



"One thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve."
—Albert Schweitzer

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Laying Aside Every Weight (Part One)

There is not a person alive whose life has gone exactly as planned. The presence of [sin](#) in [the world](#) guarantees that we will be affected by sickness, pain, degeneracy, heartache, and ultimately death. A property of sin is that it reaches out like some tentacled beast and entangles others who initially had no part in it. While forgiveness is available upon [repentance](#), sin always disrupts and degrades our lives and the lives of others. These are painful realities that we all have to face and contend with.

Even though all of mankind has had to deal with the devastating effects of sin, most of us know people who seem to be unburdened by the disappointments in life. Some appear to be essentially immune to bitterness and discouragement, despite having endured a tremendous amount of pain. What allows them to take the hits that life throws at them and keep going, while most people tend to become mired in the muck and bogged down by life's troubles?

In his book *Return from Tomorrow*, George G. Ritchie pens a remarkable account of such a person:

When the war in Europe ended in May 1945, the 123rd Evac entered Germany with the occupying troops. I was part of a group assigned to a concentration camp near Wuppertal, charged with getting medical help to the newly liberated prisoners, many of them Jews from Holland, France, and Eastern Europe. This was the most shattering experience I had yet had; I had been exposed many times by then to sudden death and injury, but to see the effect of slow starvation, to walk through those barracks where thousands of men had died a little bit at a time over a period of years, was a new kind of horror. For many it was an irreversible process: we lost scores each day in spite of all the medicine and food we could rush to them.

And that's how I came to know Wild Bill Cody. That wasn't his real name. His real name was seven unpronounceable syllables in Polish, but he had long drooping handlebar mustaches like pictures of the old western hero, so the American soldiers called him Wild Bill. He was one of the inmates of the concentration camp, but obviously he hadn't been there long: his posture was erect, his eyes bright, his energy indefatigable. Since he was fluent in English, French, German and Russian, as well as Polish, he became a kind of unofficial camp translator.

We came to him with all sorts of problems; the paper work alone was staggering in attempting to relocate people whose families, even whole hometowns, might have disappeared. But though Wild Bill worked fifteen and sixteen hours a day, he showed no signs of weariness. While the rest of us were drooping with fatigue, he seemed to gain strength. "We have time for this old fellow," he'd say. "He's been [waiting](#) to see us all day." His compassion for his fellow-prisoners glowed on his face, and it was to this glow that I came when my own spirits were low.

So I was astonished to learn when Wild Bill's own papers came before us one day, that he had been in Wuppertal since 1939! For six years he had lived on the same starvation diet, slept in the same airless and disease-ridden barracks as everyone else, but without the least physical or mental deterioration.

Perhaps even more amazing, every group in the camp looked on him as a friend. He was the one to whom quarrels between inmates were brought for arbitration. Only after I'd been at Wuppertal a number of weeks did I realize what a rarity this was in a compound where the different nationalities of prisoners hated each other almost as much as they did the Germans.

As for the Germans, feeling against them ran so high that in some of the camps liberated earlier, former prisoners had seized guns, run into the nearest village and simply shot the first Germans they saw. Part of our instructions was to prevent this kind of thing and again Wild Bill was our greatest asset, reasoning with the different groups, counseling forgiveness.

"It's not easy for some of them to forgive," I commented to him one day as we sat over mugs of tea in the processing center. "So many of them have lost members of their families."

Wild Bill leaned back in the upright chair and sipped at his drink. "We lived in the Jewish section of Warsaw, my wife, our two daughters, and our three little boys," he began slowly, the first words I had heard him speak about himself. "When the Germans reached our street they lined everyone against a wall and opened up with machine guns. I begged to be allowed to die with my family, but because I spoke German they put me in a work group."

He paused, perhaps seeing again his wife and five children. "I had to decide right then," he continued, "whether to let myself hate the soldiers who had done this. It was an easy decision, really. I was a lawyer. In my practice I had seen too often what hate could do to people's minds and bodies. Hate had just killed the six people who mattered most to me in the world. I decided then that I would spend the rest of my life—whether it was a few days or many years—loving every person I came in contact with."

Loving every person . . . this was the power that had kept a man well in the face of every privation.

This man found it within himself not to let his tragic experiences or his present circumstances weigh him down. It is not that he ignored or repressed the pain and loss. He felt those very real emotions that [God](#) instilled in mankind. However, he was determined to rise above his privations and be of service, even as his fellow prisoners, living in the exact same conditions, were hating each other, despising their captors, and giving up on life. He made a conscious choice about how the sins of others would affect him, and that choice produced a reservoir of energy and strength to accomplish good even in the midst of some of the most deplorable conditions in human history.

Next time, we will consider the example of the apostle Paul, who had his own impressive resume of sufferings yet made sure that God could continue to use him.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Love and Fellowship](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

God has given us a checkpoint against which we can check ourselves in times of despondency and despair, so whether we doubt or fear—whether the problems are moderate or deep—we can go back to see whether we are keeping God's commands and working on developing our fellowship with Him. God has created mankind with the need to face challenges—the need to overcome—or we quickly become subject to boredom or "ennui." Our major responsibility is to govern ourselves scrupulously and conscientiously within the framework of God's Laws, overcoming negative impulses by the knowledge and Spirit of God, seeking a total relationship with Him in thought, emotion, and deed, extending to our relations with our brethren. Fellowship with God is the only antidote to overwhelming feelings of despair, doubt, and self-condemnation.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Learning to Love One Another](#)

by Geoff Preston

We may look around the church of God and wonder why so many are not being healed. Geoff Preston, suffering a chronic illness himself, uses his experiences to assure us that God is working out even these matters for our good.

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