

ALWAYS TOO SOON TO QUIT

Dr. George O. Wood

I want to speak to you today on the theme of the spiritual authority of the believer. As I prayed and meditated about that though, only one word came to me about the authority of the believer. And it wasn't a traditional word for authority. It was the word in the Greek that in the English is translated "perseverance." It comes from two Greek words that mean "to remain" or "to abide" and "beyond" or "over." It means to remain behind, to remain beyond, to stay when others have left. It is the word which in the New Testament is translated variously. Patience, endurance, steadfastness, perseverance. It's a different word from the concept you see on the poster where the cat is chinning himself on the bars. The phrase at the bottom "Hang in there, baby!"

Hupomone is a stronger word than that. It's not simply a spirit of "hang in there" and barely hold on. But it's the spirit of defiantly hanging in there because you know victory is ahead and you're not going to let go at all. Because in time your deliverance will come.

Unlike the word "patience" *hupomone* – perseverance – has an active content. It has energetic resistance to hostile power. It is the endurance of the Christian that is not marked by complaining, weariness, despondency or grumbling although we all go through that periodically. But it's the heroic will in Christ to remain firm. Not only to bear up with the situation but to contend in the situation. Not only to set there and take the punch but in Christ to receive it and to realize that victory is at hand as you persevere. That's why I called this message this morning, "It's always too soon to quit." That's the meaning of perseverance. It's always too soon to quit!

When you ask God in prayer to remove a burden he has one of two options in answering it. He can remove that burden or he can give you the strength to carry the burden. The added strength to carry the burden.

Hupomone. The added strength God gives to go through a crisis. You would like to see the crisis instantly dissolved. But God in some situations says "I am going to give you the perseverance to go through it."

Why is perseverance necessary? What does it mean? Why is this such an important word in the Christian life? I want to underline that this is an important word.

In the message this morning I'm going to use practically every case in the New Testament where the word occurs. It occurs numerous times. It's a cardinal Christian virtue. The Christian life I can say flatly, cannot be developed healthily without this word, perseverance, *hupomone*, being part of our Christian experience. No way you can be a healthy, vibrant Christian without the development of *hupomone*. To remain past the time. To stay. To endure.

Why is it necessary?

Let's look at some reasons. Without perseverance we will only follow the Lord when it's comfortable. We'll only follow the Lord when it's convenient. Perseverance keeps us following the Lord when it's not comfortable and when it's not convenient. We wouldn't be able to do that if not for perseverance.

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John writing in the Revelation says this “He who has an ear to hear let him hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with a sword, with a sword he will be killed. This calls for *hupomone* and faithfulness on the part of the saints.” Revelation 13.

What calls for perseverance? *Hupomone*?

It's fact, John is saying, some of you are going into captivity. Some of you are going to be killed by the sword. There's going to be no dramatic rescue. There's not going to be any troops airlifted in to get you. What is going to be called upon for you in that situation is not to follow Christ out of comfort. Or convenience. What you're going to need instead is perseverance. Without perseverance the Christian life in that context could not be lived.

Also without perseverance we will miss being treated as God's sons and daughters. The writer of Hebrews - 12:7 – *hupomone* hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons. Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons. This is not to say that everything negative that happens to us is some special discipline sent by God. But to indicate that adverse circumstances are the training ground of discipline in the Christian's experience. Disciplined children are good children.

You cannot get perseverance in your life without adversity. There's simply no way to develop it. Discipline is a Mark of sonship and daughtership. Without it we'll never know that facet of our Christian experience.

Without perseverance we'll falsely expect overnight solutions for complex problems. We're great in America on this. Paul writing to the Romans, Romans 12:12 admonishes them, Be joyful in hope. Patient endurance in affliction. The Roman Christians are in some situations that are complex that did not have simple solutions. Microwave oven prayer answers.

Peter Marshall as chaplain in the United States senate prayed this years ago, “Our Father, when we long for life without trials and work without difficulties remind us that oaks go strong in contrary winds and diamonds are made under pressure. With stout hearts may we see in every calamity an opportunity and not give way to the pessimist that sees in every opportunity a calamity.” Without perseverance we falsely expect overnight solutions for complex problems.

