

Our Fight with Sin-Part 1
Spurred on By Godly Examples
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Well it's good to be back, and it's good to open God's word again with you in Hebrews, chapter 12. But, before we dig deeply into that, I want to remind you how Jesus loved to use the analogy of the shepherd as He described His relationship with His people. He describes Himself in John 10 as "the good shepherd." Not just *a* shepherd, the *good* shepherd who has, of course, obviously good intentions for his sheep. But for the sheep to participate and realize the good intentions that are available to the sheep because of the shepherd, it is requisite upon them to actually follow the shepherd. I mean, that seems to be our part of the responsibility. He is the shepherd, and we are the sheep. Our responsibility is to follow Him.

As a matter of fact, simply put, it sounds easy but it's not. And Jesus made that clear when He said every sheep of Mine, if you will, is going to be surrounded by competing forces. There will be things and people and desires that are going to try to detract and draw people away from the leadership of the shepherd. He quantifies that in the analogy with the words "thieves" and "robbers," and He says there are all kinds of them.

As a matter of fact, He says in the most famous verse in John 10, verse 10, He says you need to recognize that the thieves, they only come to steal, kill, and destroy. Do you remember this verse? He says, "But I have come, as the good shepherd." He says, "I have come to give you life." And He doesn't end it there, so we're not just left with some broad, eschatological view of salvation from punishment. He gets really practical, and He says, "And that you might have it"—you know the verse?—"to the full." I mean, I want you to have it the way it's supposed to be.

Do you realize how much of your life—the quality of it, the fulfillment of it, the gratitude, the joy that you experience—it really comes down to this one, basic thing: How well are you following the shepherd? Or, are you distracted, and entangled, and drawn off the path? And are you struggling, as you have all these competing forces in your life? I mean, with so much hanging on whether we faithfully follow the shepherd, and your life, really, the daily quality of it contingent on that, I think it would do us well, for the next 8 weeks, as we take Hebrews 12 seriously, to open ourselves up to God and His Spirit, and say, "You know what? I need to get serious about this issue. It needs to be priority one, top priority. And I am willing to walk this path and run this race, and get serious about fighting all the distractions and everything that wants to take me off the path of walking in step with our great shepherd."

I mean, that ought to be, just a basic, fundamental desire of our lives. And yet it's series like this that you don't find too much in the modern church, right? This is an "Operation: Crowd Reduction" for most churches. To talk about sin and temptation for eight weeks. I mean, couldn't we do this in two weeks? An eight week series on this. This is big. I mean, this is putting our lives under the microscope of God's Spirit and saying, in the heart of Psalm 139, "Search and try us. See if there is any wicked way in us. Check our lives out, God, because we want to be holy. We want to live holy lives." I mean, that seems to be unique, as the churches today seem to be very, very interested in doing nothing but pat ourselves on the back for what we already know and believe, and reminding ourselves that we're loved by God. Oh, that's super important. But I hope you recognize that the love of God and the grace of God, as Paul wrote to Titus, it instructs us to deny ungodliness. And if God is going to find a people that He is rejoicing in, it will be a people that are zealous for good works. It'll be a people that say, "God, we want to be holy like You're holy. And we're serious about taking every encumbrance and getting it out of the way, because we want to be faithful to follow you."

It's a big deal. It's a big deal, because sin is a big rip off. It's a big deal because the big attributes of God are at stake. It's a big deal for a lot of reasons.

We've come off of a—what was it?—13 week series in Hebrews, chapter 11. We called it “Ambitious Faith,” and we looked at all these examples of people that said, “I’m going to follow God and do the right thing, and I’m going to trust Him no matter what. I’m going to do that, and God is good, and it’s worth it, and I’m going to go after it.” And we saw that, verse after verse, and paragraph after paragraph. And finally, we get to Chapter 12 in Hebrews, and it’s as though the inspired words of Hebrews turn a corner, and now it points its attention right at us. I mean, the Holy Spirit just puts its finger right in our chest and says, “Okay. Those were the great people who followed Me then. But what about you, and what about now?”

Take a look at these words. Hebrews, chapter 12. Some of the most need, and desperately needed, verses for the church today, just for us to say, “Hey, we’re going to take this battle seriously. We want to follow the shepherd faithfully.” So I guess learning the great biographies of Christians gone by, and godly people of the Old Testament, that’s not enough. Since we’re surrounded—verse 1—therefore. Since we’re surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, and there are people that have done it well, and there’s all kinds of examples we can continue to give. But since that’s true, how about us?

Here’s the main verb here. Let us throw off everything that hinders. Everything. And the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance, the race—I love this—that is marked out for us. I mean, the writer of Hebrews, I mean really, is crafting together this homiletical bullet that’s moving through all these reasons to live for God. And then he says to these people, “Listen. Now, you, live godly lives.” This is about you taking all the sin and all the temptation, all the lure, and just getting it out of the way. Don’t be entangled in sin. Let’s move forward, and live for God, and follow the shepherd faithfully.

And that means some analyzation. It means some introspection through everything that hinders. We got to find out what hinders our lives, and the sin that so easily entangles. And some of you already, boom, it’s coming to mind. Yeah. That trips me up. That’s a temptation for me. And the Bible says, time for us to declare war on that. Time for us to get serious about our sanctification, growing up in Christ and becoming more like Jesus. That really needs to be our passion.

This is a great passage. And there’s so much here, we can only take one verse this morning. But just by way of introduction, because we’re going to spend eight weeks on this topic, let’s just try and analyze verse number one for a second. Let’s look at the central verb, if you will, the main imperative in the text. And it’s found right there in the middle: “to throw off everything that hinders.” Okay? The command for us here, in light of chapter 11, is to take everything that’s hindering our pursuit of God and to get rid of it. And the sin obviously is going to do that—and the sin that entangles, to get rid of it.

Now the “to get rid of it” in some older translations say, “lay aside.” That sounds pretty passive, and it sounds pretty mild. “Hey, you know, just lay that stuff aside.” But I think the translation here is helpful—“to throw off”—because really, it’s reminiscent of some words that Jesus used when He talked about the same topic. And there’s no confusion when Jesus talked about throwing things off, that He wasn’t trying to say this is theoretical or this is ethereal, or this is just some kind of intellectual discussion, or you ought to think about getting rid of that. He’s very serious about us being ruthless about sin in our lives.

You remember the verses I’m referring to? It’s found in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5. And before we fill in this first point on your outline—and hopefully you found that—I want to turn to Matthew chapter 5 and show you when Jesus talked about sin and casting off, and some you already remember this text. But turn with me, if you would, to Matthew chapter 5. Matthew 5, Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is talking to people who, a lot like us, are very uncomfortable thinking about our own sin. We’re good at thinking about the sins of other people, right? We can have a series on that, and you know, that’s not Operation: Crowd Reduction. Hey, let’s talk about other people’s sin. Yeah, those are bad sinner. Let’s all kind of huddle together,

circle the wagons, and just say how bad those the sinners in the world are. The crowd reduction sermons are those where we're really saying, "No, forget them. Let's talk about you." Let's really get into our own lives, and let God do some convicting there. Okay? That's the hard work.

