

PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF



*8 Devotions to Help You Push Forward
in Spite of Difficulties*

Carina Alanson

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Day 1: Putting Down Roots	3
Day 2: Running With Purpose and Perseverance	5
Day 3: God, You Are My Strength	7
Day 4: Fix Your Mind	8
Day 5: Pave Your Way Forward With Past Victories	9
Day 6: You Will Run and Not Grow Weary	11
Day 7: When It Looks Like Nothing Is Happening	12
Day 8: One Step at a Time	13
Let's Keep In Touch!	14

Introduction

At the beginning of 2020, I felt God give me the word “persistence.” I knew He was calling me to hold on to His promises in spite of difficult circumstances, so I gathered my strength and determined to persist to the best of my ability.

When the end of the year rolled around, I contemplated what persistence had looked like for me over the previous months. As I did, I realized a truth that may seem obvious, but I had never thought much about before: Persistence isn’t pretty.

While I had been faithful to push forward despite my situation, I’d also had many messy moments of crying and questioning. I’m tempted to feel embarrassed by my less-than-pristine performance as a persistent woman—ideally, I would like to coast through my problems coolly and calmly. But that’s not what persistence is actually about. Persistence is about being willing to expend blood, sweat, and tears to pursue the thing that God is asking you to pursue.

The good news is, even though persistence isn’t pretty, it does pay off. In Galatians, the apostle Paul said: “Let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up” (Galatians 6:9 NLT).

If you’ve downloaded this devotional, I’m guessing that you’re in the middle of a persisting season. Maybe, like me, God is simply asking is for you to keep believing His promises. Maybe He’s prompting you to keep showing love to a difficult colleague. Or perhaps He’s nudging you to apply for your dream job one more time.

Whatever you’re facing and whatever God is calling you to persist in, my hope is that these devotions provide the encouragement you need to take a deep breath, take heart, and press ahead. Because even though I know how hard it can be to keep going when it feels like your circumstances aren’t changing, I also know this: On the other side of your hardship is a harvest of blessings!

In purpose, faith, and perseverance,

Carina Alanson

Day 1



Putting Down Roots

“The godly shall flourish like palm trees and grow tall as the cedars of Lebanon. For they are transplanted into the Lord’s own garden and are under his personal care.” Psalm 92:12-13 (TLB)

There’s a gardening proverb that goes like this: “The first year they sleep, the second year they creep, the third year they leap!”

This little adage is a reminder that the first year a perennial (a plant that lives for multiple years) is planted, you won’t see much outward growth. This is because they are putting all their effort into establishing a root system—an important but invisible task.

In the second year, you may see a bit more growth, but it’s in the third year after the plant is firmly rooted and has fully acclimated to its new home, that you’ll really see a perennial start to flourish.

Isn’t this the truth in our own lives? Whenever we get “transplanted,” whether it’s into a new job, a new family (such as through marriage), or into a new city, it takes time to adapt. The initial months in our new habitat revolve around putting down roots and adjusting to our new environment. It may feel as if all our energy is focused on just getting by, with little left over for anything else. Eventually, we start to get the hang of our new role but, often, it isn’t until after many months—maybe even several years—have passed that we really start to thrive.

In Psalm 92, David wrote, “The godly shall flourish like palm trees and grow tall as the cedars of Lebanon. For they are transplanted into the Lord’s own garden and are under his personal care” (12-13 TLB).

Whatever change you may be grappling with, whatever stage you may be in the midst of, take

courage and know this: You are in God's garden and you are under His personal care.

If you're in a more root-focused phase, have patience with yourself. Learning new ways of being and building new connections is hard work. Give yourself the space you need to put down roots, and trust that, in time, you will be leaping with new growth and bearing beautiful fruit for our King.

Day 2



Running With Purpose and Perseverance

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly.” 1 Corinthians 9:24-26 (NIV)

Most dogs like to run, but I’ve never seen a dog run with more purpose and determination than a sled dog.

Sled dogs are born and bred for speed and endurance, and they love nothing more than to be harnessed to a sled and pull for all their worth. Once they hear the command "Hike!" their sole focus is on running as fast as they can in the direction their master signals.

Dog mushing is a big sport in my home state of Alaska, and many mushers race their teams in local or international competitions, such as the Yukon Quest. When a musher is serious about winning the race, she puts her dogs through countless hours of physical training. She may also implement other conditioning, such as feeding the dogs a special diet. Everything the dogs do revolves around one goal: winning the race.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24-26, Paul wrote, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly” (NIV).

Like a sled dog, and like the apostle Paul, I want to take my race seriously. I want to maintain a firm grasp of what I was born for, and I want to passionately pursue that with everything in me. Doing so requires keeping my attention on God’s voice and following His direction. It means subjecting myself to training and the sharpening of the gifts He’s given me. It means letting go of anything that might

detract or distract from my ability to push onward into what He is calling me to.

