



PERSISTENCE

Persistence has been defined as “long obedience in the same direction.” That’s a great definition. Looking for quotes on persistence, you’ll find a compendium of successful people highlighting this virtue above all others as the key trait to their success.

Persistence, as a value, lay dying in our modern world of high speed internet, artificial intelligence, and cars that drive themselves. Comfort, convenience, and ease have poisoned persistence and it’s increasingly difficult to convince people that anything in life that is worth doing is *hard*!

Thankfully, people still pursue passions where corners may not be cut—athletics, music, and yes, even relationships require persistence for long-term success. I can show you how to play *Mary Had A Little Lamb* on piano or throw a spiral in about 15-minutes. But, you will not play Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto no. 3 without years (or perhaps decades) of long obedience in the same direction. You will not throw a spiral in the Super Bowl without similar dedication.

MALACHI 2:10–16

¹⁰ Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? ¹¹ Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. ¹² May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts!

¹³ And this second thing you do. You cover the Lord’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. ¹⁴ But you say, “Why does he not?” Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. ¹⁵ Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. ¹⁶ “For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Oh Lord, I need You now more than ever; Would You put my heart back together. I searched the world 'til my head hurt, Just to find out Your way's better.

Sin is fun for the moment, but after the fun fades the hurt remains. God's way is better—trusting him means living how he's called us to live. Obedience validates faith. Scan the QR-Code to worship God and his ways!



DISCUSSION

What are some of the ways you get distracted from doing things you should do?

1. Describe God’s assessment of Judah. (11)

2. What reasons are offered for God's assessment? (11b, 14)

3. What truths and exhortation did Malachi close with? (15b-16)

4. In what ways does marital faithlessness for believers equal faithlessness to God?

5. What's one way you can grow in your persistence towards holiness?

Aren't you thankful God's grace covers our sin and weaknesses? No matter how faithless you've been, in Christ, God lets you start fresh today! Ask your coach.

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION



STUDY NOTES

INSTANT GRATIFICATION MONKEY

In a famous TED Talk, Tim Urban shares *"The Mind of a Master Procrastinator,"* using a hand-drawn illustration of his brain. At the ship's wheel stands the "Rational Decision Maker," who makes good choices and sets priorities. But he's often interrupted by the "Instant Gratification Monkey." Urban explains, "He lives entirely in the present... only cares about two things: easy and fun."

The Instant Gratification Monkey rebels against "long obedience in the same direction." But hard things will come, now or later. You can choose hard now for ease later or ease now for hard later.

Being poor is hard. Setting yourself up for success is hard. Which hard would you like? Eating right is hard. Poor health is hard. Faithfulness is hard. Sin's consequences are hard. Which hard would you like?

In his book on persistence titled, *Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, Eugene Peterson wrote, "There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness." You won't fall into holiness — only sin. Holiness must be pursued on purpose, keeping the Instant Gratification Monkey at bay. It's hard, but worth it.

UNFAITHFULNESS CAN IMPACT LEADERS

God charged Israel with unfaithfulness asking, "**Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god.**"

Israelite men were divorcing "**the wife of your youth... and your wife by covenant**" to get new, younger foreign wives. Two reasons rise to the surface as to why this situation is so wrong.

The first issue God warned Israel about was that he designed marriage as one man and one woman for life. Marriage pictures God in three persons—perfect unity in diversity. Marriage pictures God's covenant love. And, marriage will one day picture Christ and the Church. Divorce rips that in two. Please understand, divorce is often a complicated issue—but there's nothing complicated about what these men were doing. It was wrong!

Reasonably upset God asked, "**Did he not**

make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring." Biblical marriage create godly babies. Healthy families make healthy communities.

The second issue God warned Israel about was taking foreign wives. This wasn't about race, it was about worship. Deuteronomy 7 warned marrying foreign spouses would lead those people's hearts far from God. Those warnings came to pass and this idolatry partly led to the Babylonian Exile.

1 Peter 3:7 states a husband's prayers are hindered through dishonoring your wife. Centuries before Peter recorded this truth, God said, "**You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand.**"

God set clear expectations, "**So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth... and do not be faithless.**"

HOPE LIVES FOR THE UNFAITHFUL

Adultery language is used when believers return to sin. Why? Because returning to sin is like returning to a former lover, breaking your vow to Jesus. You can only pursue one love at a time, never two.

Many adults are unable to challenge your sin struggles due to hypocrisy in their own lives. They drank at your age too. They had sex at your age too. They rationalize, "It's part of being young." Let's be clear, *it is NOT!* It's sin and it is wrong.

God isn't spoiling your fun. He's sparing you scars caused by sin. Ask any committed Christian with a great marriage if they're proud of their "body count" before marriage. Of course not! Memories of former partners bring shame and hurt. It damages one of the most beautiful (and very pleasurable) things God designed for marriage.

Don't fall for the trap the Instant Gratification Monkey has laid for you! It will only bring the wrong kinds of hard into your life. And the consequences may be much further reaching than you realize—like the church that closed its doors last year after one of the pastors was found having an ongoing affair with a minor. He didn't wake up one day saying, "I want to ruin my life and the lives of those close to me, go to jail, defame Christ, and close a church's doors forever." Rather, he fell into the trap of small compromises that led to massive consequences.

Here's the thing—we're not better than that guy. Sin will lead you down the same road. Fight back! By God's help, you can cage the monkey.