

# A Persistent Life

I am fascinated by the tenacity found in creation, this I must admit to my own annoyance at times. Every year towards the end of summer we have a substantial invasion of ants in our home. Like clock work every year they arrive in their different regiments, seeking any bit or morsel of food they can find. What is truly fascinating about these ants is that they keep on coming no matter what conventional ways of eradicating them might throw at them.

What did I learn from the ants? In addition to remembering to put last night's food in the fridge, my own futile attempts at thwarting this invasion has taught me another more significant lesson, and this is that persistency pays off. Persistency is the key ingredient to any measure of success. One cannot expect to succeed in anything worth succeeding in life if one is not persistent, or consistently working toward a desired result. If you want to be a skilled pianist then you will have to devote yourself to hours of practice. The same applies to anything people want to achieve in this life.

Things aren't all that different in the Christian walk. It really isn't. For starters, Scripture actually refers to the ant's diligence as an example that Christians should emulate. Solomon highlighted the ant's example to us in Proverbs 6:6-11:

*"Go to the ant, O sluggard;  
consider her ways, and be wise.*

*<sup>7</sup>Without having any chief,  
officer, or ruler,*

*<sup>8</sup>she prepares her bread in summer  
and gathers her food in harvest.*

*<sup>9</sup>How long will you lie there, O sluggard?  
When will you arise from your sleep?*

*<sup>10</sup>A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest,*

*<sup>11</sup>and poverty will come upon you like a robber,  
and want like an armed man."*

Here in these verses, we find an exhortation for us to model the example of the ant, especially as the ant is an example of diligence, hard work, preparedness, and persistence. However, these verses

are also a rebuke of laziness in general. This warning can be applied to the Christian life equally well. Of course, and this is the primary way one can apply this, Christians should be examples of diligent work. In other words, Christians may not sit around idly expecting their daily bread, accommodation and clothes to just come out of thin air every day. No, a good amount of imitating the ant is what is going to be needed to have these basic things. Our Lord of course promised these things in Matthew 6:25-32 where He said to his disciples:

*<sup>25</sup> “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.”*

This is no doubt a promise, however, it is a promise that is predicated upon the daily discipline of working diligently and faithfully. Yes the Lord feeds the birds of the air, but the birds also know to rise in the morning and seek their food, or to build their own shelter. Nowhere in Scripture are we ever given the option to sit around idly and expect our daily needs to be met just like that. To the contrary, we are told, men in particular, that *“<sup>8</sup>...if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”* (1 Tim. 5:8).

This means that no Christian can just expect good and essential things like food, clothing, shelter and whatever else to come from the Lord unless they have done their part in working diligently and persistently every day. My contention is that the same applies to the deepening of our walk with the Lord. You cannot expect victories in your day-to-day Christian experience if you do not model the ant in this as well. We will do well to look to the first century disciples as an example. They were not necessarily people of high esteem. They were down-to-earth fisherman. They were not particularly learned either. They practiced their trade and mostly lived from hand to mouth each day.

But what is remarkable about these original disciples is that they left everything behind in submission to Christ and followed him daily. Though they had their weaknesses, shortcomings, failings, and limitations, they each decided to follow Jesus wherever He went and in whatever He commanded. They became the first living, breathing, thinking and speaking forerunners to many others, including Christians today, who our Lord would characterise as those who ‘denied themselves, are taking up their crosses daily, and are daily following him.’ Just this tells us that discipline, commitment and persistence was at the heart of what they were called to do. Of course this started with their initial faith in the Lord Jesus and their turning from their sin and receiving forgiveness for their sins, rendering them a true sheep in Christ’s fold. However, what was enabled by their salvation was a lifetime of unique and utter devotion to Christ.

This is the kind of devotion that Scripture talks about. Not here today gone tomorrow. These disciples were committed to the cause of Christ even to the point of death. This is not some loose affiliation or a fad that passes over time. No, these are passionate, living, breathing, examples who understood that life without Christ would be miserable (read Peter’s confession in John 6:68).

