to Nehemiah 9.

Here, at about verse 5, they are praising God, standing up and blessing the Lord. They go on to say how marvelous God was to bring Israel out of Egypt through the trials and tribulations. How He saw the afflictions of our fathers in Egypt, and how many miracles that He performed, and how He revealed the Sabbath to them. Verse 16:

Nehemiah 9:16-19 "But they and our fathers acted proudly, hardened their necks, and did not heed Your commandments. They refused to obey, and they were not mindful of Your wonders that You did among them. But they hardened their necks, and in their rebellion they appointed a leader to return to their bondage. But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them. Even when they made a molded calf for themselves, and said, 'This is your god that brought you up out of Egypt,' and worked great provocations, yet in Your manifold mercies You did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by day, to lead them on the road; nor the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way they should go."

Nehemiah 9:26-28 "Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against You, cast Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets, who testified against them to turn them to Yourself; and they worked great provocations. Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies, who oppressed them; and in the time of their trouble, when they cried to You, You heard from heaven; and according to Your abundant mercies You gave them deliverers who saved them from the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest, they again did evil before You. Therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them; yet when they returned and cried out to You, You heard from heaven; and many times You delivered them according to Your mercies."

Nehemiah 9:30-31 "Yet for many years You had patience with them, and testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets. Yet they would not listen; therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; for You are God, gracious and merciful."

You see, God the Father and Jesus Christ have had mercy and persistence in the plan that They have set forth all these years.

Turn to Matthew 15 and we will see the persistence that Jesus Christ exhibited. As it says in the book of John, "If all the things that Jesus Christ ever did had been listed, there would not be enough books to fill them." Well, certainly, this is just one thing that shows just how dedicated He was to the calling that He had been given.

Matthew 15:29-32 Jesus departed from there, skirted the Sea of Galilee, and went up on the mountain and sat down there. Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them. So the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel. Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way."

Now, I do not know if Jesus Christ went three days without food as well, but I would not doubt it! He stayed with these people three days; He was committed to the calling that God had given Him. He did not back out. He stayed there.

Turn to John 12. This passage is about six days before the death of Jesus Christ. And He was thinking about it very greatly. He did not quit.

John 12:23-28 But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name."

Do you see why Jesus Christ did this? He had a vision also.

I have always known what God wanted of me. And I could not fulfill it many times. But I do not think I ever stopped in this context. I got to thinking about the Smith family, and their vision to come to the “Promised Land,” and I can relate to that, because I have a vision that wants to go to a “Promised Land,” a place of safety, a place in the future: the Kingdom of God. But I do not think I ever really stopped to think, “What was the vision that is driving God?” I always knew it was there, but I just never stopped to think about it.

Turn to Matthew 13 to see what that vision is. You will see the same principle. Persistence is a characteristic of God; vision is a characteristic of God.

Matthew 13:44-46 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

This is the vision that God has—this is part of it. You see? We are the vision that God has. The earth has been put here in this spot, and you are what God sees. In fact, the whole world is what God sees.

Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"

Matthew 23:39 "For I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'"

This is what Jesus Christ is looking forward to! When the world will accept Him, when the world will understand; this is what the whole purpose of God is about.

Something else that Christ wants to do, turn to Ezekiel 36—this is part of God's vision:

Ezekiel 36:25-28 “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.”

This is another part of the vision God the Father and Jesus Christ have.

I Thessalonians 3:12-13 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

This is part of God's vision also, brethren. He wants our hearts changed.

Finally, turn to Hebrews 13:

Hebrews 13:20-21 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

You see, brethren? God's vision is the whole reason for everything that is. God's vision is to at last see us perfected. That is what God sees. That is what God wants. He wants us to be perfect. That is what it is all about. He wants to see us filled with His perfect, holy, righteous character.

I know our vision should be the same as God's vision. That requires overcoming and solving problems. And if God has that vision for us, and is going to persist in our development, then He is going to try us and test us for our good.

We have to realize that we are on the trail to the Kingdom of God. I will continue using this wagon train theme today. And indeed, we are on a journey to the Kingdom of God, and God's vision for us is to be perfected, and He is persistent, and will see that we are perfected. We must realize this because trials are going to come upon us.

Now, turn to I Peter 4, verse 12 and we will see what God has to say here.

I Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

He is saying, "Look! These things are going to happen to you. Now, Satan tempts you to see how far down you he can make you fall. But you see, God always tries you to see how firmly He can make you stand." This is the principle.

