



"What we call failure is not the falling down, but the staying down."
—Mary Pickford

21-Nov-14

Laying Aside Every Weight (Part Three)

In Parts One and Two, we saw examples of various men who remained unshackled by the miserable circumstances in which they found themselves. In giving a conclusion to the "[faith](#) chapter" of Hebrews 11, the author ties together all of the preceding examples of faithful heroes with an admonition to help his audience follow in their footsteps:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, *let us lay aside every weight*, and the [sin](#) which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the [joy](#) that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of [God](#). For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. ([Hebrews 12:1-3](#))

In verse 1, he instructs us to "lay aside" two different things: "every weight" and "the sin which so easily ensnares us." The weight and the sin describe two different things. Certainly, our sins can be weights and drag us down. But there are other weights, not specifically transgressions of the law, that

impede our progress toward the Kingdom and limit our usefulness to God. These weights are aspects of our lives that can hold us back and can cause us not to run the race efficiently or consistently.

Both the apostle Paul and "Wild Bill Cody"—the Polish prisoner described in Part One—could have allowed many things to weigh them down, yet they chose to lay aside those traumas and continue moving forward. Likewise, our progress toward the Kingdom and our usefulness to God will be hindered if we allow our negative experiences or circumstances to dictate our outlook or focus. In order to lay aside the weights, we must continually examine our lives and see what we are holding onto that keeps us from moving forward.

This is not simply a matter of pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps, as the saying goes. Just as laying aside "the sin which so easily ensnares us" is a lifelong endeavor, so also is laying aside the weights—those unneeded elements in our lives that drain our time, attention, and energy yet we continue to cling to. It takes time to evaluate whether the things that we focus on are worthy of the Kingdom.

In verse 2, we see the means by which this can be accomplished: [Jesus Christ](#) is the author and finisher of our faith. While the human spirit can do much on its own in terms of choosing an appropriate reaction, as we saw with Wild Bill in the concentration camp, the true power to overcome sin and lay aside our weights comes from the Father and the Son. When Jesus was on earth, the Father was the Source of His power. Likewise, God gave Paul and Silas the strength and faith they demonstrated in the Philippian prison.

The same God has called us and given us His Spirit. The same strength and ability not to be weighed down by our circumstances is available to us. But the battle we so often fight involves *making that decision* to use those gifts rather than allowing ourselves to be shackled.

In verse 3, the author of Hebrews points us to the example of Christ Himself as a way to keep us from becoming weary and discouraged. Are our hardships more than what He endured throughout His life and in His crucifixion? Has any person been more unjustly abused, especially by those whom He was intent on helping? [Hebrews 4:15](#) reminds us, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One

who has been tested in every way as we are, yet without sin" (*Holman Christian Standard Bible*).

Yet, where did *He* get the strength—the faith—to endure such tests and afflictions without turning inward? He said repeatedly that He could do nothing of Himself—all that He accomplished was done through what our Father gave ([John 5:19](#), 30; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10). Thus, we are admonished to keep this in mind when the pressures of life threaten to crush us.

In the stories of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, we see that all of those men and women rose above their circumstances to make decisions that would have been essentially impossible without God supplying the faith. As a result, God was able to use them to make a witness of Him. All of those stories lead to these verses, where Paul *urges us* to follow those examples and encourages us by pointing us to the Source of that faith. He is essentially saying, "If they can do it, so can we. The same God that was so closely involved in their lives is also involved in ours."

God gave them the faith to do those things, just as He has given us the faith to respond to His call, to move toward His Kingdom, and to serve in whatever capacity He has chosen. If we ask for God's help in seeing what might be weighing us down, He is faithful and will show us those things because He wants His children to succeed. Then we are left with the decision of whether to remain paralyzed and unable to move forward or to make use of the incredible gifts that God has given to cast off the shackles, run the race, and be available to be used by God. The choice is ours to make.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Five Warnings of Hebrews](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The writer of Hebrews does not identify a single flagrant violation of law, but instead delivers a general castigation for incremental, continuous,

disrespectful, and forgetful neglect—a failure to esteem what should have been thought precious, their calling and salvation, while esteeming inferior things like wealth or status. Hebrews expounds four other warnings, all designed to wake the church member up and motivate him toward greater devotion to God. Similarly, the modern church of God stands in danger of allowing salvation to slip away from pure neglect. By these warnings, we should know how to turn our lives around so we do not fall short and lose salvation.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Prevailing Winds](#)

by Gary Montgomery

Unless we are employed in a maritime occupation or have a particular interest in sailboats, we probably do not know a great deal about sailing. Using Paul's analogy in Ephesians 4:14, Gary Montgomery teaches a handy nautical maneuver, discussing how the steady, contrary winds of this world's way of life can be overcome by adjusting our sails to make spiritual headway.

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