

**Our Fight with Sin-Part 3**  
**Reconsidering How Hard We're Willing to Fight**  
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Well, dodgeball was the first to go. Bombardier? Remember that game? Don't even think about it. Capture the flag, not gonna happen. Not in a lot of places, not in these days of our hypersensitivity to everyone's feelings. Because you might have read a growing number of school districts across the country are banning all kinds of sports—soccer, football, any kind of sport that may require keeping score, see. They don't like that. As a matter of fact, school boards have even suggested that teachers not use red ink because the oversensitivity to Johnny's feelings about the negativity of the color red. See, it might hurt his feelings. I'm not making this up. Some of you nod at me; you've read this stuff, right? And we don't want that. We don't want to hurt precious' feelings about his paper being substandard and so, you know, we want to be really, really careful that we don't make him feel like he could do better, perhaps. See, we wouldn't want that. I'm sure there's some bleeding hearts somewhere that want our teachers to stop grading altogether. Let's just not grade them! You might hurt their feelings! We don't want anybody to feel like they are, you know, less than what they could be.

Well, now that I've kind of let you know what I feel about that—um, was that obvious? I feel that way, I hope in part, because God's word seems to be antithetical to that kind of thinking. Thankfully, God does not act in keeping with the Colorado Springs school board, you know what I'm saying? God is not the kind of God who shies away from the fact that there are winners and there are losers. And that even among the winners there are some that bear fruit some thirty, and some sixty, and some hundredfold. He's forthright about his methods of testing and grading and evaluation. God doesn't shy away from that. As a matter of fact, he knows that that is a very important tool in our lives to motivate us to move forward. He knows that if we understand where we are, and where we could be, or where we should be, he knows that that can be the prompting that we need to move forward.

It doesn't always feel good. I mean, we don't like the grades posted in the hallways so we can have everybody see how we compare. It's kind of akin to the feeling we get and bristling at a parent saying, "Why aren't you more like your brother?" Right? We don't like that. But sometimes, if you think about it, that's a valid question. Why aren't you more like your brother? You know what I'm saying? There are times when if you have equal privilege and equal opportunity, why is it that maybe you're not applying yourself as you ought. Sometimes the highlighting of the comparison is helpful, though it doesn't always feel good.

We've been looking in Hebrews 12 at the calling for us to fight sin, to say no to temptation and say yes to what is right. And we've done a lot of comparison against the backdrop of Hebrews 11. We've seen a lot of, as we said last week, a drawer full of baseball cards and hitters that are batting .350, and we saw last week even the beginning of a comparison. But it starts to get pretty personal in verse 4. As a matter of fact, there are some people that read this verse and want to quickly just move on to the next verse, because it kind of makes us feel bad. It almost feels like a backhanded insult, like, 'Well you know what, you're just kind of, you know, you're a minor leaguer.' And people don't like that.

But remembering Proverbs 27 which tells us that it's really the enemy who loves to multiply kisses, and faithful are the wounds of a friend. You know what I'm saying? Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. I think it would be good for us, it would behoove us, to say, "Why don't we let that resonate for a week?" Why don't we make these eight words in the Greek New Testament in verse 4, why don't we let those words just penetrate our heart for a while. Even though they may make us feel a little inferior. Even though it may look like he's saying to us, well

you really don't measure up to some other people. And if you think I'm just kind of hop-scotching over the first century group, just recognize that if we were to compare ourselves to the first century Christians, we might even seem like minor leaguers to them. And the writer of Hebrews is saying to them, "You know what, you're not really having the kind of resolve and commitment to fight sin and do the right that some of the people of old had." So the comparison is doubly true for us.

Here's what he says. Hebrew 12:4. He summarizes what we've been talking about. He says in your struggle against sin, you can see this, you can feel it. Now, come on guys, he says. You haven't resisted to the point of shedding your blood. I mean, it's kind of like, Come on! Look at you. You don't even have any blisters yet. Talk about batting .350. I mean, you're walking home with a bat over your arm going, "I'm just kind of sore." And he's saying, where's your calluses? Where's the signs of your struggle to really say no to sin, and say yes to what is right? I don't really think you compare to the guys we just read about in chapter 11.

It'd be good for us to look at those again real quick. Look at that; the end of chapter 11. We could read the whole chapter, but when he gets to the place where he says, "I'm out of time," we get this rapid fire list of people. And he says things like this. Verse 32: What more shall I say? I don't have time to tell of Gideon, or Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel or the prophets. There's a mouthful. A lot of people who did some amazing things for God, who through faith they conquered kingdoms. You want to talk about stepping out of the crowd and being distinctive in the ability to follow God and say, "I'm going to do whatever it takes." Oh, they administered justice. When the calling came, they stepped up. Oh, they're not perfect, right. They're not Jesus Christ, I get it. But man, they sure showed that they were willing to follow, even at great personal cost.