And so, we are going to be tested. Romans 8:17 says that we will be heirs with Christ if we share His sufferings. Jesus Christ, who is a pioneer, went through all this first. He was on the trail first. And He had to go through this. And we will too, because we are going to receive the same inheritance.

God loves us so much that He will persist with us to bring us into His Kingdom. I have been looking at one of the heroes in Hebrews 11—Samson. There is not a lot written about Samson, except that he was strong. He was called to help Israel to be separated from the Philistines, or to separate the Philistines from Israel. And I got to thinking about him, and the awesome strength that the man had. I am sure that the stories of Superman, and Hercules, and others, all had their beginning in Samson. I was thinking about how Samson just ripped the lion to pieces. Not only did Samson have to be

strong when the lion attacked him, but He had to be quick! Cats are exceptionally quick. But yet he grabbed hold of that lion and tore him to shreds.

And then he was attacked by a thousand Philistine soldiers. Now, these men were trained with spear, sword, axe, or whatever other weapon they might have had, like a club. I do not think they came upon Samson one at a time. I think they circled around him and just went after him! God had to have given him not only strength, but agility and quickness; He must have moved him. And when it was all finished, people were afraid of Samson.

Samson had it made. It would be just like you or I having \$12 million dollars in the bank, and in good health. Who do we need? Nobody.

Samson picked up the gates of that city, not just the gate, and the bars, but both gate posts. I have put test stakes into the ground that I could not pull out with my hand. And so, this had to have required incredible strength. And He carried them to the top of a mountain.

Now, Samson judged Israel for 20 years. And, I have a feeling he was a pretty good judge. But you see, toward the time of his trial, he was indestructible. Nobody could overcome him. And it appears that Samson started to let down. And he went to Delilah, which was a wrong relationship, and set a wrong example, and he probably left his people, and started to slip. Of course, she pestered him, and he teased her with green new ropes, new bowstrings, and weaved his hair into a loom, but the last time he did not tease, and she recognized he told her his heart, so she called the Philistines in and they brought the money, and she either drugged him, and some other way to cause him to sleep deeply, and they shaved his head. And he woke up.

Samson who was used to being king of the hill, tried to break loose, but he could not. He was helpless. He had come to rely on his own strength so much that he became careless, and it ended with his eyes being put out. Now, the symbol of strength and power for the country was now helpless. No hair, no eyes to see, nowhere to go.

But you see, God loved Samson so much, that He allowed him to be humbled.

Now in the next few months while his hair grew out, Samson had to grind grain, pushing the beam that turned the grinding wheels day after day. I am certain in my heart Samson during that time, with every step, said, “Father, how could I have left you? How could I have been so foolish as to do what I did?” I am sure that he said, “I deserve everything I got.” Of course, you know the rest of the story. The time came for all the Philistines assembled in their temple, and they brought Samson out for sport, and he asked, “Father, one more time, give me strength that I can bring down the people who put my eyes out.” I am sure that he meant a lot more than that. Samson knew he would die with them, too. And so God listened and blessed him. Samson is listed in Hebrews 11 as one of the heroes of God. God loved him so much, that He took the time to perfect him.

There is something that we have to realize: God loves us so much that He will take the time to perfect us, no matter what it takes. We have to be ready for that, and we cannot object to that, really.

Now, like the Smith family (the story I started with), we are on the trail, and there are many trials to overcome. The Smith’s could break a wagon axle, then have to cut a tree and shape a new one to fit and work; it would all take time. They could run into soft ground, where the wagon would sink down to the hub, and take a long timber to pry it up and out, everybody pulling together. They had to face sickness, dirt, and shortage of food continually. I did not know this before, but on a good day, they might make 10 miles because of the wagons and livestock. They would be on the trail for about 4 to 6 months. On a poor day, they might only make a mile or so. The cattle had to feed and drink. It was not like putting gas in your car. You had to let them eat and find them water. That all took time.

And if they were going through parched lands, they had to cut enormous amounts of grass to carry with them to feed the cattle and oxen across the arid dry land. And they carried extra water. I am sure that under the pressure and the strain that occurred constantly, some wanted to quit. I have read other stories about them, and it was told that people lost their minds, or became cruel, and many other things while on the trail because of the pressure.