Without perseverance we could never handle injustice. 1 Peter 2:20 writing to persecuted Christians “But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it. but if you suffer for doing good and you endure it this is commendable from God.” Peter's saying, if you've broken the law and you get punished that's understandable. You don't get any credit for that. But if you have not broken the law and yet are punished because you are a Christian and endureth, that is commendable from God.” I'm saying that a person who is punished and they don't deserve it that is an injustice. You know as well as I that there is great injustice in the world today and there's great injustice even about you in your own life. You don't have to look to Iran to find injustice. You can find it in your own house many times.

How do you handle injustice? Perseverance says you stay there. You wait. Not passively but wait upon the Lord. You believe that even if you don't see the resolution to the injustice that God does and God ultimately will take care of it and God will ultimately work it out. You hold on. You persevere while waiting for the answer which may not even come in your own lifetime.

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Habakkuk faced this problem. He complains to God at the beginning of his book, this minor prophet in the Old Testament. He says, God! Why aren't you doing anything about sin? When are you going to judge sin? The sin of my fellow countrymen! And God says, Habakkuk good news. I'm going to judge sin. I'm going to send the Babylonians and they're going to punish my people. Habakkuk said, "Good grief! The Babylonians! They're worse than us! And you're going to send them? What kind of justice is that?" God answers back to Habakkuk, "You can't understand everything. I'm going to ultimately judge the Babylonians too but you'll never live long enough to see that. But in the interim, while you're living, you must know this truth: the just shall live by faith." How does the righteous person live? The righteous person lives by not seeing the resolution to all the injustice. We will not live to see the resolution to all the injustice even in this room today. But the righteous will live by faith in believing that God will ultimately set all things straight. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a guarantee that ultimately that day will come.

Without perseverance we can't handle injustice. Without perseverance we will never finish our course as Christians.

I'm not a person who debates eternal security. I have a belief in the effectual call of the saints, that belief is something more than mouthing, lip syncing a confession. If it is saving grace it is continuing grace. If a person begins not following Christ it raises question as to whether or not they ever had saving grace. But Jesus says this about finishing. Because of the increase of wickedness most men's love will grow cold. But he who *hupomone* to the end will be saved. Jesus says to the end.

The writer of Hebrews says to Christians many of whom who have served God in their initial phase of discipleship with great diligence. Now the times are tough and they're thinking about dropping out. That's the reason for the writing of the Hebrews. The writer comes to this statement: "Remember those earlier days after you had received the light when you *hupomone*? Remember in the earlier days when you persevered? In a great contest in the face of suffering sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution. At other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. [that's *hupomone*] but now they're in danger of losing *hupomone* (perseverance). So the writer tells them in verse 36, Now you have need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God you will receive what he has promised.

It wasn't enough to simply have endured back then. It's now up to them to endure now that they might receive the prize that has been promised.

Tolstoy's War and Peace I think puts it well in terms of persevering to the end. Prince Andre is studying the battle strategy for the coming day. The Czar is listening and rearranging maps. Andre asks "Will we win the battle tomorrow?" The Czar responds abruptly. "I think not." The young prince is alarmed. His voice becomes frantic. "Lose the battle? What if we do lose the battle? What will become of us?" The sage wisdom of the old monarch has a seasoned perspective. "We don't count the battles. We only count the last battle. The last battle is the only one that really matters." He had the present moment in perspective. God alone holds the key to the final battle and the final battle is what counts. We could lose ten battles in a row but

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we know what the outcome is. With perseverance we will finish. Without perseverance we will drop by the way.

Emerson said, “The hero is no braver than the ordinary man. But he is braver five minutes longer.” That’s persevering.

What are some scriptural examples of perseverance?