And Jesus, He isn't going to let people off the hook on the sermon on the Mount. And as they sit there in this beautiful pastoral setting, with cascading hills and the Sea of Galilee, and He's talking to them about things, He's not going to let them say, "Yeah, you know what, I know Henry down the street, and that guy, he's a bad sinner." He's going to say, "Forget about him." Take a look at how He does this, just strategically, in verse 27, for instance. He does it throughout the whole first part of the sermon on the mount, but look what He does in verse 27.

I mean, this is just indicative of the rest of the chapter. He says, "You've heard it said, do not commit adultery." And you can hear a lot of people at that point, 'Yeah, you're right. That's just terrible. I know somebody who's done that. That's bad.' Okay. He's not going to let them off the hook there. Yeah, that's big, that's bad, but He says, "I tell you"—verse 28—"I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." And about the time you're of that really bad sinner you know, and Jesus says that to *you*, all of a sudden now a lot of eyes go down to the top of the sandals. And people start saying, "Oh, wow. I mean, that's a big deal to you, too?" And He says, yeah. And He goes on to talk about anger and murder. He says, "Murderers, those are bad people, right? But if you harbor anger in your heart against your brother, you know what? You're guilty of sin, too."

Well, how should I respond to that? Well you're an adulterer I guess you should be really ruthless about your sin. And just be totally—just attack it. But you know, lust? You know, anger, those kind of things? I don't know. Eh, maybe if you get around to it, you ought to do something about it. Jesus doesn't say that. Look at the next verse.

He says this in verse 29, "Hey guys, if your eye is the problem? I mean, if your eyeball—you just say, 'Well, I just can't help it. You know, my eyes are just attracted to—I just can't—' " He says, "Good, I got a solution for your eyeballs." Here's what He says: "Gouge out your right eye and throw it away." That'll get your attention. Now, I'm thinking little sin right now. Big sin, adulterer. Big sin, murderer. Little sin, angry. Little sin, lustful heart. And Jesus is now going to say, "You need the most ruthless solution to that."

I understand this is an analogy. I understand this is a bit of a hyperbole. If you have a lust problem, taking out your right eye isn't going to really solve the problem. But the point is—Jesus is making a point here—and that is that you need to deal ruthlessly with whatever avenue, whatever temptation, whatever it is that is you causing you, and you're saying, 'Oh, that's causing me to sin,' deal with it. And Jesus is saying, don't deal with it lightly, deal with it severely. And the phrase that is reminiscent of Hebrews 12 is, what do I do with my eye? Here, this thing is causing me to sin. What does He say to do with it? Toss it. Get rid of it. *There's* the reminiscent phrase from Hebrews 12. Now He says, "Guys, if you have got sin in your life, if something is entangling you, hindering you, hey. I got a solution for you. Cast it off. Throw it from you."

Now, I know this whole series, and the rest of chapter 12, is steeped in various analogies and illustrations. And this word is going to be on your outline, but I'd like you to jot it down because I hope it brings us out of the theoretical and brings us into the practical. Number one on your outlines, jot this down. It's the best advice I can give you about sin. It's the title of our series. When it comes to sin, we can't sit around and go, "Hmm, what should we do about that?" You need to have a mindset of warfare. Let's put it down this way. Number one: You need to fight. That's the best advice I can give you. It needs to be something you declare war on. It needs to be something you get militant about. It needs to be something—you're getting intense about this problem of temptation and sin.

That's what the Scripture is asking us to do: cast it off. And by the way, if you think, "Well, I don't know, I'm not sold on that, you're kind of overplaying this, it sounds like you're kind of

worked up about it, I don't know, you're vacation went poorly or something, but I don't—you're upset." No, no, no. I'm not. To talk about fighting sin in your life, I mean, the Scripture says that clearly, but you know, it's almost the lighter end about how the Bible talks about sin for the Christian and how we should respond to it. It's almost a euphemism. Because in Scripture, it gets a lot worse than that.

Let me give you one example—I could give you many—but let me have you turn to Colossians, chapter 3. Colossians, chapter 3. Here is a text that is addressed to Christians who are now being led to think by the apostle Paul about their sin. And he says, "You know what? If you got patterns and habits and bad things that are going on in your life, I've got a biblical, authoritative imperative for you." Here it comes: Colossians, chapter 3. And it goes a little bit further than fighting. This is not fighting like, you know, just kind of slap fighting. This is like a cage match. This is death. This is gladiator stuff. Verse number 5. Colossians three-five. Are you with me?

Let's take a look at it. Here it comes. One Greek word. Here it is. Put to—what's the word—death. Put to death. Our grandparents called it mortification. Remember that word? To *mortify* the flesh. Talk about crowd reduction, right? Mortify. That just sounds negative. I want butterflies on the banners, and the series to be about love and grace—no, no, no, no. Here's a series for eight weeks about mortifying. What? Mortify what? It says, "Put to death *whatever* belongs to your earthly nature." And by that, that's a translation of the concept of sinful impulses in our life. And then he gives some examples. Sexual immorality. And if you say, "Well, I'm not doing that"—remember Matthew 5. You don't have to commit the acts. It's allowing your mind to entertain the impure thoughts. And the Bible says, whether that's true about sexual sin or anger or impurity in just, in your thoughts, materialism, all those. Let's look at the list. Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed. *Greed*. Wow. That doesn't preach in Orange County. Greed. And you, "Well, I'm not opulent. My house is modest." I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about what's going on in your heart. And Jesus says you need to declare war on sin in your heart. Whether it's sexual sin, or flipping through magazines and coveting other people's stuff. We need to declare war on that. It is a big deal to God. And the words He uses aren't, "Well, you should deal with that when you can." He uses the most extreme words He can use. Put it to death. Kill it. There's a part of you that needs to die. That's what the Scripture's teaching. And we need to put it actively to death.

What I'm asking for is what God's word is asking for, for the next eight weeks, and that is that we get sin in perspective. And He tries to do that in verse 6 of Colossians 3. He says you need to recognize that these are the things that the righteous attributes of God rebel against. Because of these the wrath of God is coming.

"Well, I'm forgiven."

I understand that. But this is the thing that invokes the anger, the righteous justice of God. Oh, I know you used to walk in these ways. It used to be the pattern of your life in the life you once lived. But now you must—here's another way to put it—*rid* yourself of all such things. And, in case we didn't get the list last time, he gives us more things: anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language from your lips. Don't lie to one another. It doesn't matter what your job calls for, or what you think the market standards are for your industry. Doesn't matter. The Bible says you've got a higher calling to be godly in all of these areas. Since, by the way, you've made a commitment to make Jesus your shepherd. If you've said, "I repent of my sins," and you've said about your old self, "I'm turning from my old ways," you've put off the old self with its practices and you've put on the new self, and you say, "I am not a follower of Christ." Since you've done that, that's called justification. Moment in time.

Now. There's a process. He says this new self, which is—it's present tense now—being renewed in knowledge and in the image of its creator. Are you tracking with that? The point is, now we start this process. And for those that think that coming to Christ is the end of the battle, you need

to recognize that it's the beginning of the battle. Because the day you stand up and say, "I want to follow Christ," not only does the satanic world system and the demonic spiritual forces of this world, but your flesh itself rebels against that resolve. And even though God recreates our hearts and makes us new, we are now—according to Galatians 5 and 6—we are now at war in our hearts. As Peter put it, they are desires that rage war against our soul. And if you want to be passive, and kick your feet up on the desk, and say, "You know what, I'm loved by God, and the grace of God, I'm into all that, I don't really need to fight this stuff," you are a disaster waiting to happen. You got to recognize it requires a fight. And you and I need to be ruthless about it.

