

June 26, 2022

Text: Proverbs 3:21-26; Luke 9:57-62

Title: "Perseverance for the Long Run"

Beverly Masek was born and raised in Anvik, a very small village in the interior of Alaska, population 70. Anvik is one of the villages on the path of the Iditarod race, a dog sled race where one person runs through blizzards, ice, and wilderness for over a thousand miles! The racers have to stay on course and take care of the dogs. It's one of the most difficult tests of courage and strength there is!

When Beverly was only twelve-years-old, she said, "Someday I'm going to do that." She didn't own a dog or a sled. All she had was a dream. Each year she would watch the Iditarod teams come through her village and someone would ring a bell. And Beverly thought, "Someday they're gonna ring it for me and they did. Five times in fact, she ran and finished this race, an incredible feat.

I saw Beverly a few years ago, interviewed on "The Hour of Power" which I've been watching early Sunday mornings for years. She said, "I have to feed the dogs. I lift them. They're seventy or eighty pounds and I weigh only one hundred pounds. It's a big commitment and a lot of effort. Sometimes we run into an icy trail or fresh snow and sometimes it's forty below zero and I still have to take care of the dogs. There are times when I don't think I can make it. I have to trust the Lord to help me because every mile, as we get farther into the race, I get more tired and the dogs do too. But then again there's always that shining light at the end when I focus on

reaching my goal."

Jesus said to a certain man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." To me, "don't look back" means don't allow yourself to be derailed from the goal.

**ONE OF THE GREAT SECRETS OF ANY KIND OF SUCCESS IS THE IDEA OF PERSEVERENCE, FINDING THE POWER TO KEEP GOING.**

People often fail because *they quit too soon*. They give up before they have a chance to realize success.

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, was one person who discovered that success comes from not giving up. Let me read some excerpts from his diary: "Sunday, A.M., May 5 Preached in St. Anne's. Was asked not to come back anymore. Sunday, P.M., May 5 Preached in St. John's. Deacons said, "Get out and stay out." Sunday, A.M., May 12 Preached in St. Jude's. Can't go back there, either. Sunday, A.M., May 19 Preached in St. Paul's. Deacons called special meeting and said I couldn't return. Sunday, P.M., May 19 Preached on street. Kicked off street. Sunday, A.M., May 26 Preached in meadow. Chased out of meadow as bull was turned loose during service. Sunday, A.M., June 2 Preached out at the edge of town. Kicked off the highway. Sunday, P.M., June 2 Afternoon, preached in a

pasture. *TEN THOUSAND PEOPLE CAME OUT TO HEAR ME.* He was consistently asked not to come back anymore but at some point, something happened; something “clicked.” He found his groove, whatever, and he became a highly sought-after speaker and attracted thousands.

Good things happen when we hang in there and won't be defeated. **THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE WHEN YOU BELIEVE THAT THE CAUSE IS JUST AND THE GOALS ARE WORTHWHILE.** Now, there may be some people who ought to quit; cut their losses; chart a better course to achieve the goal. When we're pursuing a goal, it's best to have feedback and help from others to get there. You can't force things to happen. Sometimes you have to wait for the right moment. But give up? Not if the cause is just and the goal is worthwhile.

Jesus' imagery is of a farmer who's concentrating on the furrow before him guiding the plow with one hand and guiding the oxen with the other. Looking away even for a moment results in a crooked row. Don't look back.

**WHAT'S YOUR GOAL? IN GENERAL, OUR GOAL AS CHRISTIANS, AND AS THE CHURCH, IS TO PURSUE OUR LIFE-LONG COMMITMENT TO SERVE CHRIST.** This is the message of this verse. It isn't to be entered into half-heartedly. That results in failure. Jesus told a man who said he would follow him that it's not going to be easy. And to the man who wanted to tend to his ailing father first, he said, “if you make excuses to wait, you'll never get started.” And to

the one that needed to go home and say goodbye to his family he said, “don’t look back or you’ll lose focus on the goal.”

In the early days of the church, a lot of people died as a result of persecution. They were called “martyrs” for Christ. Rather than weakening the church, it strengthened the commitment of those who stood with them.

Our faith, and the freedom we have in this country to practice our faith wasn’t won with ease or half-hearted commitment but with a power and perseverance that kept them in for the long run.

Perseverance. That’s the kind of faith that’s needed whether you’re running an Iditarod or in our prayers that things are going to improve for our friends and family and to see this wonderful church become all it can be for Christ. There's no greater goal than that of serving Him. Amen.