

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Study Guide

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

LESSON 5: FAITHFULNESS AND PERSEVERANCE

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled Christian Character Development. When Christians fail and ministries fall apart, it is often due to a lack of character development in the leader. A Christian leader must take character development seriously, because discipleship requires that we grow in Christ-like character. This module examines a number of Christian character traits that are necessary for developing servant leadership. We will look at what the Bible teaches about these traits, and examples of Jesus and others displaying them. Godly character should be evident in the life of every follower of Christ, especially those who are leading others.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.



CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

LESSON 5: FAITHFULNESS AND PERSEVERANCE

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

This lesson explores the Christian character traits of faithfulness and perseverance, how Jesus and others in the Bible exhibited these traits, and how we can develop them in our own lives.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

All the virtues we are studying in this module were displayed by Jesus at some point in His earthly life. The goal of discipleship is to become more like Jesus, though we will never be perfect, holy and entirely sanctified in this lifetime. But we should always strive to be like Him; this lesson describes His faithfulness and perseverance. It is important to remember that character development isn't an optional part of discipleship. The process takes a lifetime and it isn't easy. To resist this development is to live in sin and disobedience. The virtues in this lesson require us to believe that God will do what He says, and that His plans are good. If we don't believe this, we cannot be faithful and persevere. If you are feeling weary and overwhelmed, remember that God will give you all you need to grow in character. He can be trusted!

GETTING STARTED

1. How do you react when obstacles block your plans and desires? Are you easily discouraged by those obstacles, or do they motivate you to press on with renewed zeal?

2. How has God shown Himself faithful to you? What does it mean to you that God is a faithful God?



STUDY

- ❖ **THE VIRTUES OF PERSEVERANCE AND FAITHFULNESS:** All of the virtues in this module can be ascribed to God. Faithfulness is one of the most commonly used to describe Him. Even when we are faithless, He is faithful! This incredible characteristic of God can be ours also if we pursue it. Just like the other virtues, perseverance and faithfulness are found in the Word of God. They confirm to us that God’s plans are good. They help us understand that difficulties, challenges and discipline are tools used by God for our good and His glory.
- ❖ **PERSEVERANCE:** As we continue walking in Jesus' footsteps, we must persevere even when it is not easy. The end goal is to follow Jesus, wherever He leads.

- What does the Bible say about the virtue of perseverance? Read [Galatians 6:9](#) and [Romans 5:3-4](#). According to these verses, what is the basis for persevering?

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- **Perseverance is not Passive Endurance:** We do not sit around and wait for life to improve during tough times. The Christian life is not a passive existence. Following Jesus is an adventure in which we must continually take steps toward becoming more like Him.
- **Perseverance is not Hopelessness:** We do not withdraw in our despair and lose hope. Rather, we endure difficulties in order to reach our goal. Those who persevere are very hopeful! They trust God and are not easily discouraged.
- **Perseverance is Persistence despite Obstacles:** We persevere when we stand firm, and actively persist in a task or path even though we face opposition. For the Christian, it means trusting God in the midst of trials, even until the end of our days. Perseverance has a goal. It counts the end result as more important than the difficulty in getting there. It helps us see our struggles from an eternal perspective. We endure the tough times that God allows because we know God’s plans are superior to our own.
- Consider the virtue of perseverance in your life. What do the following verses tell us?

James 1:12-25	
1 Corinthians 9:24-27	

- What obstacles do Christians encounter that could weaken their faith?



- What is the Christian’s end goal of perseverance? If we are running a race, what is the finish line and what is our prize?

- **PERSEVERANCE IN THE LIFE OF JESUS:** To keep going when the work is difficult and not immediately rewarding requires good character. The temptation to give up and be comfortable is natural to us as humans, but Jesus persevered! **Jesus Faced Opposition from People:** Religious leaders opposed Jesus, members of His own family did not understand His divine nature, people in His home town rejected His authority, and even His own friends and disciples doubted Him at times. Kings tried to kill Him, powerful people tried to trap Him, and wise people tried to make Him look like a fool (Hebrews 12:3, Matthew 17:17).
- **Jesus Faced the Evil of a Sinful World:** All of us live in a broken and sinful world. Because of this we have sickness, disease, hard labour and poverty. Jesus had no home, and lacked the support of a wife and family. He experienced thirst, hunger and pain. He endured storms on the sea. He suffered beatings and an excruciating death (Matthew 8:20, John 19:28).
- **Jesus Endured a Difficult Ministry to the End:** Had Jesus desired His own comfort instead of the will of God His Father, He could have stopped His ministry and terminated the plan of salvation. But the choice He made was to continue to the end, even when it looked like a hopeless endeavour. Jesus endured the suffering of crucifixion even though He had the power to not go through with it. His eyes were on the purpose for which He was sent.

Read Hebrews 12:1-3. What should we do in order to run with endurance? What is the goal for which we run? What was Jesus’ goal that allowed Him to persevere?



