

Last week, Dave wrapped up our Reaching out with Reason series, talking about doubt. Namely, that doubt is a normal part of our lives, even an invited part of our faith walk, and we are to confidently reach out to others not because we have all the answers, but because we know where to look – to the Lord – and with Him leading the way we can move through doubt and multiply His Kingdom.

And so today, we are going to continue to look at how we multiply out of our faith journey in another area related to doubt. **Perseverance.**

Perseverance happens to be my WOTY this year. I considered a lot of other words, like courage, resolve, diligence, obedience, but in the end, I settled on perseverance. Not just perseverance in the sense we normally think of, as in moving forward through the tough times, but in our faith journey, in moments that don't seem as clear-cut that need a perseverance mindset and it's where we'll spend most of our time on today.

But first, some foundation – when perseverance is brought up, what's your first thought? Or perhaps better phrased, who is your first thought? Could be someone in your family, your group of friends, could be someone you read about, heard about, or watched a movie about. We tell our kids to persevere through the tough times, we want our heroes to persevere when it looks the worst, and we encourage others to hang in there and fight the good fight despite setbacks.

Thomas Edison famously failed so many times he had the quote, "I have not failed, I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." In sports, you

can think of your favorite team and a time when they've had to persevere in the way we often think of it, like our K-State Men's Basketball team. Not long ago, they were in the midst of their toughest time of the season, but they kept persevering, believing in each other, their coaches, relying on their faith in the Lord, and now they have been able to persevere through adversity. Or I think of Ayoka Lee, who has suffered injury after injury in her career, but continues to persevere because of her inner strength and knowledge that fighting through rehab will lead to something worth the fight. I think of marathon runners, like my wife, who train for months to run 26.2 miles – but don't actually run that full distance in training. They ramp up sure, but they leave it to that day of the race to run the extra 6 miles or so. They're counting on their perseverance to get them through the physical pain but will also lead them to that great sense of accomplishment few get to experience. And there are plenty of examples of that type of perseverance in the Bible, such as Joseph with his brothers and the Pharaoh's wife, Job of course, and in the New Testament with the apostles and Jesus.

So, that type of perseverance is commendable and part of my WOTY, sure – a reminder to Keep on Swimming as Dory would say, when the going gets tough, or the book We're Going On A Bear Hunt – we can't go over it, we can't go under it, we're just gonna have to go through it. But there's another reason why I felt the Lord leading me to this word this year.

Perseverance can also be used for the times when as a believer my walk with Christ has stagnated or hit a rut. This type of perseverance requires reflection and reorientation but also courage – an inner fortitude to move past moments that good or bad, keep me from growing in my faith journey with Christ. This isn't to say guilt and shame are to be weighed more heavily, no we talked about the Shame Monster before and how it can throw off the balance of conviction vs condemnation. No, this type of perseverance, the one that beckons us to continue to grow in our faith journey is born out of a desire to achieve our final goal, being with Jesus and to follow as best we can, in the path he laid out for us.

We'll be looking at mainly **Hebrews 12:1-3**. Let's read it.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”

So, a couple of things here. First, we have a “**therefore**” at the beginning of this passage. And as Pastor Dave likes to say, we need to know what the “therefore” is there for. In this case, it references the

chapter before, chapter 11 where Paul lists out all the great examples of faith in the Bible. It is this list of normal, flawed human beings who showed great faith that should encourage us. Because in theory, they are in Heaven encouraging us on as well. So, that's the, therefore. And so, with this in mind, **we can what**, "lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely" **to do what**, "run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus". Let's pause here for a moment.

How many hikers do we have in here? Our family loves to hike. We don't get to do it as often these days with all four of us running busy schedules. But my favorite vacations are the ones where we can get out to the mountains or the wilderness somewhere and hike. And what I love about the mountains and hiking in the mountains is not only the splendor of God's Kingdom, with animals, plants, lakes, rivers, and the like, but the quietness of it, the smell in the air, and the challenge of climbing to the top so see what's there, doing it with people I love.