I want to run my race in such a way as to win the prize. And at the end of the race, I want to hear my master say, "Well done!"

What has God called you to in this season of life? Are you training for your race and running with purpose and perseverance?

Day 3



God, You Are My Strength

“The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.” Psalm 28:7 (ESV)

Joyce Meyer, one of my favorite Bible teachers, said something on a recent broadcast that changed the way I pray. She said that instead of asking, “God give me strength,” she now declares, “God, you are my strength.”

Before I started following her example, when I prayed for strength, my focus was often on how weak I felt. But I’ve found that when I do as Joyce Meyer does and proclaim that God is my strength, I shift the focus from myself and my limitations and onto God and His unlimited power. Every time I do this, I find relief in remembering God wants me to cast my burden on Him, not carry it on my own.

Of course, there’s nothing wrong with asking God for strength. But if the prayer for strength is frequently on your lips, I encourage you to try moving your attention from what you need to Who God is. Together, let’s declare: “The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him” (Psalm 28:7 ESV).

Day 4



Fix Your Mind

***"Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."
Philippians 4:8 (NIV)***

Why do I live here?! Why does ANYONE live here?!

On one of the coldest days of the year, these thoughts streamed unbidden across my mind. Though I usually love my subarctic home, sometimes the severity of our winters feels intolerable. I've learned, however, that one secret to thriving in this forbidding environment is to keep my eyes fixed on all the beauty around rather than the hardships at hand. So, as quickly as the thoughts came, I reminded myself of several good reasons why I live where I do (there are no snakes, scorpions, or hurricanes, for a start).

How about you? Are you in the midst of a difficult season? Are the challenges of your situation so formidable they've become your sole focus and, as I did, you wonder, *Why am I here?* Perhaps you're a weary mom wrangling small children. Maybe you're a student overwhelmed with coursework. Or maybe you've recently retired and your days feel empty. Whatever your circumstances, I hope to encourage you to search beyond the obvious discomfort to the beauty of your season. What makes where you are or what you're doing worthwhile? What opportunities does your current season afford that a different season may not?

In Philippians 4:8 (NIV) Paul instructs us to think about "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable." If you're having trouble finding something good about your season, try going through Paul's list and asking, "In my current situation, what is true? What is lovely? What is admirable?"

Do whatever you need to do to get your mind fixed on the good. Though doing this probably won't make the difficulties disappear, it is sure to help you feel more joy and find the grace you need to carry on.

Day 5



Pave Your Way Forward With Past Victories

***"The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here; it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you want it, take it; there is no sword here but that one."* 1 Samuel 21:9 (NIV)**

Remember how after using a sling to embed a stone into Goliath's head, David took the giant's own sword and used it to decapitate him?

All of Israel, including their king, Saul, rejoiced in David's bravery and his God-given victory. Unfortunately, Saul's favor didn't last. He grew jealous of David and eventually launched a campaign to kill him.

As David ran for his life, he stopped in a town called Nob. There, he encountered a priest named Ahimelek. When David asked for a weapon to take with him on his journey, Ahimelek said: "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here; it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you want it, take it; there is no sword here but that one" (1 Samuel 21:9 NIV).

"There is none like it; give it to me," David replied.

I wonder what was going through David's mind as he picked up that sword. I imagine that when he felt the heft of the sharpened metal, he remembered the exhilaration of seeing Israel's enemy vanquished, and I like to think he gained fresh strength and courage as he reflected on his former exploits.

While there's no way to know exactly what he thought, we do know this: David drew upon the weapon of his past victory to help himself through his present difficulty.

Though you and I may not be fighting oversized Philistines or murderous kings, we can do the same

thing. When we face conflict in our relationships, obstacles to our goals or dreams, issues with our health, or other problems, we can overcome, in part, by remembering our past victories.

How has God helped you succeed? What tools, skills, or testimonies have you gleaned from former challenges that can be applied to your situation today? Whatever you're facing, don't give up! Instead, take heart knowing that God has equipped you with everything you need to triumph.

Day 6



You Will Run and Not Grow Weary

“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” Isaiah 40:29-31 (NIV)

A new week was just beginning, but I already felt overwhelmed by the responsibilities before me. Though they were all good and all God given, I wondered if I had the energy and emotional stamina to do them well.

Seeking encouragement, I turned to Isaiah 40:29-31: “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (NIV).

As I pondered these verses, I decided to personalize the last few lines of the passage. Instead of “they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint,” I declared: “I will write and not grow weary, I will edit and not be faint.” I continued praying through the verse, inserting other needs, such as the need for strength to be there for my family and to manage my household adequately.