❖ **BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF PERSEVERANCE:** Many individuals in the Bible had to learn perseverance. It was difficult for them. They wanted to quit walking with God and do what they thought was best in their own eyes.

- **Enoch:** We may find it difficult to persevere over the course of our lifetime, but compared to some people in the Bible, our lives are relatively short! Enoch is an example of steadfast, undivided devotion to God. The Bible states that he “walked with God” for three hundred years, and at the end of his life he was rewarded by being taken to heaven without experiencing death! (Genesis 5:22,24, Hebrews 11:5, Jude 1:14-15).
- **Joseph:** We may face family members who do not support our faith, and even those who are hostile about it, but Joseph was nearly killed by his brothers. Instead, they sold him into slavery where he eventually faced prison and shame. His perseverance and good character allowed him to endure his captivity and even rise to a place of power and authority. He did not let his circumstances stop him from pursuing the dreams God had put in his heart. He was faithful to God and to his calling (Genesis 39:23, 41:43-45, 50:20).
- **Hannah:** The shame of not being able to bear a son could have destroyed Hannah’s faith in God; however, she persevered through the challenge. As a woman who was barren, she would have faced mocking, slander and been marginalized in society. Rather than letting this adversity define her life, she turned to God in prayer and poured out her soul before Him. Because of her perseverance, God blessed her and she bore Samuel. Because of her trust in God, she was rewarded with three more sons and two daughters. Hannah offered up thanksgiving to God for His faithfulness (1 Samuel 1:11-17, 1 Samuel 2:1-10).
- What stands out to you most in these examples? What was the outcome of these acts of perseverance? Would there have been negative consequences if they had just given up?

❖ **FAITHFULNESS:** This virtue is one of the fruits of the Spirit and another attribute most commonly ascribed to God Himself. In the original languages of the Bible, faith and faithful were the same word. Faithfulness requires that we trust God as we manage our expectations. Jesus promised that in this life we will have troubles. When we enter difficult situations, we should not become discouraged or quit or become faithless. God uses difficulties in our lives for our good and His glory.

- Read Hebrews 11:6 and John 14:15. Write down what these verses say about our faith in God.



- **Faithfulness is not Doubt:** Choosing to trust God completely and unconditionally is to choose not to doubt Him when plans do not go the way we anticipated. God has proven Himself to be faithful to us. We must choose to exercise faith in Him, not doubt Him (Proverbs 3:5-8, James 1:5-8, Mark 9:24).
- **Faithfulness is not Self Assurance:** We are sometimes tempted to have faith in our self instead of in God. This can prevent us coming to God in prayer with a concern or difficulty. We may even avoid asking a community of believers for help. Self-reliance is idolatry and sin. It keeps us from believing that God will do what He says He will. Remember how God has been faithful to you. Are you relying on Him? (Mark 11:22-24, Proverbs 3:5-6).
- **Faithfulness is Sustained Obedience:** Faithfulness is acting in obedience to God. As a servant of God, we must be faithful in our God-given responsibilities. We must be reliable, not letting doubt hinder us from doing what we know we ought to do. Even when difficulty comes, we will not quit or doubt that God is in control. We must be faithful in all areas of our lives – in our jobs, our marriages, relationships, service.
- Consider the virtue of faithfulness in your life. What do the following verses tell you about enduring and the rewards of obedience?

Revelation 2:10	
Matthew 6:31-33	
Psalms 119:30	

- Besides God, where do people look for security, strength and direction? What happens when we do not faithfully rely on God?

- In what areas of your life can you exercise faithfulness?



❖ **FAITHFULNESS IN THE LIFE OF JESUS:** Throughout the Bible, God was faithful to His people. Despite their unfaithfulness, He remained faithful to them. Jesus is the supreme example of faithfulness.

- Read Hebrews 3:1-6. What do these verses tell you about the faithfulness of Jesus? What role did Jesus faithfully uphold?

- **Jesus was Faithful in His Calling:** Just as Moses was faithful in his calling to lead the people of Israel, Jesus was faithful in His calling to bring salvation to the world. To accomplish this, He was obedient in all things, even to the point of death (Hebrews 3:1-6, Philippians 2:8).
- **Jesus is a Faithful High Priest:** The prophets of the Old Testament predicted that a 'faithful high priest' would come, whose service would never end. The Old Testament priests were required to offer sacrifices for their own sins and the sins of the people every year. Jesus was able to save forever and fully those who turn to Him, making Him the one true High Priest. Jesus defeated death, and so His office of high priest interceding for us, never ends. He is faithful for all time and eternity (Hebrews 5:1-10, Psalm 110, Revelations 19:16).

❖ **BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF FAITHFULNESS:** Many of God's people in the Bible were remarkable for their ability to trust God for their needs. Sometimes they asked Him for an heir or offspring, land, protection or position. In their faith they did not waver, but completely trusted God.