These pictures (6-10, then stop on 11) are from a few hikes we've done over the years and every hike at the outset you have that excitement about what you might see, what's waiting at the end of the journey, and what experiences you'll have over the next few hours or most of the day. You know from the start that you're going to need perseverance to get through it all.

I think our walk with Christ is a lot like taking a hike up a mountain. It's not a perfect metaphor, but think of it, we start out at the base of the mountain when we accept Christ, excited about the adventure ahead

but not yet knowing what challenges or triumphs wait to come on our journey.

And the **first verse of our passage and the start of verse 2** give us this visual of Jesus laying out the path for us, like a trail to follow up a mountain. The Bible is our map, showing waypoints from the past that can help shape our journey now. As mentioned earlier, the chapter before lists many people who stumbled, fell, got back up again and can serve either as cautionary tales or as encouragement.

I recently read a few books, and both mentioned the life of **William Wilberforce** in reference to perseverance. Wilberforce was an Englishman back in the late 1700s who after becoming a Christian became focused on trying to abolish slavery in the United Kingdom. Obviously, though, this was going to be a tall task – quite a mountain sized issue if there ever was one back in the 18th century. Slave trading was big business, so Wilberforce had to be careful. Becoming one of the youngest members of Parliament at age 21, he was excited and eager to begin his cause but soon found his path to be not as straight as he first thought. He would have to use his smarts, his intuition, and his faith to allow God's timing to work. So, he used his connections to begin talking with members of Parliament about this issue. Knowing that his fellow representatives would be hesitant to put themselves out on a limb to defend his beliefs due to public sentiment and the impact on the business of slave trading, Wilberforce appealed to them with facts. **In a famous speech** before Parliament on May 12, 1789, at the

age of 30, Wilberforce presented a well-researched argument for the instability, the low success numbers when traveling, and the overall horrors of slave trading, including non-emotionally describing how slaves were packed into the hull of a ship. No manacles or chains were shown, just the image from a sailor that showed how to maximize installing slaves to bring home. His goal was abolition, but to get there he realized it would take perseverance, willing to wait on God's timing, using courage to act when called. So, he attacked the slave trading industry first showing its ineffectiveness. And Parliament passed his resolutions and slavery was abolished right? NO! Ten years later, talk about God's timing, ten years later, his resolutions first suggested during this speech, and subsequently presented routinely after, were finally accepted in 1799, ending the slave trade in the U.K.

Quite the story, and Wilberforce's resolve to keep going is commendable. He balanced being patient in God's timing and acting when opportunities were presented for his cause, his mountain climb.

God's timing is interesting because when hiking up a mountain it's easy to want to hurry to the next stop. But as any hiker will tell you, you can't burn your energy early or you'll have nothing left for the hard stuff on the way. This is an interesting concept to think on considering where we are as a church now, trying to grasp what multiply means to each of us and as a church body when we reach out and engage with those around us. Waiting on God's timing and direction is a key part of our reaching out and multiplying. There is action that has to be

initiated by us no doubt, God did not design us to be mindless robots. That's why we went through the last series with Dave, going over the validity of the Bible, Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and our doubts. Growth occurs when we acknowledge those things, give them to God, and listen to His direction.

I remember my first marriage ended around the year 2000. It was a difficult time. I was young enough to not have failed at many things yet. That was really the first time I had failed at something I thought that I had put a lot of work into. And it was shattering. I felt God in those times for sure, a closeness I had never experienced before as I went to counseling, got re-connected with a church, and began working on my relationship with Christ. And there were many times over the weeks, months, even years to follow that I would say ok God, I'm ready! I'm ready to move on and to be married again. And it just didn't happen. For whatever reason, no one seemed right in dating, or there wasn't a person in my sphere that seemed like would work out. And then after a while, I said to God, fine, you know what, your timing, not mine. My life is yours. I'm prepared to be fully single the rest of my life if that's what you want. And that's when God decided was the time, I was ready. I met Beth through a blind date – fellow friends at church set us up to meet after a church softball game. We hit it off well, took our time in dating, and were married a few years later. And I'd love to tell you it's been all roses since but talk about persevering! No, she's the love of my life and I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for the Lord and for her.