There’s the example of the apostle Paul. He names himself four times as an example of perseverance. Key reference is in 2 Corinthians 6:4 “Rather as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way. In great endurance [in *hupomone*]. That’s a very striking thing because Paul is defending his apostleship to the Corinthians and revealing something of his inner character as a Christian. He gives 18 commendable qualities of his life. Beginning with 2 Corinthians 6:4. What is really interesting to see is what he puts at the front of the list. He doesn’t put faith. He doesn’t put love. He doesn’t put hope. He doesn’t put gentleness. At the front of the list is this word *hupomone*. Before he gives 17 other qualities *hupomone* is first. He says if you’re going to describe my life, what comes to the top, the cream of my character and experience is this: steadfastness, perseverance. He says I put this before you as an example of the Christian life.

The apostle John serves as an example. He writes to the Revelation churches, 1:9, “I, John, your bother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and *hupomone*.” I, your companion in *hupomone*. I, your companion in perseverance. And endurance.

John is not just hanging in there at Patmos. He’s a defiant old man in Christ. He’s not hanging on to that island hoping that he’ll live another day so he can get up and breathe the fresh air again in the morning. He’s saying, praise God. When all this is said and done. Nero and Caesar and everybody else they’re coming to come smashing down! The whole house of cards of antichrist is going to collapse and Jesus Christ is going to reign omnipotent. So what does it matter that I’m in exile here. We know whose got the battle. He insults the antichrist. He says he’s only got 42 months. He’s only got three and a half years. Not enough even of one term of an American president. If you want to know how long he’s going to last it’s 3½ years. You want to know how long God’s going to last, he’s king of the ages. That’s perseverance. That’s more than hanging in there. It’s absolute defiance.

The New Testament churches are examples of perseverance. Thessalonica is commended. Ephesus is commended by the Lord in Revelation 2. Thyatira and Philadelphia are also commended by him for their perseverance. Hanging in there. But more than that. Steadfastly prevailing in the midst of great trouble.

The prophets and Job are cited as examples of perseverance. James 5:10-11 “Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know we consider blessed those who have *hupomone*.” We consider blessed those who have *hupomone*. You look at the prophets and see who he’s talking about. He’s talking about Isaiah who when he was called God told him, “Isaiah, the end result of your mission is nobody’s going to believe you.” Isaiah had to preach for about 50 years with the prospect that he’d be a failure in terms of his own generation.

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Ezekiel, exiled. Jeremiah, held in the land going off weeping into Egypt. These men persevered. And they're blessed.

Then James goes on to say, "You have heard of Job's *hupomone* and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. Job is held up as an example of perseverance.

There are some today who have maligned the character of Job. They've said in Job there is some default. That he doubted God. That what had come upon him was because he said "What I feared has come upon me." Therefore what happened happened. That's the kind of line that his accusers use against him. God himself declares that Job was a man in whom God found no fault. And God didn't qualify that by saying, I find no fault except for the fact that he feared the worst would come upon him. It's simply, I find him blameless. Job had this kind of gutsy perseverance that said, "Though he slay me yet will I trust him."

Nothing's going to dislodge my defiant hold on God. Lose my kids, lose my family, lose my house, lose my possessions, lose my health. I don't care what it is. "Though he slay me, yet I trust him." That's defiance, that's perseverance as an example.

Christ is an example of perseverance. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith who for the joy set before him *hupomone* the cross, scorning it's shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who *hupomone* such opposition from simple men so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Consider Christ who persevered, who kept going when the going was tough. No end run around Golgotha. It's a straight drive through the line right to the cross.

How do you develop perseverance?

It must begin with a desire in the heart. 2 Thessalonians 3:5 Paul says "May the Lord direct my our hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance." Direct your hearts. It doesn't become all of a sudden rearranging your outward priorities. But it begins by saying, "God, I need that in my heart! Would you direct my heart and my will to the perseverance of Christ because I want to model his character and I want to see his life modeled in mine. Direct my heart to the perseverance of Christ. Let me know when I'm thinking of letting go that Christ did more than simply hang in there – he went to Golgotha. Direct my heart to Christ's steadfastness and his perseverance."

Perseverance must not only be a desire of the heart. It must be acted upon. It cannot be simply wishful thinking. 1 Timothy 6:11 Paul says "Pursue endurance." Persecute endurance. That means really seek it out! Make it a practice. Put it into action. Grow, develop.