- **The Heroes of Faith:** Hebrews chapter 11 lists many men and woman of remarkable faith. They were faithful to God despite incredible difficulties. In every case their lives were characterized by whole-hearted obedience to God (Hebrews 11).
- **Abraham:** One of the heroes of faith was Abraham, who is often called 'the man of faith'. Consider that he lived before any Scriptures were available. There was not even a law in the land yet, and the people just hoped that God would not destroy them. When God's angel appeared to Abraham, he received great promises – countless offspring, a nation, and land. God also promised him that the whole world would be blessed through him. Though he saw no proof, Abraham believed God and had faith in Him, based on his knowledge of God's character. Abraham left his home and followed God to a new place. Because God was faithful to Abraham, Abraham remained faithful to God even though he did not see all the promises fulfilled in his lifetime (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:13-25, Galatians 3:7-9).



- **Elijah:** God called Elijah to pronounce judgement on His people because they sinned by following false gods. Elijah had so much faith in God that he called down fire from heaven to light an impossibly wet altar, and with God's help he won a contest against 800 prophets of Baal! He was a man full of obedience and faith. But there was an episode in Elijah's life where he was not so faithful. After being threatened by Jezebel, Elijah ran away; he was discouraged, hopeless, and wanted to die. He had expected a more dramatic result from his ministry – one that he had not received yet. It took time for his faith in God to be restored, and for him to trust in God's timing and plans again. God never left Elijah, but Elijah took his eyes off God temporarily and trusted in himself instead. We must not be like Elijah, having faith only when things are going our way (1 Kings 18:20-46, 19:1-18).
- What is most remarkable to you about these examples? How did the faith of these heroes impact others?

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❖ **EVALUATE YOUR OWN PERSEVERANCE AND FAITHFULNESS:** Both perseverance and faithfulness require us to believe that God is powerful to do what He says He will do, that He cares deeply about us, and that His plans are ultimately for our good. Christians who possess these virtues are not defeated by obstacles, nor stopped by adversity. They not only trust and obey God when everything is going well, but also in the storms and dark times of life. Their faith is not dependent on their circumstances, but on God who never changes.

- Consider the difficulties you might have in practising these virtues. Our actions are direct results of our beliefs. Are your beliefs about God's faithfulness correct? Are they Biblical? Does God always do what is right? Does He love you and have good plans for you?
- What can you learn about God's faithfulness from the following verses? Memorize one of these verses to help remind you of God's trustworthiness.

2 Timothy 2:13	
Romans 8:28	
Deuteronomy 7:9	



Hebrews 10:23	
1 Peter 4:19	

- Consider the attitudes and behaviours below. They are the opposite of faithfulness and perseverance. Are any of these evident in your life?
 - Not going to God in prayer when you have trouble
 - Being inconsistent in church attendance and involvement
 - Failing to regularly pray and study God’s Word
 - Dwelling on difficult circumstances in your life
 - Losing sleep worrying about how problems in your life will be resolved
 - Allowing a complaining and critical spirit to take root in your life
 - Lack of gratitude towards God
 - Not seeing fruit in your ministry or spiritual growth in your life
 - Obeying God only when it is convenient or when others are watching
 - Allowing disobedience and fear to continue in your life

- Have you known someone who turned away from God because the Christian life was not what they had expected, or was not ‘easy’? What was the result of their faithlessness? What led them to do this?

- Read Hebrews 12:1-15. What are some of the ‘weights’ we must lay aside in order to run the race of faith with endurance? What is the importance of looking towards Jesus, our goal? How does considering His perseverance and faithfulness help us to endure our present difficulties?



SUMMARY

- ❖ Perseverance is persistence despite obstacles. When we stand firm and trust in God, not giving up in a task or responsibility even though there is opposition, we display this virtue.
- ❖ Faithfulness is acting in sustained obedience to God, relying on Him even when we face challenges that we did not expect.
- ❖ Both of these virtues require us to believe that God will do what He says He will do, and that He loves us and is trustworthy. We can be faithful to God, because He is always faithful to us.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Consider the scenarios below. For each, reflect on these questions:

- o What would your natural response to this situation be?
- o How would a person who demonstrates faithfulness and perseverance respond to this situation?
- o What might the results be of demonstrating faithfulness and perseverance in this situation?

Your marriage is generally good, but sometimes difficult. You do not have much time to be with your spouse, as work and ministry often get in the way. You work alongside someone you are attracted to. It seems you have more in common with your co-worker, and genuinely enjoy time with them. They make you happy in ways you never thought possible. You allow yourself to consider what life would be like if you were married to this other person, which only feeds discontent in your marriage.

You have assurance that God wants you to travel to another land as a missionary. You want to share the Gospel with people who have no church or Bible in their language. As you begin to pursue this dream, you realize it will take you many years to learn the language and gather the necessary funds. The dream will not be easy to realize, and you begin to wonder if you have what it takes.

You live in a culture that relies heavily on superstition, folk religion, and rituals. You have chosen to not participate in them, out of your love for God and desire to be faithful to Him alone. But sometimes God does not answer your prayers the way you want. Your family pressures you to participate in their religious practices, and accuses you of dishonouring your family or bringing calamity on them.