



"Nearness to God brings likeness to God. The more you see God the more of God will be seen in you."
—Charles H. Spurgeon

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Laying Aside Every Weight (Part Two)

In Part One, we saw the inspiring example of "Wild Bill Cody," a Polish prisoner in a German concentration camp whose conscious response to his circumstances buoyed him while many around him were foundering. The apostle Paul likewise endured tremendous hardship, and his example teaches us that we have the ability—and even responsibility—to choose how we let our circumstances affect us. Like Wild Bill Cody, Paul had to decide whether to let his circumstances weigh him down or to rise above them so [God](#) could use him.

One such experience with Silas is recorded in [Acts 16:22-26](#):

Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and *singing hymns to God*, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.

Paul and Silas, unjustly beaten with many stripes, had been placed, not just in prison, but in the "inner prison." Yet, even in the depths of captivity and restraint, they found it

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within themselves to sing praises to God! These men of [faith](#) did not obsess over the injustice, become melancholy, or gnash their teeth. Accepting the reality of their situation, they made the conscious decision not to let these things weigh them down.

A dramatic result of this choice was that God was able to use them and their situation to make a powerful witness to all of their fellow prisoners—everyone incarcerated with them was aware of these godly men and the positive example they set in enduring their beatings and imprisonment. In addition, Paul's words and actions then led to the baptisms of the jailor and his family (verses 27-33).

Could God have used Paul and Silas in the same way if they had been focused on their own misery, stewing over the injustice of life, and seething with resentment because of the obvious shortcomings of others? In choosing to maintain contact with and even praise God in the midst of their dire circumstances, they allowed themselves to be conduits of God's power and [grace](#). Their mindsets left them open to God's inspiration and use, whereas the negativity of a carnal mindset would have left them at odds with Him and likely in tune with the wrong spiritual forces (see, for example, [Luke 9:51-56](#)). Paul and Silas would not have been of the same mind as God, and in all probability could not have been used in the same way.

Paul apparently endured similar events and circumstances throughout his Christian life. In [II Corinthians 11:22-29](#), he lists the things which he experienced in service to God:

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of [Abraham](#)? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?

Clearly, this apostle knew the rough side of life! Rather than to evoke pity or endlessly rehearse life's injustices, he mentions these perils to counter the boasting of [false](#)

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[ministers](#) (verses 12-13, 17-18). Even though Paul could have complained about a great deal, we see him instead accepting what God caused or allowed him to suffer and then moving forward rather than becoming weighed down with cares. He chose not to become mired in the past, paralyzed by present circumstances, or deterred by fear of the future.

As a result, God could use him powerfully and extensively to benefit the entire church—right up through the present time! He remained in tune with God by choosing not to let these things take up more of his attention and energy than they warranted. He accepted reality and then chose a positive response, keeping God in the forefront of his mind.

The "faith chapter" of the [book of Hebrews](#) describes many more such faithful individuals who all endured many hardships without letting down. We will glean from their stories in Part Three.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

We Can Make It!

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh, focusing on Matthew 10:16-26, warns us that a teacher's disciples cannot escape the kind of persecution directed against their teacher. In the wake of this kind of abuse, people can succumb to depression, and in some cases, suicidal depression. When we compare ourselves with spiritual heavyweights like the apostle Paul, we really feel hollow in comparison. Amazingly, Paul went through many horrendous trials, never once giving up. Thankfully, God apportions us our trials with the accompanying ability to endure them. How we think about our relationship with God will determine how we will endure our quest. Do we see ourselves as pilgrims or exiles? If we can see God (in our trials) we will be able to find our way through the problem. Our forefather Jacob, forced into exile by his brother Esau, was turned into a pilgrim by contact with God, giving him a change in perspective, a solid understanding that God was continually with him, as typified by the vision of a ladder into heaven, populated by a continuous line of angels. Without this vision or revelation, we will lead aimless, directionless lives. We made a covenant with God; He never lies and He never fails. If we are going through trials, they are for our ultimate good. In order to keep on keeping on, we must desire to expand the rule of God in our lives, enabling us to have a sound mind by thinking as God thinks. According to A.W. Tozer, redemption involves the ability

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to change or transform, yielding to God's formative powers. God will rescue us from every danger, but we have to understand that every promise is conditional. We need to have the desire to restore peace and tranquility to the creation, being at one with God and His purpose. We will be able, as future kings and priests in God's Kingdom, to repair a world that has been rendered ugly and chaotic by the corrosive effects of sin. We dare not give up in fear and despair, committing spiritual suicide. We must fight the good faith for ourselves and those who follow. We owe it to

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Ingratitude](#)

by Mark Schindler

Some of us cannot seem to realize a blessing if it slaps us across the face! Mark Schindler, in recounting a personal story, shows how ingratitude can hold us back in our relationship with God.

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