Strong words for Jesus Christ. Men and women of faith are not created instantaneously. They do not come forth mechanically. They are not produced on an assembly line. They grow. They're living organisms and they grow. Faith must be acted upon. Perseverance must be acted upon.

Perseverance is the underside of faith. One aspect of faith is it believes God to do the impossible and change the circumstance or the situation. The underside of that kind of faith is the quality of perseverance which believes God even if the circumstances don't change. It is, if you will, the submerged side of faith. It's the part of the iceberg of faith that is underneath the waters. The

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active faith that believes God to change the circumstances and often what is visible. But what so often is underneath the waters and is the greater part of Christian faith is perseverance. It's the active dimension in faith that says, God, no matter what I will exercise my trust and confidence in you.

Perseverance is also developed in the company of love and faith. If it's developed apart from other graces it becomes bullheadedness and stubbornness. It must be in cooperation with love and faith.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 notes the three graces of the Christian life – love, faith and hope. But in Titus 2:2 he uses these terms “Teach the older men to be sound in faith, in love and in endurance.” Notice faith and love are the same in Titus 2:2 as in 1 Corinthians 13. But in Titus 2:2 a later letter than Corinthians, Paul substitutes the word “hope” with the word “endurance.” Perseverance. Really hope and perseverance are connected. Because without perseverance you can't hope. You'll let go of the hope unless you persevere.

It seems to me as I look at perseverance as contrasted with hope, hope directs our gaze to the future. But perseverance summons us to continue to stand steadfast under the obstacles of the present moment. Without perseverance there cannot be love, faith or hope. That dawned on me as a great revelation of truth. You cannot have love, faith or hope without perseverance. Which seems to me to make perseverance a more foundational Christian character than maybe anything else. How can you ever demonstrate love if you don't persevere? Your love will simply be illusory. It'll be a fathom. It'll be emotional. It'll be romantic. But it won't be real, gutsy love. The love of the cross. For love perseveres.

How can you ever have faith if when you ask your prayer request and it doesn't come to pass right away you wash off God and walk away angry and bitter. Faith perseveres. Perseverance is the undergirding of active faith.

How do you ever hope if you don't believe and continue to believe in spite of the evidences that God is going to come through. Perseverance.

Faith. Perseverance develops in the company of faith and love.

What are the aids to perseverance? What are the aids to developing it?

I'd like to say that perseverance is not a matter of self will. It's not a matter of grit your teeth and hold on. It's the grace that's developed by the presence of God in our lives in company with other believers.

There's God himself who's the aid to our perseverance. Paul writes in Romans 15:5 “May the God who gives *hupomone*...” That means that this steadfastness is God's work, God's productivity in life. He gives it. It's not self induced. God gives it to his people. Colossians 1:11 “Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you might have great *hupomone*.” How do we have great *hupomone*? By being strengthened with his glorious might.

How does that happen? That sounds mystical. How do I tap into the resource of God? I think how we tap into it might be compared to the first flight of a baby eagle. Pushed out of its nest by

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its parents and then discovering to its amazement that the invisible ocean of light and air is capable of bearing it up. Nothing is visible. The eagle is falling but that invisible ocean of air into which it is falling is capable of bearing it up.

The presence of God which surrounds all of us is this invisible ocean which bears us up more surely than do visible means of security. That's why people can get up and testify, Everything was taken from me. But I have everything. Christ is all to me. He's all I need. My wealth. My family. My health. Everything was stripped from me but I have found the undergirding presence of God. That's falling into the invisible ocean of air, and finding the rush of the current of God's presence which can't be seen with the naked eye but which is felt in the spirit and experienced in the spirit dimension.

And you never need it until the time comes. It'll never be there in advance. It's not like putting gas in the tank, getting it all stored up and saying, when the day comes I'll use it. It's there when you need it. God himself.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is an aid to perseverance. 1 Thessalonians 1:3 "Your endurance [perseverance] inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus." The endurance is inspired by hope.

There's expectancy that yes, Jesus Christ is going to make things straight. He will. He's alive. Our hope is in Christ. It's not in this world. Our hope is in Christ.

