

Keep going with Percy

I belong to a Bible study group that has been studying Hebrews this term. We have now got to chapter 12, and I have been listening to a talk on the first few verses. The speaker was telling us about a children's talk he had heard when he was a boy, which was all about a wonderful chap called Percy.

Percy was an amazing man, he worked hard at school, he learned to play the piano, he did all his chores, he finished whatever he started, he stood up for what he believed, and he stayed a firm and faithful believer in God all his life. More about him in a moment.

Hebrews 12:1 begins with a 'Therefore', which refers back to Hebrews 11 where we read about many people who were great examples of faith. They were flawed human beings like all of us, and made mistakes, but they trusted God.

'Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.' Hebrews 12: 1 (NIV)

The writer to the Hebrews is urging us to get rid of things that entangle us. These things may not in themselves be bad but can distract us from the race we are asked to run. Think of an athlete stripping off his tracksuit before running a marathon: nothing inherently wrong with track suits, but definitely not sensible to run a race in one.

The race we are running will be different for all of us. It's easy to feel we should be like other people or like some of the great saints we may have read about either in the Bible or in biographies. We are responsible for running our own race and being faithful to God in our own situation, the things that hinder will be different for each of us.

Going back to Percy, as you will probably have realised his surname is 'Verance' !

Perseverance can be defined by the dictionary as 'persistence in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success'

An article on the psychology of perseverance says this: We can understand perseverance as a continuous drive to reach our goals and improve our skills and performance through persistent effort.....perseverance is related to our ability to delay gratification, self-regulate, and practice self-control. All of these are required to honour our commitment to a longer term goal. Perseverance means that we prioritise future rewards over short-term pleasures in the present.

This is a challenge to me to focus on things which have eternal significance, rather than merely temporal. And with regard to meditation, to press on so that I learn better how to do it, and to grow in being still in God's presence

Proverbs puts it another way

"Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure." Proverbs 4:25-26.

However I think I could get really frustrated with Percy if it were not for the help that we are offered. The following verses give us hope and encouragement our struggles

Hebrews 12 continues in verse 2

"..Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God

"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."Phil 1:6

" being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience"
Colossians1:11, part of Paul's prayer for the Colossians

We can ask for, and receive, help in our efforts to persevere .

