Aiming at Completion

"And I am sure of this that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:6)

The Living Bible translates this verse, ***"And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will keep right on helping you growing His grace until His task within you is finally finished on that day when Jesus Christ returns."***

I often ask myself the question, 'How can I continue to grow?' 'How can I continue to experience the all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus?' 'How can I continue to be "the fullness of blessing" to others?'

I know God will always be faithful to me and will pour out on me His unchanging grace, yet in spite of this I often find my life short of always being triumphant! I sometimes find I have entered into a period of wonderful blessing with a degree of the anointing of the Holy Spirit, but I have not continued! Why not? So no blessing, however wonderful or however deep, seems to be a guarantee against future relapse. So what are the conditions for, "keeping on keeping on?"

The conditions for "keeping on"

Clearly the power that is the source of blessing is continuous. It doesn't fluctuate or break down because it is God's power and not our own power. So this power is always continuous and always sufficient. We read in 2 Pet. 1:3, ***"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness …."***

So why do we seem to break down? I think it is because it is one thing for the supply of God's power and grace to be provided and quite another thing for me to appropriate it. I may be like a bottle thrown into the sea. If I have a cork in my bottle I will remain empty. So the blockage is not due to the sea but to the bottle itself. So I am the hindrance! I lack the two most important factors in my spiritual life: surrender and trust.

Surrender

Until we have yielded (given) ourselves to the Lord Jesus, we ourselves are occupying the centre of control, the seat of government. We try to manage by ourselves – to make our own plans and seek our own pleasure. We try to provide for our own needs and fight our own battles.

But as long as this is our condition, we will be complete strangers to the rest that the Lord Jesus has promised us, the liberty of His guidance, the enjoyment of His provision and the comfort of His control.

To surrender to Him is to allow "the government" to be on His shoulders, the responsibility of subduing all our enemies in His hands and the supply of our needs a matter for Him to undertake. So now the battle is the Lord's. ***"O that you had paid attention to My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river and your righteousness like the waves of the sea; your (spiritual) offering would have been like the sand …."*** (Is. 48:18)

It is only a surrendered person who truly listens; not seeking to do his/her own will, but following God's leading. ***"O that My people would listen to Me …. I would soon subdue their enemies."*** (Ps. 81:13-14)

This act of surrender substitutes the Lord Jesus for 'self' within the whole region of our inner being: **"Not I, but Him"**. Our individuality is not destroyed; it is ennobled because the centre is occupied by the Lord Jesus. The person remains "me", but the Lord Jesus is at the centre of my personhood.

Trust

This is how the life of faith begins. Having committed ourselves and all we have into His hands, we now trust Him to carry out His promises. Our life of faith is a life of perpetually taking hold of and

making real in our experience all that God has promised. The "land of promise" is ours to begin with. But it becomes ours in a true sense as we, by faith, step into it. ***"Every place at the soul of your foot will tread upon I have given you, just as I promised …."*** (Josh. 1:3) This is an Old Testament equivalent of the New Testament promise, ***"According to your faith be done to you."*** (Mt. 9:29)

So the two conditions are: **an attitude of absolute surrender** and **the practice of perpetual trust**. If you make these an inherent part of your life there will be continuous blessing.

Practical directions for "keeping on"

We must never forget that to the end of our days we will be exposed to the tendency to go back. This tendency needs to be faced and continually counteracted. But only "Christ in us" can do this. The fullness of the Holy Spirit doesn't remove this tendency. There is always the tendency to relapse. I think that for Adam, in his sinlessness, there was no tendency, but there was a possibility of sinning. In this world we are never sinless. There is both the tendency and the possibility of falling.

Peter, as he came out of the boat onto the water to meet the Lord Jesus, might have been made to stand/walk on the water without sinking in two ways. He might have been made weightless by the Lord Jesus' miraculous power. It is conceivable that such a change could have been made in Peter's material body – somewhat similar to the axe-head of the student in the Elisha story. (2 Kings 6:6). Jesus could have made Peter walk on the water by counteracting gravity moment by moment by His own omnipotent power.

In the first case, Peter would not have needed the power of the Lord Jesus moment by moment to stay on the surface of the water. But we see that Peter is absolutely dependent on the Lord Jesus every second to keep him from sinking. So I don't believe Peter's physical nature was changed. The only reason he could walk on the water was because the Lord Jesus counteracted gravity.

I don't know if this is a helpful analogy. It is when we cease to depend on the Lord Jesus alone that we begin to sink. Some have been tempted to think that a spiritual experience they have had has been so real, so wonderful and so complete in their consciousness that the very tendency to evil has been removed. This is self-deception!

Let us beware of two things:

1. A spirit of self-complacency

Thank God that your experience of Him has been so entirely changed! But because the relief and deliverance has been so real, you may be tempted to think you have reached a point in your spiritual life where vigilance and trust are no longer needed as in earlier stages. Perhaps you are tempted to think there is not the same necessity to, ***"Press towards the mark/goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"***. (Phil. 3:14)

Sometimes a spirit of contentment with the amount of blessing that is already yours may be creeping in. You may be making that blessing a stopping point rather than a fresh starting point. Paul wrote, ***"Not that I have already obtained or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own."*** (Phil. 3:12)

2. A spirit of laziness and spiritual indolence

Beware of sluggishness in our hearts and minds that makes us less likely to pray. Always have a spirit of contrition – the humble and contrite heart. ***"But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at My Word."*** (Is. 66:2) This is the secret of a tender conscience.

So cultivate the habit of immediate confession. The moment you are conscious of any sin remember 1 Jn. 1:9, ***"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."***

Maintain an attitude of instant obedience. Maintain the habit of looking to God alone for your deliverance, ***"If God is for me, who can be against me?"*** Faith is seen in the restfulness with which we commit all to Him and step out in implicit obedience. Act without waiting for feelings. Cultivate these things so they become life habits. They will help us to be effective in a steady, even walk with God.

Be diligent in the ordinary disciplines of the spiritual life

You won't always have extraordinary opportunities. You may have some, but such excitement can be a hindrance to real progress. So be diligent in prayer. Take time to sing praises and worship in song. Make the Bible the subject of continuous and prayerful study. Give time to meditation. Give yourself time to take truth into your believing heart. Then begin at once to act out the truth you have received.

If we diligently use this means of grace, our difficulties of "keeping on" will slowly be eroded.

Someone has written this poem.

Only admit Me to your heart
and I will there abide,
and all the riches of My grace
I will to you confide.

Only commit your way to Me
and I will guide aright,
and lead you lovingly along
till faith is lost in sight.

Only submit to my decree
and you will surely find
the sweetness of the will of God
can give true peace of mind.

Only transmit your burdens all
and I the load will bear,
and you will find 'tis rest indeed
to cast on Me your care.

Only now yield yourself to Me
and trust Me day by day
and I will be the Lord – your life,
your guide, your strength, your stay.