We have as an aid to perseverance the encircling protection of Jesus, Revelation 3:10 to the church at Philadelphia. The Lord himself speaking, "Since you have kept my commandment to *hupomone* I will also keep you." Don't you know Jesus is saying nobody's going to pluck my sheep out of my arms. I will keep you. I will encircle you with my presence. Do you not know that I will never leave you nor forsake you. You are mine. I will keep you.

There is as an aid to perseverance the comfort of other Christians. 2 Corinthians 1:5-6. "If we are comforted it is for your comfort which produces in you *hupomone* of the same sufferings we suffer." Paul is saying, I'm able to comfort you because I've been comforted from God. The reason why I've been comforted is because I had sufferings. And in those sufferings God gave me *hupomone*. He gave me steadfastness. He gave me perseverance. Because that's happened to me I can now comfort you. When that happens to you, you can comfort somebody else. It's quite one thing to hear a lecture about how to get through a tough time. It's another thing to talk with somebody who's been through it. That is why as Christians we need as a community more than simply the public attention to the word of God as it is taught. We need the interface of human relationships where in smaller associations we can share what God is doing in our life that we might be of comfort to one another and strengthen one another in our adversity.

Another aid to perseverance is what I would call the theater audience of God's heroes. Hebrews 12:1 "Therefore [in light of all the people of faith] since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses..." The writer of Hebrews is talking about running a track, probably an oval track and the grandstands are full watching the runners. And we're the runners. He's saying, as you run remember the great theater of spectators that is the role call of Hebrews 11. They're watching you. So you see your life and there's a gallery of people in the grandstands watching you run your race. Who's in the gallery? Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the Red Sea people, invaders of Jericho, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, David, Samuel,

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and the prophets. They're all cheering. David is saying, By my God I leaped over a wall and he just did too! They're the gallery of heroes.

Since we are surrounded by such a great crowd of witnesses let us run with *hupomone*. That describes the Christian life as a long distance run. It's not a 20 yard dash. It's not a 100 yard dash. It's a 26 mile marathon. "We run with perseverance the race marked out before us."

Love is also an aid to perseverance. 1 Corinthians 13:7 "Love endures all things." You can put up with a lot if there's love in your heart and you sense the love and support of other people. Love is an aid to endurance.

What are the results of perseverance? One is reward. The very essence of saving faith is that it perseveres. Saving faith is effective faith. It is faith that finishes. I don't think the New Testament knows anything about a faith which doesn't finish. The Christian life is not predicated on the basis of works. It's not. It's the gift of God's grace. But where there is effective salvation the grace that is given and received and acted upon is an effective grace.

Jesus in Luke 21:19 "By *hupomone* you will save yourselves." Endurance. Matthew 10:22 and Mark 13:13 same words – "All men will hate you because of me but he who *hupomones* to the end will be saved." Not who drops out. He who endures.

2 Timothy 2:12 "If we *hupomone* we will also reign with him." Hebrews 10:36 "You need to *hupomone* so that when you have done the will of God you will receive what he has promised." James 1:1 "Blessed is the man who *hupomones* under trial because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life." All these metaphors speaking of finishing.

Life has been described as a journey, a pilgrimage, a battle, a race – select your own metaphor. But the necessity of finishing is the same in each. If life is journey it must be completed. If life is a battle it must be finished. If life is pilgrimage it must be concluded. If life is a race it must be won. Reward for perseverance.

It's not just jogging around the track innocently and getting tired out. It's the joy that is set before you. There's someone waiting for you at the end of the track. There's a finish line.

Character development is another result of perseverance. That's the *this time* side. It's happening now. Romans 5:3 "suffering produces *hupomone*. *Hupomone* produces character. And character produces hope. There's a cycle here. An interconnected cycle.

What is happening when you're going through suffering, adversity of any kind. What is it producing in your life? It's producing *hupomone*. Staying power. Enduring power. Persevering power. What does that produce? It produces character. The word for character is a word that is used to describe metal that has one through a test and has been approved. It has been through the fire and you know it's character. You know it's worth because all of the impurities have been smelted out. It has stood the test. It's real character has been revealed by the fire. And since it's real character is revealed then hope is the natural consequence. It's useful. It's hopeful.