My hope by calling to reminder the example of the first Christians is to encourage you to follow their example as they followed the Lord’s example. Reflect for a moment on the apostle Paul’s example and that of his faithful colleagues. We find a summary of their “ant-like” example and obedience to the Lord even amidst danger. Paul tells the Corinthians about his zeal for Christ despite hardships. He does so by showing what true works done in faith endures, unlike the false works of false apostles:

*“<sup>23</sup>Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. <sup>24</sup>Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. <sup>25</sup>Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; <sup>26</sup>on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; <sup>27</sup>in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. <sup>28</sup>And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. <sup>29</sup>Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?” (2 Cor. 11:23-29).*

Unlike the pseudo ministry of false apostles, Paul’s works were truly done in faith as it was backed up by an undying dedication to Christ evidenced in his persistence. Even in the harshest of

circumstances Paul kept on being a faithful disciple of Christ. This should be an example to us all. We cannot let our circumstances stand between us and living our Christian duty. A true disciple will be disciplined to live the way Christ expects of him to live. Although tested by fire at times, this speaks of a devotion to Christ that remains. It is a devotion which, even though it has certain challenges, or ups and downs, will always produce the pleasant fruits of the Spirit over a lifetime lived for Christ.

Arthur Pink describes this devotion or “devotedness” as the Christian trait which always accompanies the mortification of our sin. He says: *“The lifelong work of mortification is but the negative side of the Christian life, being a means to an end: the positive aspect is that the redeemed and regenerated sinner is henceforth to live unto God, to wholly give up himself unto Him, to employ his faculties and powers in seeking to please Him and promote His glory...Devotedness to God is a living out of the decision and promise which the believer made at his conversion, when he gave himself unto the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5), chose Him for his highest Good and entered into covenant with Him to love Him with all his heart and serve Him with all his strength.”*

Pink concludes, saying: *“It is one of the most effectual means for spiritual growth to live in the daily realization that Christ has ‘redeemed us to God’ (Rev. 5:9): to restore His rights over us, to admit us to His favours and friendship, to enjoy fellowship and communion with him, that we may be for His pleasure and glory; then to conduct ourselves accordingly. Only as we are wholly devoted to his service and praise, only as all our springs and joy are in Him, do we actualize the design of our redemption. No progress in the Christian life can be made any further than as we are regulated by the fact ‘ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price’ (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). When that is really apprehended in the heart, the soul will become the consecrated priest and his body will be the living sacrifice offered unto God daily through Jesus Christ. Then will it be the devotedness not of constraint but of love. The more fully we are conformed to Christ’s death, the more closely we be following the example He has left us, the more (and the only) true Christian progress are we making.”*

The implication is clear then: If one is truly saved then such a person has become deeply devoted to Christ, and as a rule of life, will grow in devotion toward Christ. The question that remains though is how has your own personal devotion for Christ fluctuated since the time of your conversion? The possibility exists that one has experienced serious obstacles in this devotion. My encouragement to you is that you cannot allow circumstances to become a hindrance in the biblical call to live a life of being devoted to Christ. Jesus explained it well. Some in Christ’s time have said family responsibilities are more important than following him. To this Jesus answered: <sup>37</sup> *“Whoever loves father or mother*

*more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me*" (Matt. 10:37). Of course this does not mean that we are not obligated to care for our relatives, rather it means relatives may not stand between a disciple of Christ and his responsibility to be fully devoted to him. Others may have a tough time breaking with their old life and might want to continue on in their old, sinful ways. To this Jesus said: *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God"* (Luke 9:62). And the same applies to the one who loves any aspect of this present world more than Christ.

On the other hand those who belong to Christ patiently and persistently seek to obey their Lord in every aspect of their lives. As good athletes they do as Paul said: *"...forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 3:13-14). This kind of persevering persistence is at the heart of the Christian walk.

When we are obedient to Scriptures such as this one quoted above, then we will be like little ants. Yes, little ants who persistently, patiently, resiliently organise around this central goal, to gather their food against all odds. May every Christian be like the ant, as we gather our rewards in heaven through our wholehearted devotion to the cause of Christ. More devotion to prayer. More devotion to the church gatherings. More devotion to sacrificial giving. More devotion in love to our wives, children, and fellow Christian. This is a persistent life.