So. You know, I could stop right there and say, okay, that's what we should do, but man, I want to go a couple levels deeper. Can we just have a little time of contemplation right now? And say to God that we are going to declare war on sin. Whatever in the next eight weeks, not what Pastor Mike reveals, but what Your Spirit reveals in the conviction of my heart because of the preaching of the word, I am ready to say, I'll cast it off. Whatever hinders and whatever sin entangles me, I'm ready to say I'm done with it. I mean, you got to agree up front. One thing I've learned about God, and I know you have too, He's not much into dealing with people who say, "Show me first and then I'll decide." Is God a God that deals with people like that? No way. What is He looking for? Faith. What is faith? Saying to God, "God, I trust You. You are my leader. If You want me to get rid of it, like the Psalmist says, 'try me, know me, search my heart, see if there is any wicked way in it.' " Why? Because the precondition is I am willing to cast it aside if it is not pleasing to You. So the commitment is, right here in the middle of our first message of eight weeks through Hebrews 12, is: am I committed to doing that? Am I ready to say, God whatever You reveal that is not pleasing to You, I am going to get rid of it.

And it's not just about sin. It's about the avenues through which they come. Matthew 5 was clear on that, right? The eye. I need to get mad at the avenues through which they come. Which means that the practical implications of this series, if you give God the blank check and say, "God, whatever You decide in my life is not pleasing to You, I am going to cast it off." You do recognize that some of them will seem unrelated. And some of your Christian friends will tell you, 'Well, you're overboard. Now you're just being, you know, crazy. What kind of fundamentalist group are you a part of.' Because you're going to start to get mad at the avenues through which sin comes. Which, by the way, is a biblical concept, if you've ever read Matthew, chapter 18.

Remember the whole millstone around the neck discussion? Remember that story? You know what a millstone is, right? It's that big donut at 7th Street and PCH in Long Beach. Right? That's where I grew up. We had a big donut down the street. Remember that big donut on two poles? Picture that full of cement and just a little bit smaller so that your head fits nicely through the hole in the donut. That's a millstone. And they used it to grind down their wheat. You remember all that. If you've been to Israel with us, you've seen examples of these giant millstone. They don't make great flotation devices. Right? I mean, you don't want to have one in a pool or a lake. And Jesus says, "Listen." Here's how mad He is at the avenues through which sin come into your life. He says, "Listen. If someone in your life is bringing sin and temptation into your life, it would be better for that person to have a millstone hung around their neck and cast into the Sea of Galilee, than for them to bring sin and temptation into your life."

If God is mad at the avenues through which this comes into our life, how can we say passive about those things? In other words, if in eight weeks we're not mad at the things that bring temptation into our life, then God hasn't worked. And we've got to say ahead of time, we're willing to have that attitude. I'm willing to adopt God's attitude about my form of recreation if I determine by Your Spirit and God's word that that an avenue through which sin comes. I'm ready go stop that subscription to that magazine, as benign as my friends might think it is, if it's leading me to covet other people's stuff. I'm ready to say no to that television program. I'm willing to say no to that internet. I'm willing to say no to that job. I'm willing to move. I'm willing to stop that relationship

with that person. I'm willing to change states. Because whatever it might be for you, God's going to say, "Hey, here's the problem for you." And it's not just the sin, it's the avenue through which sin comes. The lure is temptation. The entanglement is sin. We need to deal with both. It's the hindrance and the sin that so easily entangles. And the command for us is to fight.

So. If this is just an intellectual exercise for you, you know you should find another church for the next eight weeks. Because this will do nothing according to James 1 but delude you. Because we'll talk theoretically about sin, and all it will be for some of you is, 'Well that's an interesting thing, let me think that one through.' Unless we all start at the beginning of the series and say, "God, you've got free reign in my life. I'm signing the blank check. If you reveal sin or temptation avenues in my life, I'm agreeing up front, I'm getting rid of them." And there's no manipulation. I've got no secret agenda here. We're not going to give up, I don't know, you know, hamburgers or something. I've got no agenda here. I just want to preach this text and have you, ahead of time, say, "I'm willing to put out anything in my life that hinders or entangles my following of the shepherd." If you are willing to do that, and I am willing to do that, here's the thing. This series can change your life. Radically transform it. It could be one of those series you look back on five years from now and say, "That's where I got really serious about my sanctification. That turned my life around, in terms of that habit and that sin that used to entangle me. God changed my life there."

But, you should be willing. Because you're either going to be a better Christian at the end of eight weeks, or you're going to be a worse Christian at the end of eight weeks. Because your heart will become deceived. So, let's not make it theoretical. Are you ready for that? Let's just agree. I mean, I know we're not a vocal church, and you're not interactive. I try to draw it out of you. But I get it. Now you're Orange County-ans. I understand. But at least in your heads. At least you can nod it with your eyeballs that you're ready. Yes. God is going to be the king, and I'm going to do what He says. Okay?

But the point is, okay, you're saying to God: okay, God, you got it. You're the king. You see something in my life You don't like, I'm ditching it. That's the bottom line. Fight. We're going to fight it.

Well, what if it's hard?

You're going to fight it. You're going to put it to death. Whatever. Whatever that belongs to your earthly nature that is not pleasing to God, we're getting rid of it. Saying no to it.

Oh, but I don't know. That's just what we've always done as a—

Doesn't matter. We're giving God free reign here. As Jude 23 says. I love that, that little one chapter book: Hating even the clothing that is stained by the flesh. Anything. We're just ready to say no.

Huh. Sound like a bunch of fanatics at that church.

See? Let the world say what they want. Let a lukewarm church say whatever they want. Let's just try and be a people that are zealous for good deeds. All right? Let's just try and be a people that are serious about holiness. Okay? For all the excuses the world makes, and for the church-going that say, 'Well, that's crazy.' Then let them call us crazy. Fine. Okay? We're not going to create a bunch of manmade rules here. We're just talking about letting God be God and root out sin in our lives. Let's fight it.

Okay. That's the main imperative. Let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles. That's our goal for the next eight weeks. Now, you're going to really declare war on something there ought to be some good reasons for it. As a matter of fact, it sounds like a real hassle to fight something. Well, it is. So we need to remember why it's worth it. And the verse starts, in verse number one of Hebrews 12, with a reason. And the reason is really a window into the whole eleventh chapter. Look at it again, verse number one, the first line:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, *then* he says, here, let

us throw off everything that hinders. Okay, and we know what the goal is for the next eight weeks. Let's start with some reasons. And the reasons that the writer of Hebrews gives is, man, we got a lot of great witnesses surrounding us. Now it starts with a "therefore" so we're not talking about "you're at a church and people around you"—not talking about that. We're talking about the Hebrews 11, roll call of people that have ambitious faith. That's the backdrop to this chapter. Okay?

