

The Perfecting Of Our Faith

Illustration/Setting The Stage: In 1983, Toyota chairman Eiji Toyoda issued a challenge to build the world's best car. This challenge prompted Toyota to embark on a top-secret project, code-named F1 ("Flagship One"). The F1 project aimed to develop a flagship sedan that would expand Toyota's product line offering both longtime and new customers an up-market product.

In 1989, after an extended development process involving 60 designers, 24 engineering teams, 1,400 engineers, 2,300 technicians, 220 support workers, approximately 450 prototypes, and over US\$1 billion in costs, the F1 project was completed. The resulting flagship was the Lexus LS 400. At its debut, the LS 400 was widely praised for its quietness, well-appointed and ergonomic interior, engine performance, build quality, aerodynamics, fuel economy, and value.

The original Lexus slogan, developed after Team One representatives visited Lexus designers in Japan and noted the incredible attention to detail, became "The Relentless Pursuit of Perfection."

Lexus manufacturers may have discovered the truth about the big picture about Biblical perfection that many have missed. Like the apostle Paul (see Phil. 3:13-15), they never think they have arrived. They are relentlessly pursuing the prize, continuing to aim high, never lowering the standards, always pursuing the goal of Christ-likeness. They are always learning how to be more gracious, more considerate, more courageous, more like Jesus. But always also trusting that the Author of our faith will be the finisher (or perfecter) of that faith as well.

Sunday – Faith Lasts

James 1:2, 3; 1 Peter 1:6, 7; 4:12, 13

What is faith? It is the “substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1) It is taking God at His word, and if it needs to be obeyed then it obeys. Faith is a set of beliefs, founded on God’s word, and carried about in the life. When we talk about, “My faith,” or, “Our faith,” we are talking about a way of life for us as we follow Jesus and His word. This faith, this lifestyle is to grow and it is to last irrespective of difficulties and trials. Trials are an inevitable part of the Christian life.

1 Peter 1:6, 7: “In this you greatly rejoice [leap for joy], though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

The Christian is pictured as being bombarded with annoyances, problems, disappointments, and grief, all of which Satan uses to destroy our faith in God. Personal faith, like gold, gets tested so its value might be fully displayed.

The final stage of gold production – refining - involves removing impurities that remain after the smelting process. Refining companies receive gold and reliquefy the metal in a furnace. Workers add borax and soda ash to the molten metal, which separates the pure gold from other precious and less precious metals. A sample is then taken to a lab for tests that measure the gold content. In most cases, the gold is 99.9 percent pure.

1 Peter 4:12, 13: “Beloved, do not think it strange [do not continue to be astounded] concerning the fiery [scorching - persecution] 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.” – The devil brings trials, but God overrules by making them the means of developing character.

James 1:2, 3: “My brethren, count it all *joy* [unmixed joy] when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” cp Acts 5:41 – through an intelligent understanding of the causes of suffering and through faith in God.

Purpose of trials: *1) Reveals what is in our hearts.* It’s easy to be a fair-weather Christian. If there were no trials, everyone would be a Christian for the wrong reasons. *2) Purify us.* If you want to take the dross off something, turn up the heat. God allows trials to come to refine our characters. *3) Strengthen faith and experience.* If God can get me through a certain problem then He can get me through the next thing. **We can trust God no matter what.**

Patience = Perseverance, meaning it will outlast everything because it rests confidently in God’s final deliverance - cp. Rev. 14:12 – patience [perseverance] of the saints – Matt. 24:13 – those who endure to the end shall be saved – murmuring and complaining weaken our enduring power. – Joshua & Caleb endured to end.

Douglas Mawson was a contemporary, and colleague of Ernest Shackleton and Captain Scott. During a scientific expedition in the Antarctic he lost his colleagues 300 miles from safety. Frostbite and starvation meant his hair, nails, skin and the entire soles of his feet fell off during a grueling two month trek back to camp. At one point he fell down a crevasse and was left dangling in the abyss from a rope, up which he dragged his disintegrating body.