Our destination is the Kingdom of God. We may have physical trials along the way, but the nature of our trials will be a spiritual type. If we are to be changed from what we are to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Jesus Christ, we are going to be confronted in areas of relationships with each other; the attitudes of our hearts; faithfulness; loving and forgiving one another; overcoming; gaining in godly wisdom through daily contact in prayer and study; not being fearful and not being timid about standing up for God; and for working for God while on our jobs, not for our employers; for loving our mates; raising our children right; and tithing. The things that pertain to a Christian we are going to be tested on.

Now we find a little encouragement in the book of James.

James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, . . .

Trials are not joyful. I know that, and you know that, but he says to count it all joy! Count it that way.

James 1:3-4 . . . knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; . . .

These are all the problems we have individually, we are all different. John has his, I have mine, and you have yours. You do not want mine; I do not want yours. God is going to work with you and yours.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Now, John Ritenbaugh has often said that our trials increase as we grow. I can remember when I was first baptized, we were baptized on a Saturday night. That Sunday morning I felt so wonderful. I said, "I am clean! All my sins have been forgiven." I really felt great! Well, on Monday morning, on

my first call, I walk in the back of the kitchen, and the cook said, “John, I want you to taste my new bacon.” And he picked two pieces off the grill and held it right in front of my mouth! I said, “I don’t want the bacon.” He said, “John! Taste this bacon! I want your opinion!” “I don’t want the bacon.” He said, “TASTE THE BACON!” I said, “Father, help me!” And the phone rang. He had to answer it.

That trial is nothing today.

Later on, when I would not call my boss on the Sabbath to report how I had done that day, he had a hard time with that. So, he called the Vice President of the company, and the Western Region Manager, and he was going to have me fired. And I had to go meet them at a hotel at night in downtown Los Angeles. I have got to tell you, I was scared. I had two little children to feed and take care of, and a house to pay for. And I was afraid. That was another trial that God was putting me through. But even so, I could not deny God. I had to stand up and tell them, “Look! I’m working for you almost seven days a week. If I can’t have one day to go to church, then there is something wrong with the company.” That came out of me! And the Vice President said, “You’re perfectly right! By all means, keep the Sabbath.” And then, I had to work quite a few years with that boss who almost fired me. That was not fun, either. But, you see, God put me through that trial to see where I would stand, and what I would do.

Recently we have all had a tremendous trial to leave the parent organization. That was probably the toughest trial I ever had to face. God wants to see where we stand. So, He is going to give us trials. That is the kind of trials we are going to have.

God tells us, “Be encouraged! Count it for joy, even if it is not joy.” Count it, because God is testing you to see where you stand; it is going to be to your benefit. That is what our trials and tests are for. What is God’s goal? His vision? It is to perfect us, and therefore, we are going to be perfected.

Now, just as those in that wagon train had to take things one day at a time—some days ten miles, some days only one mile (some days it might not move

at all), but as long as we have any hope in God, and the desire for the Kingdom of God, God will never let us down. Even though we may feel like giving up, God is going to bring us through. There is no question about that!

Sometimes, our shortcomings overwhelm us, and we feel like giving up. But we do not have that option. The Smith family could have always turned around and gone back to their former home and way of life. But we cannot go back. We have been called to go forward to the Kingdom of God. That is our destination. There is not any other. We cannot go off the trail. God expects us to trust Him, and to stand. He will never let us down.

How long is our trip?

The Smith family, when they left, had a window of time that they had to consider. They could leave from early spring, because they had to get there before the snows set in the mountains, or they would be like the Donner Party, trapped in the mountains without food starving to death. They had to have grass to feed the cattle, and water, and an abundance of game, and all that. In the winter snow season they would not have that. So, if they left too late, or if they dithered on the way, and did not get things done, they would have the feeling of being trapped—it is too late to make their destination.

How long is our trip? It is our lifetime. How long is that? We do not know. And because we do not know, we have to be urgent about overcoming, and accomplishing the vision that God has for us.

Now, those who were considering coming West, were encouraged to come. They heard stories about those who had gone, and perhaps had come back, or they read this or that book about the beautiful country that was there with lakes, streams, and trees. And they often read the pulp magazines then too, maybe showing a huge grizzly bear 12 feet tall, and a man standing fighting it with his hunting knife, and they were amazed. They were excited about the West. They were thrilled. They wanted to come to leave what they had and start over.

Brethren, we are to be encouraged as well.

Hebrews 9:28 So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

That is what we look forward to. We know what salvation entails. We are told that we are going to be joint heirs with Jesus Christ. And we will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, from flesh into spirit beings, being able to soar to the stars, being actual members of the Family of God—sons of the Family of God. We are going to have a part in creating a new heaven and a new earth.