Now, if you look at the word "witnesses" and you think about a great cloud of witnesses, and that's why we ought to do this; some of you think, "Ooh, are they watching me? You know, when I'm in the shower, or I don't know. I'm afraid that Moses is watching." Right? I don't know. Is that what we're talking about? Okay? Now, I'm not saying, that it is impossible for people on the other side—you know, Abraham, who knows, just list the list from Hebrews, chapter 11—that they can't see what's going on the planet. Revelations 6:9, that's another topic; ask it after a Thursday night study. But the bottom line is that, yeah, it's possible that people in the presence of God can keep track of what's going on here on earth. But that's not the focus of this chapter.

As a matter of fact, those of you with your Greek New Testaments here—some of you scholarly ones among us—you can look at the Greek word right there, can't you, that translates "witnesses." And it's the word that we use and transliterate into English, "martyrs." We have such a great cloud of *martyrs*. Now "martyrs," just like the English word "witness," can be used in one of two ways. We can say someone is witnessing *me*, they're witnessing what I am doing. Or we can say someone is witnessing *to* me, they're testifying to me of something else. Okay? We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.

Well what do you mean, we're surrounded?

Well, look at chapter 11. All these people are testifying to something. What have we been looking at in Hebrews 11? People that say, I don't care what the world says, I don't care what people think, I'm going to do the right thing, I'm going to follow God. I'm going to have the faith to move on to the next. I'm not going to be lukewarm, I'm going to be hot for God. That's what we've been learning about in Hebrews, chapter 11. And he says, since now we are surrounded by people that testify to the appropriateness of it, to the value of it—he says, now, you do it. Okay? So that's where we are.

Now, just let's try and see that as the reason. Chapter 11 is the reason for chapter 12. Let's put it down this way on our outlines and we'll try to break it down. And we can do this all day, but let's just start with the basics of chapter 11. Jot this down, number 2 on your outline: We need to rethink the reasons.

We've already been there. But let's rethink some of them. What are the reasons for me to be like those people in chapter 11? Why should I tear off the encumbrances and the sin that entangles me?

Well, we learned some things about the guys in chapter 11. Let's go back to chapter 11, verse number 6. When we defined faith—this is the very first week, we looked at verse 1 and verse 6, you might remember—here's what it says. It says that—look at the very last phrase—He rewards those who earnestly seek Him. Now that was one of the themes throughout chapter 11. That when people, in Hebrews, chapter 11, Old Testament examples, earnestly sought God, God made it worth their while. He promised good things for them. He rewarded them. Okay?

Example. Just to talk about our fight with sin, drop down to verse 24. Hebrews 11:24. Moses was a good example of this: "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, he refused to be known as the son of pharaoh's daughter." Grew up in the palace, he had everything there available to him, he could have had whatever kind of earthly indulgence he wanted. But he chose rather, verse 25, to be mistreated along with the people of God that they despised, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He said no to temptation. Okay? Could have indulged, but he didn't. And he regarded disgrace, people going, "Aw, you're weird," for the sake of Christ, the coming Messiah, and righteousness, and the embodiment of God, as a greater value than the treasures of Egypt.

Why? Because, as Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 6 said, he was looking forward ahead to his reward.

Let's put A, B, and C down underneath number 2. Okay? We need to rethink the reasons for this. The great cloud of testifiers testified to this one thing: when we do the right thing—let's put it this way—it's rewarding. Why should I fight sin? Why should I work so hard to follow the master? Why should I say no to temptation? Because, it is rewarded. God will reward you. There is a promise of reward for doing what is right. And we just need to start there. We started our sermon there. John, chapter 10: He's a good shepherd with good intentions for us. But as sheep, what do I have to do? I have to follow the shepherd.

So I know that it is requisite upon me to follow the shepherd because if I do it will go well with me. He wants to give me life, and that to the full. Okay? Now this is not the prosperity gospel. But what I am saying to you is this: it will go well for us. As Moses said in Deuteronomy, choose life. This would be better for you to do the right thing as opposed to the wrong thing. It is rewarding.

And I know when we read this passage in Hebrews, chapter 11, verse number 26, we look to the ultimate reward. I know we quoted in that particular sermon the ultimate laying up of treasures in heaven, I get it. And there is an eschatological ultimate reality to God saying to us, "Well done. Now here's your reward for doing the right thing." But you need to know, that when we think about denying ourselves, saying no to sin, putting to death the sin in our lives, you need to know that there's benefit here and now. And that doesn't take a lot of imagination because a lot of us have experienced this. *We* can testify to that. There's reward here and now.

I'll give you one example. Turn with me to 1 Timothy, chapter 4. 1 Timothy, chapter 4. I just want you to underline it and highlight this verse, because it is very helpful as we think about why should I go to the hassle of denying myself the pleasures of doing what I want to do, saying what I want to say, telling the jokes I want to tell, thinking the thoughts I want to think, indulging in the pleasures that I want to indulge—why? Why work so hard at this? Why fight it?

Well, it's certainly rewarding to fight it. Winning any skirmish against temptation is going to be rewarding, but it's not just by and by. Don't fall asleep in your bed going, "Oh, one day God's will reward me for this in heaven." You know, when you deny yourself, you need to recognize there's reward here and now.

1 Timothy, chapter 4, verse number 8. "But godliness"—okay, you want to talk about working to do something that's hard? You see those guys at the gym sweating it out, right? I mean they're working hard, and yeah, you know there's benefit for that, Paul says. But, here's the deal. You work hard at this next word. What is it?—"godliness"—see, that—"has value"—now here's the big expansive word—"for all things. And"—this is great—"it holds out promise for both"—circle that word "both"—"for both the present life and the life to come."

I want you to ponder that for a second. Let that percolate for a minute. That when you and I say no to sin, the sins that we're kind of getting entangled in right now, if eight weeks from now, we're really winning battles against those temptations in our minds, in our thoughts, in our words, in our attitudes, in our actions. If we're winning those battles, it will be reward, not only in the by and by treasures in heaven, it will be rewarded here and now. And we could get up, and you could probably say, "You know, I have fought temptation and won in a few battles in my life. And you're right. It was worth it." Can you not say that? Can we not open up the mic and have you come up here and go, "Yeah, that's true. It was rewarding to say no to sin. And though it was hard and I got the ridicule of the world and all that, and maybe I denied myself, and I had an unmet appetite or desire, when I said no, it was worth it."

And if that doesn't prove it, let's invert it for a minute. Invert that principle. Weren't there times when you gave in to sin, that you looked back on, and said, "Wow. It would have been rewarding *not* to fall into that sin." Right? I mean, isn't that right? I don't understand the hubris of our culture where you get these people on the TV all the time going, "Well, I have no regrets about

my life, you know.” I don’t understand that. Do you understand that? I don’t understand that at all. Right? Did you live a perfect life?

“Well, no, but I’m just—I just see it all work—”

I don’t—you know—I don’t—don’t you— isn’t there some things you regret about your life? I do. I’d like to go back and change a million things. I would like to, every time I’ve given in to temptation, I would like to go back and do it right. Why? Because, you reap what you sow. See? And I’d like to take all the scars of every failure and I would like to not have experienced that. There would have been a reward in the passivity of not having the damage caused by sin. Let’s start with that. So I’m saying there will be a reward. Because if you could run the tape forward in your life, and you could see your life working out on two different planes: one where you fight the battle severely, you mortify the flesh if you will, as our grandparents used to put it, if you say I’m going to fight it hard and you see the reward that comes to your life; and then if you say, “Naah, whatever, I’m gonna cruise and just read me another verse about how much God loves me,” if you go that path and you don’t worry about this stuff.