Mawson arrived back at base only hours after the ship which could have taken him back to civilization, had set sail. He was, however, able to send a message back to his fiancée in Australia. A short message, but one so understated it could only have been written by one of those epic heroes of the age of Antarctic exploration. There

was no complaint or self-pity. No mention of the horrors he'd just been through. "Deeply regret delay," it read. "Only just managed to reach hut."

Monday – Perfection

James 1:2-4; Romans 5:3-5; Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 3:12-15

It's a misunderstood topic, yet the Bible is replete with the notion of character perfection.

James 1:2-4: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work [full effect, completed its task], that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." – High ideal. Cp Rom. 5:3-5 (faith has trusted in the steadfast love of God).

Ephesians 4:13: "Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Philippians 3:12-15: "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. 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; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you."

This is the same man who said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race." How do we reconcile these two statements? By the end of his life he could look back to see how far God had led him and that he had done all he knew he needed to do to get to the end. Nike ad popularized the motto: "There is no finish

line.” The Christian will never be satisfied with anything short of patterning their lives after the unselfish, sacrificial love of Jesus.

It may be easier to get a handle on this if we state **what Bible perfection is not:** 1) It does not mean holy flesh. 2) It does not mean that it is impossible to sin, although it is possible not to sin. 3) It does not mean ever reaching a time when we will be able to make it on our own. 4) It does not lead one to feel that he is holy, perfect, or to have pride or self-confidence. 5) It does not mean to become as unsurpassably perfect as God is perfect. It does not mean that one has reached the absolute, ultimate limits of growth.

The Bible is concerned with moral perfection and it states very clearly that it is a work of God. It is His responsibility (Phil. 2:13). All He wants from us is our willingness to stay connected to Him, our determination to aim high in all aspects of our lives, and our integrity in honoring high standards. Like a work of art, we can always be improved upon.

Tuesday – Asking In Faith

James 1:5, 6; Proverbs 9:10

One of the prerequisites to receiving the promises of God is asking in faith. Heb. 11:6 says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” (Heb. 11:6) Jesus said, “Whatsoever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.” (Mark 11:24). Continuing his discussion on being complete, lacking nothing, James encourages his audience to ask God for wisdom.

What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom? Knowledge knows that a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom knows not to put it in a fruit salad. Wisdom has to do with character and conduct, whereas knowledge is primarily intellectual enlightenment.

James, knowing that his audience have not reached the goal of Christian maturity he explains how many may find understanding that will make him victorious amidst the problems of life. This wisdom includes more than knowledge because knowledge alone doesn't guarantee right action or right conclusions. Wisdom helps us place a proper value on things and ensure the proper use of knowledge. "Some people need a glue stick not chap stick."

James 1:19-21: "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

James 2:15: "If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit?"

James 3:13: "Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom." – Genuine wisdom will be demonstrated in works – biblical knowledge applied.

Wednesday – The Flip Side Of Faith

James 1:1; 1 Peter 2:9, 10

The antagonist of faith is doubt. Notice how James describes a person who doubts the goodness of God – **James 1:6-8**. To doubt is to be inwardly divided. Kadesh-Barnea Israel faced the choice of moving forward in faith or rebelling against God's promises. When judgment was pronounced all of a sudden they believed. Wishy-washy, fickle. John Bunyan characterized this type of person in Pilgrims Progress as Mr. Facing-both-ways. Solution to this problem is found in **James 4:8**.

Want increased faith? The disciples desired the same thing (Luke 17:5, 6). Jesus makes it clear that it is not the quantity of faith that makes a difference but the quality of the faith. The smallest amount of faith can accomplish seemingly impossible tasks. Again, not the amount, but the genuineness of the faith truly matters.

Thursday – The Rich And The Poor

James 1:9-11, 27; 2:15, 16; 5:1-4

Both James and Jesus place value of human worth far above the acquirement of things: cp **James 1:9-11** with **Luke 8:14** – riches choke and will perish; **James 1:27** with **Matt. 25:37-40** – active care for the less fortunate; **James 5:1-4** with **Luke 12:16-21** – the greedy will be very disappointed one day.

Appeal: James shows that Jesus, the Perfecter of our faith, uses trials to strengthen and purify our faith. He also stresses how true wisdom reveals itself through good conduct. Finally, he reminds us not to be bound by earthly wealth but instead to reveal a generous spirit.