

## Don't Give Up!

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One of the messages that is impressed upon us each year as we celebrate Hanukkah is the call to persevere, to not give up when events and circumstances weigh heavy upon us. When we consider how our people must have felt as they suffered at the hands of the foreign governments under which they labored during the Maccabean period, we are strengthened by their courage and perseverance in the face of overwhelming odds. The few stood faithfully against the many, and God gave them the victory.

As I contemplated once again the issue of perseverance, my mind naturally went to John's words in the book of Revelation and his repeated use of the Greek verb νικάω (*nikao*, “to overcome or conquer” (used 17 times in Revelation). But coupled with the idea of “overcoming” or “conquering” is John's use of the verb ὑπομένω (*hupomeno*, “to persevere, to remain” and its cognate noun ὑπομονή, *hupomone*, “perseverance, to patiently endure.” To the assembly of Ephesus, for instance, John writes these words of commendation: “you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary” (Rev 2:3).

Now, surely, that we persevere in faith is God's work within us—strengthening, encouraging, and conforming us to the image of His Son. But perseverance is also a cooperative work between the saved individual and God. He has promised that we will endure, but He has also called us to persevere and not to give up. He expects that we will utilize the means of grace with which He has gifted us, and thus accomplish the work He has ordained us to do, namely, to sanctify His Name upon the earth.

What are those factors that impede our way—that open us up to thoughts of quitting, of “throwing in the towel?” There are obviously many, but as I contemplated this question, four things seem to be prominent obstacles to persevering. The first is *fear*. Quite often the reason people sideline themselves rather than staying in the race is because of fear: fear of failure, fear of rejection, or fear that the cost is too high. What is the antidote for such fear? It is to consider once again the love of God made known to us in Messiah Yeshua. “Perfect love casts out fear” (1Jn 4:18). The love of God for us is sure, for He paid the ultimate price that we might be redeemed unto Him. Would He pay such a supreme price for our redemption only to lose us in the end? Hardly! “He Who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:32). Given the perfection of His love, we can be assured that He will supply everything we need to persevere in His ways and one day to stand before Him, victorious in His love.

A second reason we may be tempted to “give up” is that *we become overly focused on our own weaknesses*. When we fail because of sinful choices, we begin to talk ourselves into thinking that we could never succeed in the life of holiness because we just aren't strong enough. We begin to focus on our own weakness and failings, and we fall prey to debilitating discouragement and defeat. It is true that we all struggle with the weakness of the flesh. Paul states “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (Rom 7:18). Yet it is also true that we have been made new, and that we are being recreated after the image of the One Who created us (Col 3:10). We dare not remain focused on our weakness. Rather, the realization of our own weaknesses should urge us all the more to look upon the excellencies of our Messiah, Yeshua, the One like Whom we are becoming. But once we have our eyes focused upon Him, we must remember that God never intended us to walk the life of righteousness

alone. The assembly (ἐκκλησία, *ekklesia*) Yeshua promised to build (Matt 16:18) is all important in the successful perseverance of Yeshua's disciples. Shlomo wrote: "And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart" (Qoh 4:12). We must come to grips with the reality that a community of faith is not a peripheral aspect of our relationship with God, but an essential one. "...let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some..." (Heb 10:24–25). Indeed, it is through that which "every joint supplies" that each of us will be strengthened to persevere in faith. Such a community of faith consists of individuals committed to help each other persevere in their love for God and service to the Messiah. Size does not matter; quality of relationship and commitment does.

A third factor that can debilitate us is something far more subtle. It is *the distractions of life—losing a proper focus*. Some might argue that being distracted is not the same as "giving up," and I might agree, but in the end it amounts to the same thing. Instead of being actively engaged in the battle of faith, those who are distracted find themselves on the sidelines. Paul warns Timothy: "No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier" (2Tim 2:4). Paul's illustration is clear: a soldier must be focused on his military service if he is to perform his duties properly. He cannot be distracted, even by good things, that might cause him to fail in the priority of his committed service. How can we guard ourselves against such distractions and losing a proper focus? By committing ourselves to regular, disciplined worship of God. By "disciplined" I mean worship that involves the mind (heart) as well as the emotions. Such worship is both individual as well as corporate, and at its core consists of giving praise to God and communicating with Him. When Paul commands us to "Pray without ceasing" (1Thess 5:17), he is describing what I'm calling "disciplined worship." If we are in regular communication with God, expressing to Him our praise and thanksgivings, as well as listening to the voice of His Spirit Who leads us (Rom 8:14), we will not be distracted away from the path upon which He intends us to walk. And here, also, the corporate aspect of worship is important. There are times when our hearts are weary and tired, and we hardly know how to begin in worship. It is then that others may help lift us up by their prayers and expressions of praise, enabling us to join them in true, heartfelt worship.

A final thing that I have seen sideline people is what I'll simply call "*bad information*." Yeshua taught His disciples this: "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31–32). If the truth is that which sets us free—free to serve Yeshua, free to be His true disciples, free to accomplish the work He has given us to do—then falsehood or "bad information" does the opposite. It binds us and disables us from being the disciples our Master intends, and it hinders us from accomplishing our kingdom work. It is no secret that the Messianic movement is full of "bad information." And it is not uncommon to hear people in our movement express a deep weariness over the strange doctrines that are perpetrated upon God's people by uninformed or ill informed teachers. Interestingly, Paul gives a prophecy about this very thing: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths" (2Tim 4:3–4). So how do we guard ourselves against error—against "bad information." We dare not think that relying upon tradition (whether rabbinic or Christian) will be our safeguard. Rather, we must commit ourselves afresh to the disciplined study and application of the inspired Scriptures, seeking to know and understand what the text says, what it means, and how it is to be applied to our lives, both individually and corporately.

So as we come to the conclusion of our Hanukkah celebration, the “Festival of Dedication,” let us dedicate ourselves once again to the work of being Yeshua's true disciples. May we take to heart the words of Paul in Gal 6:9 – “So let us not grow weary of doing what is good; for if we don’t give up, we will in due time reap the harvest.”