Can’t you compare those two lives in the imagination right now of your mind and say, “Wow, that’s a better life than that one”? I don’t want the scars of any more sin in my life. Do you? Do you want to carry that stuff? Do you want to look back and say, “Oh, I shoulda, woulda, coulda.” I don’t want to do that. I want to shore up as much of this as I can. And I hope that you do, too. And the bottom line is—let’s put it in a word—it’s rewarding. Fight the battle. It’s worth it. Every ounce of energy that is expended on fighting sin, it’s, you’re going to go, “Wow. It’s worth it.” I don’t it doesn’t feel like it in the middle of temptation, but it’s worth the fight.

Rethink the reasons. Reason number one, and certainly Hebrews 11 proved this to us: man, it’s rewarding. It holds out promise, and we saw these people testifying to the way that God rewarded them for doing the right thing.

Secondly, and if that wasn’t good enough—hey, fight sin because it’s rewarding—how about this one: fight sin because, and this is a rare alliteration from Pastor Mike, you ready? Letter B: because it’s required. It’s not only rewarding, it’s required. It is not only something that you should do because it’s worth it, it’s something you should do because you should do it. God’s telling you to do it. You must do it. You have an obligation to do it. You’re clinging to a cross where God’s anger was spent, and Christ Himself took the penalty of that sin, and it’s only something that is right to do because you have a debt. Just being forgiven indebts you to fighting sin in your life.

Let me give you one example. Go to Romans, chapter 8. Romans, chapter 8. In Romans, chapter 8, I hope that we’ll see, with the clear and explicit language of this text, that you and I have no option. Being engaged in a fight with temptation and sin is your birthright as a Christian. It starts at conversion, and you’re not left off the hook until you die. Right? Contrary the Wesleyans, our good friends in the Wesleyan church—here’s the deal. You’re never going to stop. The battle does not stop in this life. Okay? You are going to fight it when your 90 years old. There’s going to be some area where you are going to see that you got to declare war on sin. There’s no perfectionism here. You and I are in this fight all the way to the end. That’s every example in the Scripture. That’s the case. And it is an obligation that we have.

Look at the word in verse 12. Romans, chapter 8, verse number 12. “Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation”—that’s a big, legal word; a forensic word. It is a debt that we owe. You’re in contract for this. You are a debtor to some obligation, and he says, first of all, let me just tell you, it’s *not* to the sinful nature. It’s not to your flesh. It’s not to do whatever you feel. You’re not enslaved to your body’s impulses. You’re not obligated to say what you feel like saying. You’re not obligated to express your anger when you feel like expressing it. You’re not obligated, you’re not in debt, to carry out the desires and satisfy the appetites that you have innately in your fallen flesh. No, you don’t have obligation to that. To live according to the sinful nature.

If you do, verse number 13, here's the deal. You're going to die. Right? People that do that aren't even saved. But if you live by the spirit, here's the obligation now. Connect this. If you chart this syntactically out in some kind of diagram, you guys will see this clearly. Here's the obligation: the obligation is to put to death the misdeeds of the body. And again, that's the mortification. That's the big word. That's even a stronger word than fighting.

I had people really concerned that I had boxing gloves as a logo for this series, okay? Well, it's a good thing I didn't put what I thought of first. You know, something that was a tool of death of some kind. Because the Bible is calling you to declare war to the place of death, and your obligation is to—look at the wording here—put to death the misdeeds of the body. Whatever it is that is sinful, whatever it is that is less than holy, our obligation is to kill that stuff.

There's a part of our lives that need to die. And if you do that, you'll live. There's the paradox. Bottom of verse 13. "Because"—now here's an interesting phrase—"those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." Now that adds a whole new conundrum in theology. And that is this: that if you are fighting sin as a Christian, it is something you're not only obligated and required to do, but the obligation is so strong you could flip that on its head and look at it this way. If you're *not* fighting sin, you're not saved. Because the element of fighting sin is not just—this is not an AA meeting here. This is where God really indwells your life and is working through you. And if you're led by the Spirit of God, you're sons of God, and people that are led by the Spirit of God are putting to death the misdeeds of the body because they're obligated to do so. And you're not on your own in this.

As a matter of fact, if you want a cross-reference on this jot down Philippians, chapter 2, verses 12 and 13. What a great set of verses, and since there's not a service after this, why don't we look at it? Here's—and again, this is a bit of a bunny trail—but the conundrum of your fight with sin, and by that I mean it's paradoxical. I'm calling you to fight sin. And some of you are going, "Okay, I should do that." But here's the deal. If you're a Christian, as 1 John 3 puts it, your relationship with sin is *already* changed. You are fighting sin already, maybe not as well as you should, because God's seed abides in you. That's how 1 John 3 puts it. 1 John 2 puts it, if you say you're a follower of God but you're not walking as He walked, if you're not fighting the temptations in your life, then we got a real question about your Christianity. John calls you a liar.

Now here's the conundrum. Verse 12. Here's the paradox. He says, "Therefore, dear friends"—Paul writes to the Philippians; Philippians 2: 12—"as you've always obeyed"—and that doesn't mean they were perfect, but they were always working at it, they were always moving, they were following Christ, they were following the shepherd—"not only in my presence"—when the preacher was pounding the pulpit and breathing down their neck—"but now much more in my absence. I'm hearing good reports"—you guys are still following Christ! He says, "Continue"—keep on going—"to"—now underline this—"work out your salvation"—keep working at it—"and do it with fear and trembling." So get to work. Fight this sin.

And what's the context? Look at verse number 12. Obeying God. Fight. Work to obey God. Do it. Work it out. Continue to work it out. Okay? That'd be how some people are taking this sermon right now: "Okay, I gotta work at it." You do have to work at it. But remember this. It is so required that it is guaranteed by the indwelling of God in your life. In other words, you're going to fight this battle. All I'm doing is giving you some tools to help you fight it. Because every real Christian today... If you say this: "Well, I'll look at it. Maybe I'll fight sin in my life." If you can even say that, you're probably not even a Christian. I mean, you're a Christian from the outside in. Christians from the inside out, which are real Christians, are people that have God living in them. And because God live in you, He's already declared war on sin in your life. And he's going to push you to do it.

Look at the next verse. Work out your salvation. Obey God, work to obey God, "for it is God who works in you"—now that's weird—"to will and to act according to His good purpose."

Translation: He's making you holy. He declared you holy at salvation—that's called justification. Now He's working in you to make you more holy in your life. That's what we're talking about for the next eight weeks. And to do that, what do we do? Declare war. But here's the deal. It's guaranteed. You're going to be declaring war. The question is, how adept at it are we at it? How good are we at it? How skilled are we at it. Because some people you know bear fruit some thirty, and then other people are going to fruit some sixty, and then other people bear fruit some hundredfold. And here's the deal. It's rewarding to go after it. And it's also required. But I would say, listen. You have no option to be passive. It's a non-optional fight. So we're all going to engage in it. I'm just telling you, the harder we fight it, the more rewarding it is. But it is required. So please be encouraged by this: that it is rewarding. And please be obligated by this: it is required.