She is everything to me and there's no one else I'd rather climb up this mountain path called life with. God's timing was indeed perfect, even though it was hard to see at that time. It required a perseverance of faith, to surrender my desire to go quickly in my development as a believer and to surrender my desire to quit and give up.

Wilberforce certainly had every right to give up – I mean, 10 years or trying to convince public figures to do something that seems so logical now but seemed inconceivable then? Easy to say this isn't going to happen and quit. But he did not, he followed the Lord's leading even through not necessarily bad times, but inactive times, when it seemed the journey was going nowhere.

In fact, it's those moments of inactivity, when it seems like God isn't answering on our terms, that another aspect of danger on our climb comes into play, the one I talked about at the start. Complacency.

When we, like it says in verse 1, throw aside this sin that so, as described in another version, that so easily entangles, we may finally get to a point on the climb where there's a clearing, a glade, or a place to rest. And the temptation to stay not just for a short time, but for a while, comes into play.

In hiking terms, we might call this a **false summit**. You know what a false summit is? It's when you see the top of the mountain ahead, except it really isn't the top of the mountain yet. It's a lower peak that looks like it's the top but when you get there you realize there's more

work, more climbing to do. That false summit though – you’ve worked hard to get there, and there are **great views from here**, can’t we just say we did it and stop? Do we really need to keep going to the top? But what if we did? What would we see up there? We’ve come so far, only to be that close and not go up there how could you NOT go up there? To say you conquered the mountain or you only did $\frac{3}{4}$ of that mountain?

Wilberforce knew about this idea of persevering through the ups not just the downs. Being not okay with being comfortable or better put, choosing to move from comfort to discomfort. As we said it took him ten years to get the slave trading industry stopped but remember that wasn’t his goal. His goal was the complete abolishment of slavery. So, he continued to advocate, put forth resolution after resolution until 26 years later, 26 years of Wilberforce fighting for the abolishment of slavery in the U.K., 26 years after he started his mountain climb, he reached the top, and slavery was officially abolished in the United Kingdom. Wilberforce was not satisfied with being halfway or just part of the way done with his journey – he persevered in the face of adversity and triumphs to accomplish what he felt the Lord was calling him to do. He found the balance between conviction to do something and condemnation where shame inhibits our ability to grow.

So, **this passage** in Hebrews, we’ve identified in the first two verses our cloud of witnesses, ala part of our hiking group, we’ve identified our trail, the path laid out by Jesus, and we have our map, the Bible and

stories from past believers that can help show us the way, both through the toughest of times, and the times where we might be tempted to become complacent. So now what? How DO we find the strength to carry on – to not be complacent, to look for growth in my faith? Well, I'm glad you asked.

In verse 3, Paul says we should look to Jesus for an example of how to persevere. I sometimes would read this verse and have a feeling of sadness. I could never measure up to Jesus, of course he could persevere, he's Jesus! How could I with so little of that same ability possibly persevere through tough times and when I need to find the courage to move forward with something I know might be tough but for my own good. That's when we read about the promises of Jesus – he has overcome the world, he's always with us, right until the end of the age. And as we've learned from Dave the past few weeks, if the Bible is undoubtedly true, and Jesus is undoubtedly who he says he is, the son of God who died for us, rose again for us, and now intercedes for us, then that means his promises are true and are at work to give us the inner strength needed to move forward. The only action needed is to turn our thoughts and lives over to him and let him begin to work. We can persevere through our faith ups and downs, starts and stops, if we allow Him who has the greatest strength of all to be in us and at work in us. I think when we get to Heaven and visit with the apostles about their lives after Jesus ascended, I think they would say it wasn't their strength that kept them going, but the Holy Spirit, gifted to them by

Jesus, that provided the fuel to keep the engine of faith going. Jesus knows all about perseverance both in life and faith. He knew what laid ahead but went through incredible pain and suffering because he knew what joy and good was on the other side. This verse isn't trying to draw a distinction that we aren't good enough, rather it's showing we have a Lord and Savior who knows us and knows what it means to struggle in our faith, have those doubts, have those moments of complacency and comfort, and not want to move willingly into discomfort, even if we know it's for our own good. Verse 3 tells me I have a Lord that's going to walk through it with me.

