

7/19/26

A Call to Persevere

Hebrews 10:19-39

Pastor Doug Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

The biggest blockbuster movie of the summer, *The Odyssey*, was released this weekend. It's Director Chris Nolan's version of the ancient epic about the hero, Odysseus, trying to get home to his wife and son after serving in the Trojan war, and the unending string of obstacles in his path. It's only by extraordinary perseverance – over many years – that he finally makes it. And, if I can mix imagery from two movies, I'm sure there were days when Odysseus felt like Vinny in the movie *My Cousin Vinny*.

If you've seen the movie *My Cousin Vinny*, you probably remember the scene where Mona Lisa Vito starts talking about her biological clock ticking away, and how, at the rate Vinny's case is going, she's never going to get married. Vinny replies: "Lisa, I don't need this. I swear to God I do not need this right now, okay? I've got a judge that's just achin' to throw me in jail! An idiot who wants to fight me for \$200! Slaughtered pigs! Giant loud whistles! I ain't slept in five days! I've got no money! A dress code problem! And a little murder case which, in the balance, holds the lives of two innocent kids. Not to mention **your** biological clock, my career, your life, our marriage, and let me see, what else can we pile on? Is there any more we pile on to the top of the outcome of this case? Is it possible?"

Have you ever had a week like that? A week where every day seems to bring another problem, another disappointment, another phone call you telling you something you didn't want to hear? A week where you find yourself saying, with Vincent Laguardia Gambini, "I swear to God I do not need this right now."

I'm having one of those weeks right now. Starting last Sunday afternoon, as the week unfolded with each new day bringing another email, text, call, or conversation sharing another heartache, problem, or issue, I began blaming myself for titling this sermon "A Call to Persevere".

On Sunday and Wednesday, we lost two dear and committed BBC members, George Vermilyea and Jeannette Louth, and in between, Jill's aunt, Ann Skeath, also passed away. We've had so many people in our church break bones and end up in the hospital recently that our congregation is beginning to look like the patient on the old "Operation" game board. When Jill and I went out for Chinese food on Friday night, my

fortune said, “Your love for sports will lead to a healthier, happier, and more fulfilling life.” So at least I have that going for me. Then, last night, we lost power at our house, after lightning hit a pole near our home. You can’t make this stuff up.

Some weeks feel heavy. Maybe you’ve had one recently, too. Maybe you’re in one now, also. And that’s one reason *Hebrews 10* is an important passage. Because sooner or later, every Christian discovers that faith requires perseverance. The people who first received the letter to the Hebrews didn’t need to be convinced that perseverance mattered. They were already living it. Listen to *Hebrews 10:19-39*.

*Hebrews 10:19-25:*

“Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **let us** approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. **Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**”

*Hebrews 10:26-39:*

“For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, **but a fearful prospect of judgment**, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy ‘on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ **How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?** For we know the one who said, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ **It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But recall those earlier days** when, after you had been enlightened, **you endured a contest of suffering**, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion for those who were in prison,

and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting. Do not, therefore, abandon that **confidence** of yours; it brings a great reward. For you need to **persevere**, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet ‘in a very little while, the one who is coming will come and will not delay; but my righteous one will live by faith. **My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back.**’ **But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved.”**

A few weeks ago, as we studied *Hebrews 6*, we spent time talking about hope. The writer gave us a beautiful image: “*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.*” An anchor doesn't eliminate storms. It doesn't stop the wind or calm the waves. It keeps the ship from drifting. It keeps it connected to something stronger than the storm, itself. Our hope is anchored — not in ourselves — but in Jesus Christ.

And that raises an important question. **If our hope is anchored in heaven, what does that hope look like on earth?** How do people whose hope is secure live? How do they endure suffering? How do they face disappointment? How do they keep believing when following Christ becomes costly?

*Hebrews 10* seeks to answer the question: if Christ has gone behind the curtain into God's presence, **how are we supposed to live on this side of the curtain?** For ten chapters, the writer has argued that Jesus is greater than the angels, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and the Levitical priesthood. Jesus offered a better covenant through a better sacrifice — with a better priesthood that gives us better promises. Now, the writer turns from *the supremacy of Christ* to, “**How then should we live?**” The answer is: **with perseverance and confidence in Jesus.**

There's something deeply admirable about refusing to quit. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. captured that spirit in a commencement address at Spelman College, in 1960, when he said, “**If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk, then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.**”

*Hebrews* reminds us that Christian perseverance is different from mere human determination. That's why this passage begins and ends with the same theme. It begins, “*Since we have **confidence** to enter the sanctuary...*” And it ends, “*Do not,*

*therefore, throw away your **confidence**.*” Everything in between answers one question: **How do God’s people keep that confidence when life becomes difficult?**

Hebrews gives us three answers. **First, we persevere by drawing near to Christ. Second, we persevere by refusing to drift away. Third, we persevere by remembering God’s faithfulness and looking ahead to God’s promises.**

### **I. Persevere by Drawing Near to Christ** (*Hebrews 10:19-25*)

The first word of verse 19 is, “**Therefore.**” It tells us that everything the writer is about to say is built on everything that’s already been said. *Hebrews 10* begins with what Christ has already done. “*Therefore, my friends, **since we have confidence** to enter the sanctuary **by the blood of Jesus...and since we have a great priest over the house of God...***” Notice the repeated phrase: “**Since we have...**” We have confidence. We have a new and living way. We have a great High Priest. Everything the Christian is called to do grows out of what Christ has already accomplished. That’s the pattern of the gospel.