There's one more thing, and we don't have time to unpack it, but at least jot it down. Letter C. In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, this great cloud of testified of something else. Not only that it is rewarding and that it's required, but they testified to the fact that it is right. And by that I mean it's right in a kind of supra-true way. It's above the circumstances of just, you know, yeah, it's the right thing to do therefore I got to do it. I'm talking about it's *right*. It's right in the fabric of the cosmos.

"It—that's just—that—that Carl Sagan—it's—that—I'm out there now. What? What'd he say?"

It's right in the most profound sense of all. Okay? Let me give you one example of this. Jot down if you would, Psalm 51. Sunday school grads immediately know, "Psalm 51, I know that psalm." Psalm 51, and Psalm 32, Sunday school grads know, those two psalms reflect David's penitent heart. And the superscript in Psalm 51 makes it very clear, this is after he committed adultery with Bathsheba, and by proxy murdered Uriah, Bathsheba's husband. Now that's some pretty serious sins, right? Committing adultery, right? I mean, it's starts as some kind of, I don't know, he didn't plan it but he's gazing at this naked woman across the street, and then he's going to go pursue her, and then he's going to bring her into his bed, and then he's going to violate his covenant with his wife, and he's going to have sex with some other man's wife, and then he's going to then impregnate her, and now he's going to say, 'I got a real problem on my hands, so hey, I got a captain out there who can get the guy killed, and then maybe, you know,' so he does all he can to dig a deep, deep hole of sin. And I'm thinking, if you're Uriah's parents, if you're Bathsheba's sister, you're mad at David, are you not? You're saying, "You violated our family." "You violated." "You killed my son," if you're Uriah's parents, right? What if you're Uriah's brother? "You killed my brother. I mean, you're totally responsible for this."

Here it comes. Psalm 51, verse number 4. David cries this out of the depths of his heart. He says, "Against You"—speaking to God, now—"and You only have I sinned." Is that odd? Does that sound odd to you? I mean, if you're in Uriah's bowling team or something, I'm thinking, 'No, you sinned against us. You hurt us. You sinned Bathsheba. You sinned against your wife. You sinned against Uriah.' And yet he says, "You know what, that's all true on this level." But when it comes to sin in its most profound theological sense, we have sinned against God, Himself. Every sin you commit, let's put it this way, is violence against the character of God. It is not right on that philosophical, theological level. Your sin, whether it's an outburst of anger, kicking the dog, screaming at your wife, lustful thought, compromise at work, telling a lie, whatever it is, it does violence against the character of an omnipotent, holy God who created the universe, and sits whether we believe or not at the center of all things. And out here, somewhere, in the cosmos, you as a person doing wrong does violence to all that is right. And in that sense, every sin we commit is an exclusive sin against the righteousness, holiness, appropriateness of God.

Is that too philosophical? Do you track with some of that? That is a big deal. And so not only is it rewarded, you know, and not only is it required, it's just right. In the most profound sense. So I want to fight sin in my life, because it's going to be worth it for me, and it's something I got to

do because I'm a Christian, and it's just profoundly the right thing to do. I mean we should be serving God and doing righteous things and saying no to temptation because it's right in the most profound sense. My sin does violence to the character of God.

All right. Three reasons. We could have thirty-three reasons and we could re-analyze Chapter 11, but the bottom line is, since we're surrounded by such a great cloud of testifiers who have testified to the appropriateness, the value, the reward, the requirement, and the rightness of doing the right thing, here's the deal. Let's throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles, *and*—bottom line, now—let us run with perseverance the race that is marked out for us. There's the heroes, chapter 11. Now you got a race to run. And you better throw that sin out of your life because you got to run that race. But here's the virtue you're going to need. Circle this word. The virtue that you're going to need is, what? Perseverance. I got to have perseverance. I cannot do it without that. I need to persevere.

I cannot think as I said earlier, that the Christian life, when I become a Christian, *solves* the problem. It *creates* the problem. Right? The world is declaring war on my values. My body is rebelling against the resolve to follow Christ. And that battle, as Paul said, in the last chapter of the last book he ever wrote in the New Testament, the second epistle to Timothy, he said, listen, it's not until his dying day that he could say this line: "I fought the good fight. I finished the race." He doesn't say that until he's about to die. The preceding phrase is, "I'm going to be poured out like a drink offering." He's on his deathbed, and his amanuensis is standing next to him, and he's dictating these words: 'Here's the deal. I'm about to—I'm dying tonight. And you know what? Because I'm dying, I finished the race, I fought the good fight, and now I'm going to get the crown that stored up for me.' Here's an apostle. Do you think Paul was a godly guy? I'm thinking he was. I'd like to have him as my Sunday school teacher. He's a pretty godly guy. And the Bible says that on his deathbed, he finally could say, 'And now I'm done.'

What does that mean? That means that you're going to fighting this thing for the rest of your life. How old are you? Think about it. You know, ten years from now if you're still alive, you're going to be fighting this fight. Young people, thirty-five years from now if the Lord tarries, and you're still alive, you're going to be fighting this fight. You're going to win a battle, maybe in the next eight weeks, over some area of your life, and then it's going to creep up, and the onslaught and the battle and the temptation and the opportunity for sin, it's going to come again and you're going to fight it all over again.

Wow. Tired of fighting it. Couldn't this be easier? No, it's not going to be easy. It will be a lifelong struggle. It's not a sprint. The picture here is a marathon. And a marathon means it's going to hurt the whole time.. I mean, running is excruciating, right? Why do people do that? You don't need to do that. But in the Christian life, you have to do it. And when you're sucking air, and there's all that self-talk going on, 'Oh, come on I can do this!'

I was in a marathon club—I know that's shocking. It was in junior high, okay, long time ago. Lean and mean Mike, in junior high—and I remember the fifty mile club. We were running fifty miles, not at one time, after school every day. And it was the most ridiculous, excruciating thing I ever did. But I think to myself, all those thought you have when you're running, right? Some runners here—some you healthy ones, you run. I don't understand, but you run—what goes through when you're just dying inside? And I'm sure you say this: "Keep going." Don't you? "Keep going. Keep going."

When you have the ability to do that, that's called perseverance. And I could just write that on your third pointer. You could write it and I could throw it up there on the screen, but there's a word that underlines this. But there's a word that underlines this, that translates it from the original Greek New Testament to our English translation, that is so descriptive that I want you write it down. And some of you who have been around for a while, you've heard me preach on this word. We've done whole sermons on this word. But the word in the Greek New Testament right here, that

translates perseverance, is the Greek word, *Hupomone*. I want you to write it down, and plus it rhymes so it's kind of cute. You and I need to pray, number three, for *Hupomone*.

Pray for *Hupomone*. It does rhyme. *Hupomone*? Why's that—why do you need to teach me a Greek word all of sudden? Here's the reason. This little compound word, if you've heard me preach on this before, has two distinct parts. *Hupo* is a preposition. All the prepositions are about relationship, spatial relationship. *Hupo* is the Greek preposition that describes something underneath something. *Hyper*—and we get all these from Greek, right?—hyper, you're hyperactive, that means you're overly active. Right? *Hupo*, like hypothermia, that means your temperature is too low. *Hupo* means something that's underneath. Okay? *Hupo*.

