



Tests: Rewarding Perseverance

What if perseverance were acknowledged, not just perfection?

“On the wall at the front of Jane’s classroom hangs a photo frame, but it does not contain the class picture. Above it is a large, vibrant, and colorful sign that reads, ‘FANTABULOUS EFFORT!’ Underneath the frame is a photograph of a boy — one of the little photos routinely taken each year at school. Inside the frame is a workbook open to a page of math problems. As I look at the workbook, I expect to see a page with 100% of the problems correctly answered; far from it. Many of the calculations are not correct, but the comment written by Jane underneath the work says, ‘Well done, Nathan. What an improvement!’

“I did not hang the frame there to display the best work done in the class, but to recognize the effort made by students. It is hung at the front of the room so that it is prominent. I always draw my class’s attention to the new entry in the frame. In this case I talked to the whole class about how I could see that Nathan has shown great improvement in subtraction. The class applauds, and this seems genuine, for they all know how it feels to have their effort recognized.

“This public acknowledgment is an important part of the classroom practice as Jane’s class encourages one another and learns to share in each other’s learning, celebrating the small daily accomplishments. That afternoon, Nathan took home a certificate in the shape of a photo frame, stating that his subtraction work was featured in the ‘Fantabulous Effort’ frame today.”

What's going on here?

Jane saw her teaching as a chance to encourage students regardless of whether they achieved high scores, and show that she had noticed and valued them as well as valuing perseverance.

Jane engaged the whole class in actively celebrating hard work from students, and let them experience a reward other than high grades for correct answers.

She reshaped her practice by finding concrete ways to model encouragement, using classroom display and certificates to support encouragement, and planning for how students could encourage each other.

What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

Perseverance is the virtue that develops character in difficult times. Perseverance is carrying on against the odds. It is linked to patience, faith, and trust. Perseverance is a form of strength, for it requires the ability to resist temptation. Hope inspires perseverance with the knowledge that (1) we can make a difference with God and (2) the world will not always be as it is. The Bible calls people to persevere in doing good; perseverance in wrongdoing is not virtue.

What difference does it make?

Often it is only achievement that is recognized and not effort. High achievement should not be downplayed, but in some cases it can come effortlessly from natural ability and does not require character. From the point of view of character development, effort and perseverance can be combined with low or high achievement to develop maturity.

Where could we go from here?

The same idea can be used at the upper elementary level with a sign reading “Effort Worth Framing” or “Exemplary/Excellent Effort.”

At the annual awards ceremony, consider acknowledging effort and perseverance leading to improvement as well as “firsts.”

Digging deeper

Perseverance brings about maturity (James 1:2-4), for it is in facing life's difficulties that we grow and our characters deepen (Romans 5:3-4). The Bible calls Christians to persevere in doing what is good and right (2 Thessalonians 3:13), persevering in faith and in hope.

God knows our situation; He will not judge us as if we had no difficulties to overcome. What matters is the sincerity and perseverance of our will to overcome them. C. S. Lewis

The Bible compares life to a race in which the runners have to persevere to cross the finish line (Hebrews 12:1). The Apostle Paul talks of his own life toward the end as a race faithfully completed (2 Timothy 4:7). It is not about being first to cross the finish line, but about completing the marathon of a life lived faithfully to God and others. An example of this was Michael Watson, who completed a marathon in 2003 that took him over six days. Michael had suffered horrific brain injuries in the boxing ring and was not expected to live. He had lost his speech and spent six years in a wheelchair. Michael rediscovered his faith in God and refused to give up, eventually crossing the finish line with the man who had injured him and whom he had forgiven many years before (http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/athletics/london_marathon_2003/2958573.stm).

What keeps people going? The answer is a relationship that starts now and continues in a deeper way in another life. C. S. Lewis called this life "the shadow lands" compared to the depth and reality of the next. The Apostle Paul talks of now as seeing in a fogged-up mirror (1 Corinthians 13:12) compared to knowing God face to face. The experience of God now is such that it encourages Christians to persevere in order to know him better. The encouragement and love of others plays a vital role along the way.

Christ modeled perseverance (2 Thessalonians 3:5) throughout his life in the face of temptation, hardship, and suffering.

Let us then continually persevere in our hope...Let us then be imitators of His [Christ's] patience; and if we suffer for His name's sake, let us glorify Him. For He has set us this example in Himself, and we have believed that such is the case. Polycarp

Perseverance is more than endurance. It is endurance combined with absolute assurance and certainty that what we are looking for is going to happen. Oswald Chambers



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