I am not sure about you, but I think all of us have wished we could create something—farm, town. God is a creator, and He has put the urge in us to create also—mountain ranges, streams, hills, or farmland. When I flew in from Salt Lake City, I saw hundreds and hundreds of miles of nothing—barren desert—no water, no anything. We will have a part in turning that green again. We are going to have a part in teaching mankind how to be at peace, and how to be healthy and happy. We will help heal the blind, and the deaf, and the halt, and the maimed. I can imagine what it might be like to be without an arm or leg, but to have that given back all of a sudden will be something awesome! We will have a part in that.

We will be able to heal them, and we will see the joy and radiant happiness spread throughout the earth. Brethren, we are going to be there when Ezekiel 37 takes place, and all the dead who were not in Jesus Christ are going to be resurrected. You will be there to help, and to teach. We have the vision of how busy we will be, and what we will be doing. That is what God gives us to encourage us.

And then He also gives us lists of examples of those who have gone on before us to encourage us, who have been perfected by God.

Hebrews 11:7-10 By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. By faith

Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

The Smith's went toward the Willamette Valley. We are going toward the city whose builder and maker is God.

Hebrews 11:11-16 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off [the vision] were assured of them, embraced them [inculcated] and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

We could go on, and read the rest of these, and see all those who kept the vision of God, and persisted—given their lives in death, dressed in rags—but they had the vision of the Kingdom of God. They persisted in their calling.

Now, in every wagon train, there was a captain. We know the captain of the train that we are on is Jesus Christ, the Captain of our salvation. He was a trailblazer, the Archegos; He is the pioneer who is going to lead us in the right direction. We will not let us go off the road if we stay close to Him. That is part of our responsibility.

In those days, wagon captains were elected to lead, make decisions, and to settle disputes. Even then, they knew that somebody had to be in charge.

As I was thinking about this message, there was a special show on television about the Donner family. I did not realize this, but the Donner's were part of a much larger wagon train, being led by a skillful captain. They had heard of the Hastings' Cutoff and they believed what they heard. It was supposed to save 300 or 400 miles. And so when they came to the cutoff, they met with the captain of the train, and told him they were going to take that Hastings' Cutoff. He pleaded with them not to do that, but to stay with the main train. "We're on the right path, we're going to get there. Please don't take the cutoff."

For stubbornness or vanity, or whatever, the Donner party decided to take the Hastings' Cutoff. They said later that they learned to curse him almost every day of their lives, because no sooner had they left, after four days of easy going, they came to forests, where they had to hack their way through the trees. The wagons sank up to their hubs near the Great Salt Lake, and the cattle went wild with thirst, and ran off. Two-thirds of the men died, because of famine and murder. One-third of the women died, and some of the children, because of starvation. Because of the Hastings' Cutoff, they missed going over the pass to California by one day. One of the worst storms to ever hit the California Sierra's landed upon them.

I will not go into anymore grisly details.

One of the young women who survived wrote back to her relatives, and she said something interesting. "I won't tell you of all the hardships that we went through. But I will tell you what I have learned. Stay on the main trail, and never take shortcuts." Interesting!

Now in Matthew 7, verse 13.

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Difficult is the way that we are on, because of God's vision for us. He is going to perfect us. You know that everybody that stayed with the captain on the main trail all came through. There was not a single loss. Our main trail is

to keep the vision that God has given us, and to persist in overcoming, and growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. That is our trail! There is not any short cut, not any other trail for us. God expects us to overcome; His vision is to perfect us. And, He has the persistence to do it.

Turn to II Timothy 2.

II Timothy 2:1-10 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, . . .

Paul had the same vision that God the Father and Jesus Christ have. And he conveyed that vision to the people he was teaching. We have a pastor that does the same thing. We are blessed to have a pastor who does not have some vision off somewhere else. He has the same vision that God the Father has. The Father is going to perfect us.

II Timothy 2:10-12 Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him.

The Smith family endured what we would consider today an impossible hardship. But they kept their vision. They never gave up. They arrived safely at their destination.

If we keep our vision and persevere and work at our calling we too will complete our journey to the Kingdom of God. That is a promise. That is a surety.

You see, at last, then, the vision that God the Father has and Jesus Christ has that cause Them to be so persistent with us, to perfect us. Their vision will be fulfilled, and They will do what They always wanted to do—sharing everything they possess with us.

Hang on to your vision! Persist!