And what God does now in this text by the Holy Spirit He gives this verb, *Meno*. And this is the root of this word, *Meno*. And He says, *Hupo-Meno*. You're going to stay under. *Meno* is the word to stay, to remain, to be resolved, to don't move, just stay there, don't move, you can handle it, don't give up, don't quit, don't fall down, okay? And I'm always thinking of this word when I go to Israel with our group and we the Bedouins with their camels, right? You remember that, those of you that traveled to Israel with us? They got their camels there, and there's inevitably always the portly, stout couple that comes up and wants to ride it, you know, tandem. They want to ride it together. And I always look at the Bedouin with his pocket full of ones and I smile at him, because you know there's always this big couple that wants to ride. Not from our church, our church only healthy people, but the other church people pull up and they want to ride the camel. So there's 600 pounds on the back of the camel. And the camels always have to start down at the bottom. Now, I don't know, you know, if you've been around camels. Not this week, probably, but.

Camels are interesting animals. And I'm telling you, I've watched them. A lot of, lot of, lot of time watching camels as we wait for the bus at the next stop on our Israel trip, and those camels, they're very expressive about their displeasure, for the weight of the riders. Okay? You watch them. You, next time you go to Israel with us, you watch them, and listen to them. They groan, and moan. Right? Little kids get on them, no problem. Right? But you get the big, stout, portly couple, saying, 'Please, Pastor, take a picture of us,' and the camel stands up, it always goes, *vurvlerrrrlurreh!*

Right? You watch. They just groan, they spit, they stink, *ruawrerr*, lips are—and they hate it. But the Bedouin sticking the ones in his pocket, he's going, "No, no, no. Come on, come on! Tsk tsk tsktsktsk," right? Speaking in Arabic to the camel, "Come on, ngtsktsktsktsk." And the camel, "*Rrrlrnngrrlr!*" Right? And you know what? I've yet to see the camel toss the big, stout couple off his back. Every time, those camels. They may not like it. They may feel the strain on their back. They *hupomone*. They bear up. They don't toss. They don't fall down, they don't quit. You and I need to pray for *hupomone*.

Just came back from this vacation. We were having a little time in this coastal town, and we went to the lobby of the hotel, and we said "We want to do something with our family. I got a family of three young kids, what's good." "Oh, you need to go on this little boat, and this boat ride's really cool, and they let you go in this little cove, and you get to snorkel." "Okay, that's okay, we'll do that." So we pay way more than we should for the boat ride at the lobby of the hotel, and then we show up to go on the boat ride. So it's vacation time. I'm in non-pastoral garb and I'm there, and ready to just be a tourist, ready to go snorkeling.

So we get on to the boat. Right? Go down to the dock, we get on the boat. Get on the boat, we sit down, very beginning of the three hour tour, right? Ah, of the harbor. And I sit down, and this lady sits down right next to me. I got my family on this side; she sits down right there. And she squares her shoulders up to me, right? And we haven't even launched from the dock yet. And, I don't know what, but she just *peers* at me with her eyes, and she leans towards me and says, "So, what do you do for a living."

I'm a—I'm a auto mechanic. I don't want to get into it. Not now, you know. Into the trip, maybe. I was just starting! I don't want you think I'm weird *now*. You know? Just let me be with

my family. I just, uh!

And so then the conviction, you know, *ohhh*, speak the truth to one another, I'm like, *aaaahh!*

"Ahhh. *cough*ImaPacoughPastor."

"You-you're what?"

". . . Yu—I-I'm a pastor at church in California."

"*Reeaally.*"

Right? And then she turns her whole body, right?

"Ohh, we gotta talk."

She starts in. And then, at first it was, you know, great. I just want to hear your testimony. Off she goes on her testimony: "Well I became a Christian in college, and my life was a mess, and I came to Christ, and I got involved in this church, and dadada"—and then the story just went [downhill]. And then it was like, "You know what, though? My life right now is so hard." Right? She's got a family which she's totally ignoring. And they've just wandered off on the boat somewhere. Right? And she's squaring me up, and my family's lost interest in *me* at that point, and she—"And now my life is just awful. It's just awful. My marriage is just in the dumps, and my kids, I just, ahh!"

And, you know, we're having fun at this point. And then she says, she says, "And I'm thinking of taking my life."

Okay. I said, "Well, then we need to talk."

And here's the problem. She grew up in a church, in her college day and early marriage, where they taught her that Christian life, entering the Christian life, it solves your problems. That it'd be great. And I said, "Well, you need to go to our church. Because I remind them every week it's not supposed to be great." You're Christian life is going to be battle. And you know what passage I was in that morning? Hebrews, chapter 12. And I said, "Listen, I got a passage for you. You got to run with endurance the race that is set out for you. You need run with perseverance. You need *hupomone*. And you better start asking God for it. Because it wasn't meant to be easy. You're going to fight the good fight until the very last day, and God doesn't want you to quit. He wants you to keep fighting it. And I know it's hard, and I know there's marital issues, and I know your job's an awful thing, and—but here's the deal, you got to fight this."

So my wife can testify this was like two hours, at least, we're sitting there engaging in one another's life talking about the need for *hupomone*. And I turned to her, and we didn't have our Bible with us, but I turned her in her mind to a familiar passage in Isaiah 40. And I said, "Do you remember Isaiah, Chapter 40?" I said, "What does it say?"

Here, the prophet calls out and he says, "Have you not heard? Don't you know? The Lord, the God of the universe, He does not grow weary. He doesn't get tired. He doesn't faint, He doesn't sleep." But here's the deal, and here's the verse. It's so good. It says—do you remember what the Bible says? It says, "He gives strength to the weary." Those who wait on the Lord, they'll renew their hope, they'll renew their strength, if you hope in God. Fight the good fight, and keep fighting it, because you're going to fight it till the end of your life. But hope in God. Ask God. God wants to give strength to the weary. You know? And then that last part: "Even though young men, they stumble and fall." They do. People get tired, used, they grow weary, they're exhausted. "Those who hope in the Lord they'll renew their strength. They will mount up on wings like eagles. They'll run and not get weary. They'll walk and not faint."

I said, "No fainting. No killing yourself. No ending your life. Get back in the game. There's your husband. Talk to him, please. Right now. Let's make it happen." And it was so great to watch her countenance just pick up, and to say, "You're right." And at the end, she was high-fiving me, thanking my wife for taking her husband away, and [saying], "You know what? I'm going to go fight the battle."

And you know what grieved my heart the most? She's never heard that stuff. She's going to church every week and hearing, "Oh, hey, you know what? It's going to be great." It's a fight. You and I got to fight sin. We got to fight sin in our lives, and when it comes up and it creeps into our lives, we got to say it's a battle. Let's just fight the battle. And if you need endurance, and you will, you know where to get it. You get it from God.

And by the way, let me just point this out. Once you're done praying for it, and you got to pray for this every day, get off your knees and remember what we learned in Chapter 10 of Hebrews. There is no one in this room who can do this on their own. No one. You and I are all called to do this together. The Bible says this. It says you and I ought to be spurring one another on to love and good deeds. I mean the thing about her was, and I found out in her testimony, now she's lagging on her church attendance. Number one, I think you're going to the wrong church, but let's get you in a better church, and then let's get there. Get involved. And immediately I said, "Here's the problem. Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together as is the habit of some, but encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approach." What's the assumption? As we see the day approach, things will get harder. And as things get harder in our world, in our families, in our lives, here's the deal. We're going to need each other even more.