Which brings us to attachment, which we've talked about before. I'm more convinced than ever, that attachment to others and to Christ is essential for our faith journey. You can't hike by yourself and have the same experience that you do when with others, especially those you love. Sharing those views, the experiences, conquering something together builds unbreakable bonds. It's the same with Christ, who promises to always be there for us. Most often we think of that in terms of the worst of times. But I submit that it's also true that He is with us as we gingerly step out onto the cliff face or downed tree covering a river, leaving behind a comfortable spot to get uncomfortable, knowing there is good on the other side. This is what verse 3 also means. Jesus went through all of this bad stuff not to make us feel inferior but for us to realize we have a Savior that knows all too well where we are, what we're going through and promises if we trust Him, turn to him, be

attached to Him, He will lead us on the climb up the mountain to even better places than we could have imagined.

So, action items:

One – identify where you are on your faith journey – at the base of the mountain, midway up, at a false summit, in a steep, rocky patch or near the top? Getting connected with Jesus is a good way to identify where you are, and then get connected with someone else who can walk with you in your faith journey. More often than not, the Lord leads you to someone either in a similar spot or someone who has been in a similar spot. Perseverance in faith, allowing ourselves to grow, and move up the mountain only can happen when attached to the Lord and to others. That's what allows multiplication to happen.

Two – what do you need to do to persevere not just through a tough spot but a comfortable spot to move forward in your faith journey? When we are at a comfortable spot, we don't stop and go back down the mountain. We want to see what's at the top. Don't you want to see what's at the top of your faith journey? Who knows what the Lord has in store for you and me as we live out this call to multiply that our church has set upon? What would it look like, what could it be? And what actions, prayer, sabbath rest, reading in the Word, getting closer to God through small groups, meals, books, podcasts, conversations, could get you to understand through the noise of daily life the urgings of Jesus on

when, where, and how we are to engage others as part of our call to multiply His kingdom.

Nothing great in life is gained without some sort of perseverance. We may look at points in our hike and say could it be any better than this? Well, yes! Jesus' promises that it is when we join up with him and fellow believers at the end of our faith journey, when we are called home to Heaven. Seems fantastical but it's true. Heaven is better than anything we can have on this earth and if that's true, then the goal of reaching the top of the mountain is worth persevering for, when we hit the bad times or the good. If sports teams such as K-State stopped trying to get better after a win, then they wouldn't have many more wins afterwards. The K-State Men's Basketball team would never have found their winning touch, Ayoka Lee wouldn't have been able to get back to help K-State compete for a national title. **Nothing compares** to what's at the top, the feeling you get from completing the task, from persevering through all of it, the joy of surviving the ordeal and doing it with others. **So not only should we persevere** when facing headwinds and adversity because the other side of it will be better, but when faced with leaving our comfort zone with the possibility of rejection, pain, discomfort ahead we persevere forward because we can trust our God has this in mind for us and we'll be better for it. We should face the journey ahead like this young lady, with determination and a mindset of persevering forward no matter the circumstances.

Here at Tru we have an open communion, meaning anyone who believes they are in right standing with the Lord, may come and take a piece of the bread, which symbolizes Jesus' body, broken for us, and the dip the bread in the juice, which symbolizes Jesus' blood, shed for us. We have two spots to come and partake of the elements and you can start on the outside and come down the middle aisles and go back to your seats. Let's pray.