When Jesus died on the cross, something extraordinary happened. Matthew’s Gospel tells us that the curtain of the Temple was torn from top to bottom. Not from bottom to top — as though human beings had reached up toward God — but from top to bottom. God opened the way. Through Christ’s sacrifice, the barrier created by sin has been removed. Hebrews calls it “*a new and living way.*”

We draw near because Christ has already made the way. That’s why the writer gives **three exhortations**, each beginning with the words, “**Let us...**”

**The first is, “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.”** Perseverance begins with God’s presence. Not our activity; God’s presence. One of the great temptations, during difficult seasons, is to withdraw from God. We feel ashamed. Disappointed. Confused. Angry. We wonder why God hasn’t answered our prayers. We question if God is disappointed in us. So, instead of drawing near, we pull away. Hebrews says to do exactly the opposite. **Draw nearer.** The place where we find strength to persevere is in the presence of God.

**The second exhortation** is equally important. “**Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering...**” Why? “**...for He who promised**

**is faithful.**” That verse tells us where our confidence rests. It doesn’t say, “Hold on because your faith is strong.” It says, “Hold on because God is faithful.” There are days when our faith feels weak. There are days when our emotions rise and fall. There are days when circumstances tempt us to question everything we thought we knew. Sometimes, all that can happen in one day. But God’s faithfulness never fluctuates. Our hope is secure because it rests upon God’s character, not ours.

Then, comes **the third exhortation.** “**Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together...but encouraging one another...**” Christian perseverance is a communal effort. It’s not: “Let me draw near.” “Let me hold fast.” “Let me persevere.” Hebrews says, repeatedly, “**Let us...**” God has given us one another because we can’t carry the weight of discipleship alone. Sometimes, we need someone else’s encouragement when our own courage has run out. Sometimes, we need another believer to remind us of truths we’ve temporarily forgotten. Sometimes, we need someone to say, “Don’t give up. God isn’t finished with you. Keep trusting.” That’s one of the reasons that meeting together matters so much. It’s about placing ourselves where we can worship together, pray together, bear one another’s burdens, and remind one another of the gospel. Isolation is fertile soil for discouragement, as some of our online worshipers know only too well. Community is fertile soil for perseverance.

**Draw near to God. Hold fast to the truth. Care for one another.** That’s what persevering faith looks like. It’s vertical. It’s doctrinal. It’s communal. Our hope is anchored in Christ and **that hope is lived out together.**

## **II. Persevere by Refusing to Drift Away (Hebrews 10:26-31)**

At this point, the tone of the passage changes dramatically. The invitation gives way to a warning. The writer isn’t trying to rob believers of their assurance after spending ten chapters explaining why our confidence rests securely in Christ. Nor is the preacher trying to frighten tender-hearted Christians, who are struggling with temptation or battling recurring sin.

Every believer knows that struggle. The Apostle Paul did. In *Romans 7*, he describes the painful conflict between wanting to obey God and finding himself still wrestling with sin. That struggle is part of the normal Christian life. The warning, here,

is different. The writer is describing someone who has deliberately, knowingly, and persistently rejected Christ, after receiving the knowledge of the truth. This is not stumbling; this is abandoning. Notice the language he uses. Such a person has “*spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant,*” and “*outraged the Spirit of grace.*” These are not descriptions of a believer who has fallen into sin and longs to repent. They describe someone who has decisively turned away from Christ altogether.

Why is the writer so forceful? Because there is nowhere else to turn. If Christ is the final and perfect sacrifice for sin, as Hebrews has argued, then to reject Him is to reject the only sacrifice God has provided. There is no Plan B. No alternative Savior. No different sacrifice waiting somewhere else. The same cross that gives us confidence also demands our allegiance.

God’s warnings are one of the means God uses to keep us persevering. Every loving parent warns a child not to run into traffic. Every physician warns a patient about habits that destroy health. Suppose you’re driving along the edge of a cliff. You come around a bend and see a large sign: **Danger. Sharp curve ahead. Slow down.** Is the sign trying to frighten you? No. It’s trying to get you home safely. The warning is an expression of care. The same is true in Hebrews. God warns people because God loves them. The Lord doesn’t want them to drift toward destruction. God wants them persevering in Christ. Perseverance is not simply avoiding bad behavior. It’s continually returning to the One who saves us.

### **III. Persevere by Remembering God’s Faithfulness and Looking Ahead** (*Hebrews 10:32-39*)

After the warning comes encouragement. Hebrews repeatedly follows this pattern: **Assurance. Warning. Encouragement.** The writer now reminds us of something they may have forgotten – their own story. “*Recall those earlier days...*” **Remember what God has already brought you through.** These believers had already suffered greatly for their faith. Some had been publicly ridiculed. Some had been imprisoned. Others had lost their possessions. Some had stood beside fellow believers who were suffering, and accepted the consequences, themselves. This wasn’t theoretical discipleship. Following Jesus had already cost them something. Yet, they endured.