So as you pray for hupomone, God is going to take His hand on your back and push you into the center of the life of your church. He is going to say what you need now to encourage, bolster, and strengthen that hupomone is your church family. The word that is translated in Hebrews, Chapter 10, "encourage one another" is the word, *parakaleo*, to come alongside of. The church will be called alongside of you to encourage you. Some of you are out there when we're announcing Thursday nights, you're going, "Maybe I'll get the tapes." Here's the deal. You and I need to say we need it now more than ever. You should be less involved in your church this year than you were last only if the day of the Lord is further away now than it was last year. Are you tracking with that? There's no out there. We need to be more involved. All the more as you see the day approaching.

Bobby gets up and holds up a basketball jersey. 'Oh, that's interesting.' It's not just interesting and, "Oh, well, maybe." You know what? You would be better off playing basketball with your brothers in Christ at Compass Bible Church on Sunday night than sitting in front of the TV and flipping channels on Sunday night. Do you realize that? Because here's a group of guys together playing basketball and reaching out into our community to lead people to Christ. Do you think that might help encourage you to say no to temptation, and to walk a path of righteousness? Absolutely. Do you think you got a better chance of saying 'No' and winning battles over sin and temptation if you were in the trenches with our kids helping them learn Bible verses in AWANA on Thursday nights? I think you will.

I don't know what you're doing the weekend of Men's Retreat, men. I don't know what you're doing the weekend of Women's Retreat, women. But I guarantee you, you got a better chance of having *hupomone* and winning battles against sin, if you're sitting there sacrificing all your domestic responsibilities for a weekend to say, "Let us learn together, and bolster our relationships with one another, and learn what God's word has to say in a unique setting that will equip us to live for God." This is not just, 'Hey, we want more work for the staff; let's put a bunch of stuff on the calendar this fall.' The point is that you and I need this. And we need it all the more as we see the day approaching. And I do not understand those churches out there that think it's really cool or godly to say, 'Well, you know, we don't want to take any more of your time up.' Right? We're not a commune. We're not moving in together, okay? So, then don't worry about that, "Well next, they'll want us to live at the church!" I don't want you to live at the church. You got a job, you got a neighborhood. Go live there. And I guarantee you'll still have opportunities for evangelism and outreach.

But you know what, a couple more hours at the church this week—that'll probably be a good thing. Another night at a small group called a Home Bible Fellowship where we really dig

deep and apply God's word—that'd probably do well for your fight against sin. Because Satan's strategy is to isolate you. Because if he can get you away from the group, right? You've seen *National Geographics*. Those animals go after that struggling wildebeest. He's out there, 'Oh, well, I don't know, I don't want to go with the group.'

'Great! I'm going to eat you then.' That's what the roaring lion says.

And here's the deal. That's just exactly what Satan would want to do to you. You need hupomene. You need to pray for it, and you need to know this. Once you pray for it, God's going to put His Hand in the small of your back and say, "There's your church. Go get involved." Okay? And I'm not trying to just create more activity at the church. I'm trying to say that's what you and I need, and all the more as we see the day approaching.

Well, we got to fight. There are a lot of good reasons for fighting. We need hupomene to fight. And I think a sermon like that, and an outline like that—it can definitely afflict the comfortable. You come in here wanting butterflies, and "God loves me," and hymns; then you guys are going to go just, "Wow, that was uncomfortable." Here's the deal. Maybe you came in already afflicted. Let me just give you one short word. I know this is a homiletical no-no, but let me give you one verse that may help tie this together for those that came in under a cloud of conviction. And you're already afflicted, and you're going, 'This makes me feel even worse. I'm such a loser. I can't live righteously.' One verse. Okay, ready? 1 John, Chapter 2. Last verse of the day, 1 John, Chapter 2—or at least the morning. 1 John, Chapter 2. Sermons like this, sermons on sin, they afflict the comfortable, but maybe we need to comfort the afflicted for just a second. You come in here, you go, "Wow, that's just what I need. A reminder of what a sinful loser I am." That's the wrong attitude. Okay? I know Hebrews 12 is designed to get us to fight sin. But if you've been fighting it and you're coming in here and you're weary from the fight this week, and you have been on your A-game fighting sin. Please know this. That if you failed at it a few times, next Thursday when you stumble and fall, remember this passage: 1 John, Chapter 2, verse 1:

"My dear children," the apostle John writes, "I write this to you"—and he's just written a great chapter in Chapter 1 about living righteously, and confessing our sins, and doing the right thing. He says—"I write this to you so that you will not sin." That's the goal. But, if anyone does sin, and he's already said we're all going to fail. Punctuated failure. It's going to happen. Remember this: "We have one who speaks to the Father in our defense." Okay? This is not an adversarial relationship. We've got a friend here. Jesus Christ, the righteous one. "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins." And John is speaking to this little Jewish group out there, and he says, 'Just don't think it's just for us.' He says, "And for the sins of the whole world." There'll be people 2,000 years from now on some little coastal county, on the other side of the planet, and you know what? Christ's death covers their sin as well. The atonement on the cross paid it all.

This is not about penance. It's not about purgatory. Are you tracking with this? Our sins are covered by the grace of God and the cross of Christ. It is. It is. I'm all there with you. Declaring war on sin is our obligation. Recognizing when we fall, that the grace of God forgives us, see? That's also an important reminder. So if you're coming in here going, "Aw, don't lay on another layer of guilt about my sin." Here's the deal. Guilt has one purpose in Scripture. Have you heard me say this a hundred times? One purpose: To lead you to repentance. Repent, confess it, and get up, and let's move on and keep fighting. You fail—okay, great, welcome to the human race. We're all going to fail in our fight against sin. Get up, and go. That's why I like that, and it's a bit of a poetic statement in Proverbs 16:24. It says, "The righteous man he falls seven times, but he gets up." Just get up.

If you've fallen a few times this week and you came in discouraged today; and you're going, "Wow, I didn't need that sermon." Maybe you need just this last word. The atonement of Christ has covered your sins. God just wants you to get back up. Let's keep fighting. Don't give up.

Let's pray. God, help us to be people who take the fight against sin seriously. We want to get serious about our sanctification. We're not going to throw in a bunch of manmade rules about



dos and don'ts here. We just want to look at Your word, and if it's sin we want to say it's wrong and we want to declare war on it. And we want to be smart enough, wise enough, by Your Spirit's leadership in our lives to say if there's an avenue through which sin comes, we want to shut it down. It is not worth it to have some entertainment, some relationship, something in our lives that is a conduit for temptation and sin. We got to remove it. God, I pray that you would help us to declare war on sin, always remember we're not trying to earn our place in your family. It is not about some meritorious structure that keeps us out of purgatory. This is all about the reality that our lives are indebted to the grace of God. That the grace of God, because it's forgiven us completely, and Christ said, "paid in full," that all of our sins past, present, and future have been atoned for. God, it's just a reminder that that kind of grace instructs us to deny ungodliness. So we want to take that beckoned call; we want to take it seriously. We want to respond rightly. So God, give us the courage, the discernment, the wisdom, and even, God, the boldness to say to You to try us, search our hearts, see if there's any wicked way in us. God, we want to be changed. We want to be transformed. We want to be more like Your son as a result of the next seven weeks. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.