

## HABIT SIXTEEN

# Persevere Tenaciously

*“Endure hardship with us like  
a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”*

*|| Timothy 2:3*

**T**he habit of obeying from the heart is possibly the most important in this book. It deals with the ultimate criterion by which all behavior is evaluated when we meet the Lord. This present chapter now addresses the second most important habit: persevering in obeying God. Deciding to obey is not enough; it does not guarantee completion. We have to persevere in obedience as we face our unseen spiritual adversary and the various obstacles we meet in life. Character development occurs when we pursue goals in the midst of opposition. Remove the obstacle and the character-development process is aborted. Note the difference as you compare these two sentences. To say, “John is doing well,” is a nice statement. However, it is bland compared with this sentence: “In the midst of terrific opposition and almost insurmountable adversity, John is proving his endurance, growing enormously, and still doing well.” If God had made a world without the presence of evil or the need for perseverance, we would never have had the opportunity to develop fully. That world would have been too easy. This world provides the opportunity, in the process of rising to conquer, to become our very best.

## Obstacles Are Deliberately Planned

God is more concerned with our development than with our comfort. If this were not true, every instance of our discomfort would illustrate that either God is weak and cannot help us or that He does not care and will not. Neither is true; He is not weak and He does care. Moreover, He cares about our development. Difficulties develop us. Jesus said, “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Then again,

He also wants us to grow — and bear much fruit — and that takes pruning. “... every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:2).

Have you ever obeyed God and found that in the process of doing what He asked, you encountered opposition? The disciples did. (Mark 6:45-52). One night, they were going exactly where Jesus had just told them to go. They encountered a storm on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus foresaw a storm on Galilee that night yet sent them into it. Furthermore, he controlled its duration and its severity. Jesus saw them rowing against the storm in the evening and didn't go to them until the fourth watch — 3:00 a.m. At an earlier time, He had accompanied them through a storm. At that time, He was asleep in the boat, but at least He was there in the boat with them. The disciples learned that Jesus could calm storms. This time, Jesus was not with them in the boat, so it probably seemed to them like an even greater crisis. During this latter storm, Jesus walked on the water towards his disciples in the boat. He did not abandon them; He came to them and calmed the storm. The disciples' experience teaches us that our difficulties, their severity, and their duration, all are under God's control. Each experience prepares us for the next. As our faith gets stronger, the difficulties get harder. When we realize this is all part of His scheme for our good, we are not to worry. To the contrary, observe how God is working and embrace his handiwork in our lives.

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What if circumstances went well for us every time we were in the will of God and did not go well if we were not in the will of God? Everyone would seek to be in God's will — not because they love God but because they love having things go well. To keep us weak, our adversary would like us to think that difficulties indicate we are out of God's will. Yet, a storm does not necessarily indicate that we are out of the will of God. The disciples were in the will of God and still were in a storm. We must be careful in evaluating storms. Jonah was out of the will of God, yet God used a storm at sea to arrest his attention and redirect him back into God's plan for his life. God can use opposition to redirect or change our course, but difficulties do not automatically mean that we are going in the wrong direction. A storm is, therefore, an occasion for reappraisal, prayer, development, and recommitment. A storm is not the time to quit. The devil wants to undermine our faith by making us think that we are out of the will of God when we have opposition. We must be aware of this tactic. God allows opposition for our development and good. It toughens our faith and improves our character.

The weather in Beijing can be very cold, especially when the north wind blows the Siberian air through the city. Radiators pumped heat into our third-floor Beijing apartment only several hours each day. Preserving this precious heat was therefore an important measure. We took great pains to seal all the cracks in the metal windows. One Saturday afternoon during our first year in China, Char and I both had headaches. We laid down to rest for a while before our Chinese language teacher came for our lesson. Soon we remembered we had chicken soup in the refrigerator and thought that perhaps the broth would have a healing effect. I got up and boiled it on our gas burners. My head was throbbing. We drank the soup and felt so sick we decided I would go ask a Christian neighbor friend to pray with us about the problem. He came down two flights of stairs to our apartment. Upon entering, he immediately realized our room needed some fresh air. After a brief conversation, it became apparent that we were gradually killing ourselves with carbon monoxide — a colorless, odorless, extremely poisonous gas. We had been so careful not to let the cold air in that we had also stopped our supply of fresh air. More importantly, there was no way for the carbon monoxide to escape. This event sobered us greatly. We recalled that we had a similar problem the previous Saturday. That began to make sense as Saturdays were the days we were in the apartment the most. Other days, we were out and about with our responsibilities — in the fresh albeit cold air. Observe that our difficulties with gas poisoning were not a sign we should

leave Beijing. Instead, it was merely an obstacle that needed to be met and conquered. Sadly, I have seen people leave because of similar problems. Nevertheless, there is another dynamic.

When we become anxious or worry about our difficulties, we have two storms — the original circumstances (exterior storm) and inner frustrations (interior storm). God wants to develop people who know how to experience inner peace in the midst of external difficulties. We can handle an enormous amount of difficulty if we maintain inner peace. Our boat is in real trouble when our external storms whirl into our hearts and we experience an internal storm. If we can keep the circumstantial adversity circumstantial — so it can't produce an interior storm — we will be poised for perseverance. This is why God uses storms for our training.

## **Recognize His Handiwork**

We live at the level of our perceptions. In our difficulties, we react according to what we perceive is occurring. The problem is that our perceptions are sometimes incorrect. There are occasions when God works in our behalf, and we don't recognize His handiwork. Perhaps this is because He is working quite differently than we expect.

We often think things are getting worse. Instead, the new development that we think is making our situation worse is really God beginning to work. Go back to the story of the disciples crossing the sea at night. When Jesus came to them walking on the water, they thought He was a ghost. The very person they needed and wanted was coming. Things were about to get much better. Help was on the way. Jesus was coming to them, but since they did not recognize Him and thought He was a ghost, they thought their situation was getting worse. Find out what God is really doing instead of reacting to what we only perceive to be happening at the natural level.

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In the spring of 1985, our national church in Korea had its first convention. We were living in Seoul, but the national