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**Perseverence Devotional**

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**Scripture**: James 1:2-4 (NIV) *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”*

For over twenty years I have ministered among American Baptist, trying to help us understand and come to grips with the effects of accelerating change on our churches in the United States. The dramatic decline in regular church attendance to less than 20% of the population, and the loss of Christian influence in the culture has left many feeling discouraged. It has been my heart’s desire to move us from denial, shock and withdrawal toward embracing the good future that God is preparing for us through these changes.

One of the recurring themes I have witnessed is the joy among churches that rediscover the power and purpose of being present in their community with God’s healing love. In hundreds of workshops with thousands of people, their love for God shines through their stories of community involvement and reflects back into their church life.

In recent years, I have begun to see new patterns of ministry emerging among Millennial Christians (born between 1982-2000) who are using the skills of their generation, technology and networking, to make effective connections in the lives of people who are called to God’s restorative mission. Their ways are not the old ways that many of us know and expect, but they are true to the gospel of Jesus Christ and his mission of creating a restored humanity that reflects God’s nature.

One of the important qualities this younger generation of Christians understands is the need to develop perseverance in their faith. Perseverance requires taking the long view of our purpose and service, and believing God has the power to use our efforts to bring about God’s restored outcome. This generation believes that being a part of God’s mission is worth their sacrifice. For those of us born during a time when Christianity was the dominant culture in America, being a Christian was fairly well regarded and often a social advantage. But today’s generation of young Christians face a different reality, much closer to what early Christians faced in the first century after Jesus’ resurrection. They are “swimming upstream” against cultural forces that make their faith more than just an inconvenience.

This has caused me to notice again – maybe for the first time – how much the Bible has to say to Christians about the powerful resistance they will encounter while serving Jesus and his message and why perseverance must be developed in order to serve God effectively. First century Christians served God’s great purpose without many resources and were persecuted on many levels from simple societal and financial rejection, to extreme imprisonment and martyrdom. Yet they were encouraged to pay the price for the prize of being a part of God’s great work of redemption of humankind and all creation.

These days as I face the accelerating changes in my own life, I more fully understand the normal responses of the churches I serve to the societal changes we are all experiencing: denial, shock and withdrawal. That is when this message of perseverance takes on deeper meaning. The scripture from James 1:2-4, is helpful because it reminds of us of the wonderful reward for developing perseverance, “perseverance must finish its work so that (we) may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

For certain, the world will continue to change at an exponential rate. This is a great time for Christians to revalue the quality of perseverance as an important part of our service to God.

Still with you in Christ’s adventure, Glynis Labarre