PERSEVERANCE

HEBREWS 12:1-3

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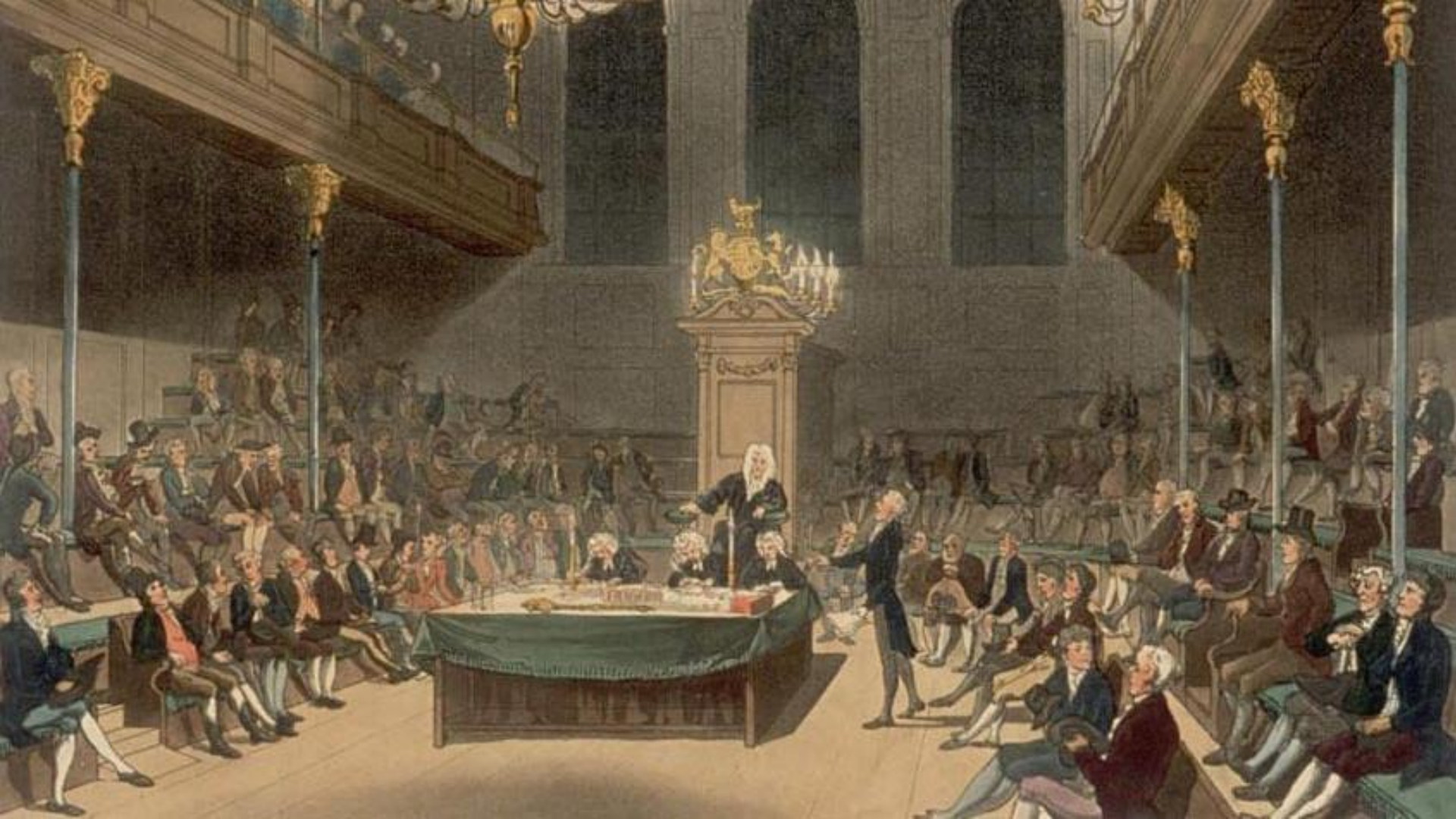


