

Perseverance Personified  
By Patsy Kuipers, Guest Writer

Today's Treasure

***Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.***

***Hebrews 12:1-2***

After growing up in Delaware, one of the things I like best about living in Georgia is the relatively mild winters dotted with spring-like interludes. But sometimes, early hints of spring stretch into several days of balmy temperatures, enough to coax plants out of their winter hibernation early. Inevitably, the temperatures return to a more normal range. Every few years, though, they plummet to well below freezing, jeopardizing new foliage, early flowers, and buds on the verge of opening.

Such was the case last year. I watched as tender green shoots and spring ephemerals began popping out, hoping the unseasonable highs wouldn't give way to record-breaking cold. Nearly a week of days passed with temperatures in the 70s, well above average for March. Flower buds swelled, and some burst open, overcome by the welcoming warmth. The exuberant plants just couldn't contain themselves!

Seeing the forecast for nighttime temps in the lower 20s, I strolled my property, took some photos, and whispered encouragement to the young sprouts, "Hunker down, guys, you can make it!"

After successive nights of such cold, I walked my garden again to assess the damage. Some of my plant friends survived unscathed, while others bore significant evidence of the relentless cold. New leaves, bright green a few days before, hung brown and limp from branches. The first courageous flowers, zapped by the deep freeze, bore the same appearance.

I've watched my plants undergo various hardships over the years – drought, hail, and temperature extremes, both high and low. Their will to live inspires me to keep going through my own challenges. Their perseverance is one of the things I like best about gardening, the thing that makes it such a hope-filled endeavor.

I've learned that as long as the roots and crown of perennials haven't been damaged, the plants will survive. Thus, despite my sorrow at seeing their injuries, I knew most of my plants would persist and begin to flourish again when more typical spring weather

settled in. My confidence was well-founded. Some began to produce new leaves to replace the brown, lifeless ones days after the chilling temperatures subsided. Even those that weren't able to bear flowers last year would have the hope of producing buds and blooms this year.

### LIFE-GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT

Scripture praises perseverance, telling us that our suffering produces endurance, which in turn produces character, which then yields hope. James even goes so far as to counsel us to count it all joy when we encounter trials of various kinds because the testing of our faith produces steadfastness (James 1:2-3).

Jesus is our ultimate example of perseverance. He knew from before the foundation of the world what it would cost Him to save God's chosen ones. Still, He came, humbling Himself by taking on flesh, enduring the punishment and mistreatment due to us, and remaining obedient to the point of death on the cross.

Why? For the joy set before Him. And what was that joy? Spending eternity with us in the presence of His Father! Think about that, dear readers. Marvel and wonder at it! Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, endured far more than any of us will ever have to bear so we can be with Him forever. The writer of Hebrews urges us to consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that (we) may not grow weary or fainthearted. In (our) struggle against sin, (we) have not yet resisted to the point of shedding (our) blood (Hebrews 12:3-4).

Though we'll never have to bear the weight of God's wrath because of Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf, we will have troubles in this broken world, even times when we wonder how we'll endure and if we'll remain steadfast. But we're never alone. Just like the plants whose outward appearance is alarming but whose roots are strong and healthy, those of us who are rooted and built up in Jesus will draw on His living water and bear much fruit for His glory despite setbacks, daunting conditions, and seasons of dormancy. And one day, He'll call us Home, where we'll flourish forever.

### PRAYER

*Thank You, Lord*, for loving us unconditionally and sacrificially. You lived a sinless life yet became sin for us, enduring unimaginable pain and separation from the Father so we'll never have to. May we follow Your example of perseverance so our faith roots will grow strong and deep in the nourishing soil of Your presence.