As I pressed into God, I could feel the Holy Spirit comforting and sustaining me, and though it was a challenging week, by His grace, I made it through.

What are you facing this week? I encourage you to think of whatever you have to do and fill in the blanks in this sentence: I will _____ and not grow weary, I will _____ and not faint. Remember: God promises to supply all you need—including the strength and stamina to accomplish the tasks set before you!

Day 7



When It Looks Like Nothing is Happening

“The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus.” Isaiah 35:1 (ESV)

As I lay in bed on a cold November morning, cocooned in my downy white comforter, I contemplated the impending end of another year. Ten months prior, I’d felt God speak the word “blossom” as my word for the year, but I struggled to see how that word had been fulfilled. This had not been a year of blossoming—at least not in the ways I’d most hoped for.

In the middle of my moody mulling, a text notification interrupted my thoughts. “Good morning, Carina!” the text said. “Rearranged my plants for better lighting and look what I found!” Above the text was a picture of a cactus shoot with a big, pink bud on it.

My friend’s message continued: “Somehow, a segment of my Christmas cactus got into the soil of the spider plant, and then when I turned it, I saw it was about to bloom!” She went on to explain how she’d been working hard to get the parent plant, from which this stray segment had grown, to bloom to no avail. Yet while nothing seemed to be happening with the parent plant, something was happening behind the scenes, and, in a hidden place, the desired blossom was in progress.

In the midst of my dispirited, end-of-year thoughts, I felt clear encouragement from God: “Don’t let go! Hold on to hope! Something is happening!”

Even when it looks like nothing is happening, God is at work. While we see just a portion, God sees the big picture. In Isaiah 35:1, we’re promised that “the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus” (ESV).

Things that look empty and lifeless one minute may be blossoming before our eyes the next. If you’re struggling to see the results you desire in your life, hold on to the hope that God is at work behind the scenes. Nothing is impossible with Him!

Day 8



One Step at a Time

“The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand.” Psalm 37:23-24 (NIV)

With what appeared to be every ounce of his strength, the newborn reindeer calf pushed himself to a standing position. His spindly legs trembled, and his entire fuzzy, brown body shook with the effort of remaining upright. Close behind, mama reindeer hovered protectively, keeping watch over her baby’s progress. The calf took one halting step forward—then tripped and tumbled to the ground.

I got to watch this baby reindeer learning to walk via a video shared by our local large animal research farm. The caption said, “The first step is always the hardest!”

Isn’t that the truth?

Whether we’re learning to cook, change a diaper, write, paint, knit, give a speech, or grow a garden, our first attempts at any new endeavor tend to be the hardest. Initially, we may feel discouraged by the difficulty. We might be embarrassed by our inexperience or reluctant to perform in front of others for fear of a misstep.

But the way we gain proficiency is the same way a baby reindeer learns to walk: one wobbly step at a time. When we’re faithful to push past our discomfort and keep practicing, our steps grow steadily stronger. Before too long, we find that we can run with grace and ease!

What new things are you stepping into in your life? Are you starting a new job? Adapting to a new city? Adjusting to parenthood? Taking on a new role at church? As you move forward, keep this promise in mind: “The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand” (Psalm 37:23-24 NIV).

Let's Keep in Touch!

Thank you again for joining me on the journey of preserving in spite of difficulties! I hope you've enjoyed the devotions as much as I've enjoyed writing and sharing them. My prayer is that as you've read, you've grown closer to Jesus and been empowered to pursue all He has for you.

Though our devotional time together is over for now, I would love to stay connected.

If you haven't done so already, I'd like to invite you to sign up for my email list. When you do, I'll send you updates on similar devotionals or courses I may create in the future, as well as my weekly-ish blog post, which is devoted to helping you live with purpose and grow in your relationship with God. As a subscriber, you'll also gain access to my free resource library, which includes my video "How You Can Express Your Purpose No Matter Your Life Season," and my printable PDF "What The Bible Says About Your Purpose—32 Verses," plus other fun printables. And if you want to support my ministry, just know that simply being on my list is a great way to do that.

If you're not on there already and you would like to be, you can join my list by going to CarinaAlanson.com—you'll find a sign-up form right on the front page. You can also email me at carinaalanson@gmail.com with a note letting me know you'd like to be added, and I'll get you added. I'd also love to hear any thoughts or experiences you've had while reflecting on these devotions, so please feel free to message me.

Other ways to connect with me include on Instagram [@CarinaAlanson](https://www.instagram.com/CarinaAlanson) and on Facebook [@CarinaAlanson](https://www.facebook.com/CarinaAlanson)

God bless you, and I look forward to connecting again soon!

Love and blessings,

Carina Alanson