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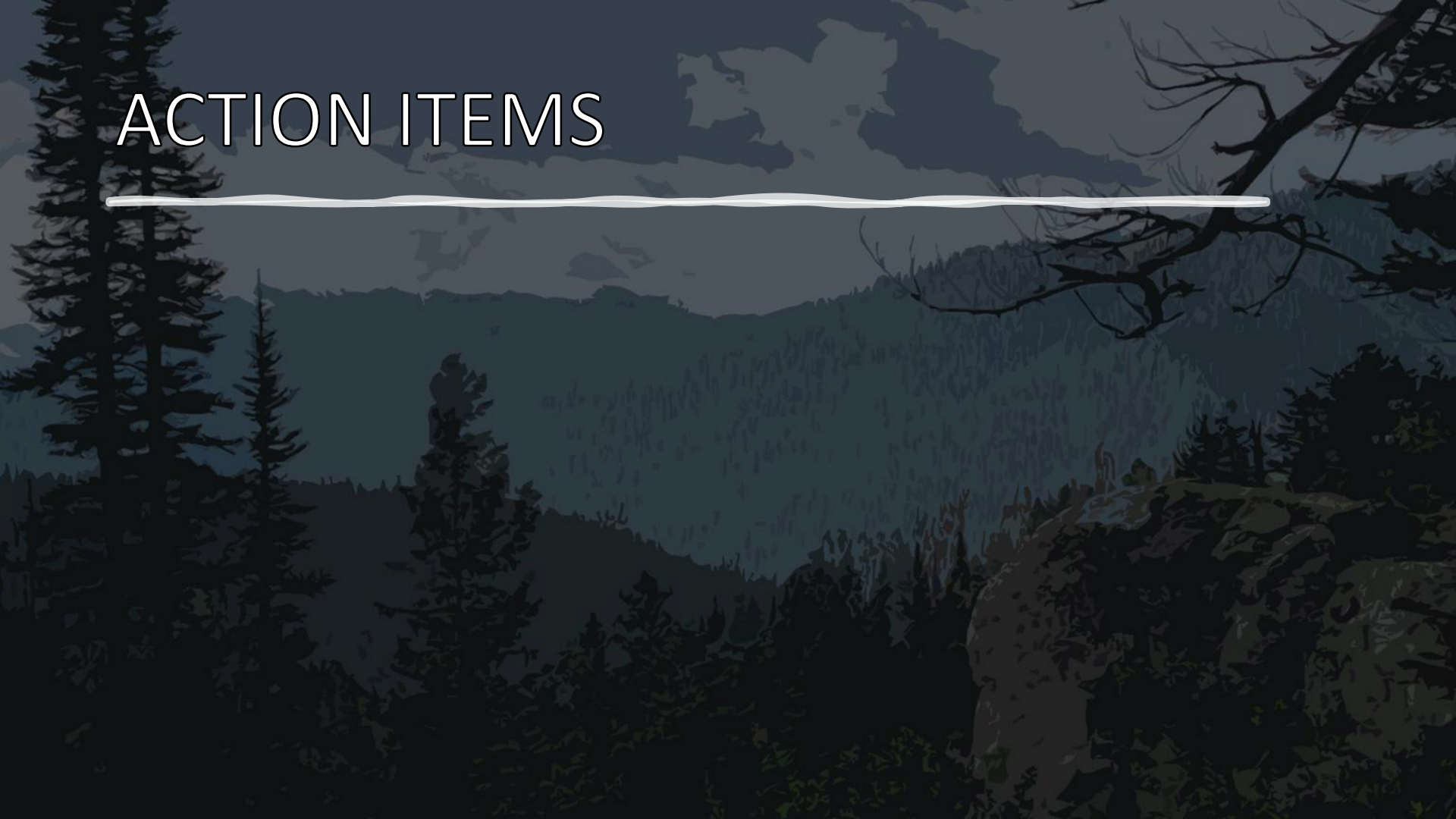
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ACTION ITEMS



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- Identify your current spot on your faith mountain climb.

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- Identify your current spot on your faith mountain climb.
- What false summits might be holding you back?





The background is a dark, atmospheric photograph of a forested mountain landscape. Evergreen trees are visible in the foreground and midground, with misty or snow-covered mountain peaks in the distance. The sky is filled with soft, grey clouds. A white, hand-drawn style border frames the entire image. The word "PERSEVERANCE" is centered in a white, serif font, with a horizontal line underneath it.

PERSEVERANCE