One verse especially captures their perspective: *“You cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting.”* How is that possible? How can someone lose everything and still have joy? Only if they know that they possess something that can’t be taken away. That’s exactly what Jesus taught. *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...but store up treasures in heaven.”*

The writer isn't minimizing their losses. Losing your possessions hurts. Being rejected hurts. Being persecuted hurts. Christian faith never pretends suffering isn't painful. Instead, it reminds us that suffering is never the whole story. There is something better. Something lasting. Something eternal. That perspective changes everything.

Then comes the heart of the chapter. ***“Do not, therefore, throw away your confidence; it brings a great reward. For you need perseverance...”*** That word — **perseverance** — is the theme of this entire passage. Perseverance isn't flashy. It isn't spectacular. Most of the time, it looks remarkably ordinary. It’s simply continuing to trust Christ. Day after day. Year after year. Sometimes, we imagine perseverance as dramatic acts of courage. Occasionally, it is. More often, it looks like quiet faithfulness over a lifetime.

It looks like parents faithfully praying for children who have wandered. It looks like caregivers lovingly serving aging spouses. It looks like believers quietly showing up for worship, even when life is difficult. It looks like opening your Bible one more morning. Offering one more prayer. Taking one more step of obedience. Not because you feel strong, but because Christ is faithful. Most discipleship is ordinary. It’s not one heroic decision. It’s thousands of faithful ones.

Sometimes, people hear a sermon on perseverance and think it means we must always be running at full speed. But Scripture paints a richer picture than that. There are seasons when we run. There are seasons when we walk. There are seasons when we do little more than crawl. And there are seasons when faithfulness looks like waiting. The Psalms repeatedly tell us to “wait for the Lord.” Isaiah says, *“They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.”* **Rest is not failure. Waiting is not quitting.**

Perseverance is not frantic activity; it’s steadfast trust. It’s continuing to rely on Christ, whether life is moving quickly or slowly. The writer concludes by loosely quoting

the prophets, Habakkuk and Isaiah: *“My righteous one will live by faith... and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.”* After all the warnings, after all the exhortations, after all the reminders, the writer expresses confidence in God’s people and brings us back to where we began.

The chapter begins with confidence, ***“We have confidence to enter the sanctuary...”*** It ends with confidence, ***“Do not throw away your confidence...We are not among those who shrink back.”*** Everything in between answers the question, ***“How do we keep that confidence?”***

We draw near to Christ. We hold fast to our confession. We encourage one another. We take seriously the danger of drifting. We remember God’s faithfulness. We keep our eyes fixed on the promises that still lie ahead. Sometimes, faith runs. Sometimes, faith walks. Sometimes, faith crawls. Sometimes, faith waits quietly upon the Lord. But, in every season, true faith keeps looking to Jesus – because our confidence has never rested in ourselves, it’s always rested in Him.

The One who opened the way into God’s presence is the same One who walks with us every step of the journey. Jesus is the One who strengthens weary hands. He is the One who steadies trembling hearts. He is the One who promises never to leave us or forsake us. So, don’t throw away your confidence. Draw near. Hold fast. Encourage one another. And keep going. Because Jesus is worth persevering for. As the writer says, in the final verse, ***“But we are not among those who shrink back and are destroyed, but among those who have faith and are saved.”*** May God give us the grace to be those people.

## Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. What gives us confidence to approach God (verses 19-22)? What do these verses teach us about what Christ has accomplished for us? How does this change the way we think about prayer, worship, or our relationship with God? What keeps us from approaching God with confidence?
2. What does it look like to “hold fast” today (verse 23)? What are some things that tempt Christians to let go of their faith? How does remembering God’s faithfulness help us persevere through difficult seasons?
3. Why is Christian community essential for perseverance (verses 24-25)? The passage connects perseverance with encouraging one another and meeting together. Why do you think isolation makes faith more difficult? What are practical ways we can “provoke one another to love and good deeds” this week? Have you ever experienced encouragement from another believer that helped you keep going?
4. *Hebrews 10:26-31* contains some of the strongest warning passages in Scripture. What do you think the author is trying to accomplish by including this warning? How can serious warnings be an expression of God’s grace toward God’s people? What’s the difference between struggling with sin and deliberately turning away from Christ?
5. Read verses 32-39. The first recipients of *Hebrews* had experienced persecution, loss, and suffering, yet they kept trusting Christ. What motivated them to endure? When have you seen God sustain someone through a difficult season? What promises of God help you keep going when life is hard?
6. *Hebrews 10* ends (verse 39) with a contrast between those who shrink back and those who persevere in faith. In what area of your life do you sense God calling you to trust the Lord more deeply? What is one practical step you can take, this week, to draw nearer to Christ and encourage someone else to persevere?

Closing Challenge: Complete this sentence: “This week, I want to persevere by

\_\_\_\_\_.”