As a young Christian, often you don't see this. You get into suffering for the first time as a Christian, persecution arises or some sort of adversity and you say, "What's happening to me? Has God left me?" Not at all. There's a second thing that's coming into focus. Steadfastness in

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your life. Staying power. What's that going to produce? It's going to produce character in you. It's going to produce hope. After you've gone through this cycle two or three times, the next time you begin to get encircled by adversity you look at it and say, "Thank God! I know that I don't look at this just from the standpoint that adversity has come. I see that this is a trail. This is a sequence. Hope is going to be the end result. So I can face this." I know that certain things are being worked out in my life. Hope is the end result. How does hope come? Through easy wishful thinking? No. It must pass through the fire of adversity which makes perseverance, which forms character, which then produces the hope.

Paul is saying that the effect of perseverance is it refines our character. It's character development. He knows what we need. James 1:3-4 "The testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything." The assumption is if you don't have perseverance you will be immature and you will not be complete. What a description of Christian maturity! Don't develop perseverance, never go through struggle, never work it through and you can't be mature. The price of maturity is perseverance.

The caterpillar's necessary metamorphosis into a butterfly demands that he spin himself into a cocoon. What a strange way! Once the capsule is finished nothing must touch it. When the newly formed butterfly starts to emerge he must struggle and fight to push himself free. If there's any help from the outside the little creature will never fly. Thank God the Lord helps us! Only through the agony and struggle of cracking the cocoon can the monarch's wings spread.

Or the oyster. Irritations get in its shell. He doesn't like this. He tries to get rid of them. But when he cannot get rid of his irritations he settles down to make of them one of the most beautiful things in the world – a pearl. He uses the irritation to build the loveliest thing that an oyster ever has a chance to do. An oyster is ugly! But the loveliest thing an oyster does from our point of view not his is to produce a pearl. If there are irritations in our life they are to be made into pearls.

A final thing that perseverance produces productivity. Luke 8:15. The great parable of the sower and the seed. The seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart hear the word, retain it and by *hupomoneing* – persevering – produce a crop. In other words Jesus is using the language of the farmer. He says the farmer doesn't ever produce a crop unless he perseveres. He's got to keep at it. Day by day. Not a lot of miraculous things happen. Just a lot of hard work. But if you're going to produce the good crop – persevere.

2 Peter 1:5-8, a list of Christian graces – faith, goodness, knowledge, self control *hupomone*, godliness, brotherly love, kindness. Verse 8 "If you possess these qualities in increasing measure – perseverance can be something that increases – they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in our knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Do you want to be kept from being ineffective and unproductive? Then *hupomone* is a part of that. It's developing that defiant staying power that says with Job, "Though he slay me yet will I trust him." I have discovered the way of gladness. I have discovered the way of joy. I'll keep my eye on the goal. I will consider Christ. And I will let the perseverance of Christ rule in my heart. Perseverance.

Is that the key to spiritual authority? I'm not sure it's the key to authority but I think it's got a lot to do about authority. I think it's sort of the bottom rung. Developing that authority, staying steadfastly with God in the will of God through tough times.

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Our God and Father, we thank you for the gifts of your Son, Christ Jesus, to us who showed himself, a runner who did not faint or fade away. But a runner whose eyes were fixed on a very painful goal. By way of the cross. But beyond the cross the open tomb and triumph. Help us to know, Lord, when you want to rescue us from our Golgothas. And when at other times you do not want us to take the end run around Golgotha but to meet the cross and to persevere even through questionings and trouble and abandonment. You will never leave us nor forsake us. you are with us always. Give steel. The steel of your character to each of us here today that having begun to run we might continue, remain and finish. Especially for the young people where who have so lately started on the race and the goal line seems so far away. We pray for the strength of your Spirit to cause them as well as the oldest among us to continue with perseverance. Thank you, Lord, for your grace and love which is given to us. Through Christ we pray. Amen.