And speaking of that, in middle of verse 33, sometimes their commitment to do what's right landed them in places like the lion's den. But the good news is, we saw great exploits of these people of faith shutting the mouths of lions, or how about Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego—verse 34—I mean they were thrown into the fire because they weren't keeping their little Jewish dietary laws and not compromise. But you know what, look at what God did. He met them in the furnace and they quenched the fury of the flames. Or how about those people that were so hated for their righteousness that they were threatened, they were on the "Most Wanted" posters, but God, he allowed them to escape the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. Their cowardliness it was turned to boldness. Their timidity was turned to courage; they became powerful in battle and they routed foreign armies. And even in the height of the classical prophet period of the Old Testament in the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, we see women receiving back their dead. Their children were raised to life again. Amazing victories.

But right here in the middle of verse 35, everything turns. But sometimes, because they stood up for what was right, God didn't protect them. I know sometimes he didn't let them to have their sandals wear out. They didn't even get blisters on their feet. But you know what, sometimes they were tortured. But even in their torture they recognized the privilege of suffering for what is right, and they refused to be released. They knew they would gain a better resurrection. But I mean, as a regular fare for these people that did some amazing things for God, they were tortured. And they refused to be released. They were jeered at, they were flogged, they were put in chains, and put in prison.

Verse 37: Some people threw rocks at them. They were stoned, they were sawn in two and God didn't deliver them. They paid the ultimate price. They were put to death by the sword. They didn't get rich off their commitment to godliness. They were around in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, and mistreated. And man, these are the heroes. The world wasn't worthy of these folks. They wandered in the desert and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

After that list, he says being surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, come on, let us run with endurance the race set before us. Let's cast off everything that hinders us and the sin that so easily entangles us. And then he says—last week we saw it—look at Christ. He was willing to go

to the cross. Talk about shedding blood for the sake of doing what's right. He could have wimped out in the garden, but he didn't. He said I'll do the right thing; I'll go, I'll be crucified. And now he says, what about you guys? Back to you again. How about your struggle against sin? Your commitment to do the right thing? Oh, that's right. you don't have many scars. It hadn't cost you a whole lot.

Before you throw up your hands and say, "Well, that's because we've living in a time that's not really hostile to the gospel," I think you'll find before we're done this morning, there's a lot that we could do to really distinctively stand up for truth that probably would cost us. As a matter of fact, it's the cost that often keeps our mouths shut. It's the pain. It's the ridicule. It's the people looking away from us when we walk into the office. And we don't want to distinguish ourselves that way. Oh, and I know, maybe they're not throwing us in prison. Yet. But things are getting worse, aren't they? I mean, it's just a matter of time. I know we've had a little reprieve here in modern American history in the last few hundred years, but times are changing. And to stand up and say, "This is true. Jesus is the way, the truth, the life, and no one comes to the father except through him, and anyone else who says they're the path to God is wrong." To make statements like that of the exclusivity of the gospel, that's going to get you in trouble. Not to mention the ethical code that comes into Scripture that says this is right and that is wrong. Start preaching that stuff twenty-five, thirty years from now and see if your preachers and Bible study leaders don't get thrown in prison. It's getting worse. And if for nothing else, it's time for us to gear up and say, "What are we willing to pay for this? Are we really giving our all?"

And I know it's hard, but he makes the comparison. Look at your brother. Look at your brethren, if you will, who are spilling their blood to do the right thing. What about you in your struggle against sin? Ohh, that's right. You haven't resisted to the point of shedding your blood. You know what he's saying to us? He's saying we're lightweights, and we need to admit it. Number one on your outline. I don't know if you're willing to admit it, but jot it down. I think we should admit it. We're lightweights. That's a good way to put it. We're just lightweights. We're playing T-ball here. Little American Christian with your struggle to do the right thing. It's, come on. Really? I mean, look at what we complain about. "Oh, I got a nasty e-mail." You know? "I did the right thing, and look, they're persecuting me." Right? "He hurt my feelings. He doesn't want to fellowship with me anymore." Right? See, Paul is looking over the scars of being whipped and stoned—people throwing rocks at his body—and we're complaining about an e-mail. Right? I mean, a lot of people are going, 'Well, I don't know if I can take another night out this week for church stuff. I don't know, I've just been out so much. Oh, we're just martyrs for the cause, you know.'

Really? I mean, you didn't get to watch your favorite television show. You'll have to TiVo it, really, and watch it at another time? Oh, you're suffering for Christ, really. That's big. How impressive.

The writer of Hebrews is trying to say that, no, it's not all that impressive. You're really not suffering all that much. We're lightweights. My wife and I say that. We love that phrase. We say it back and forth all the time when we are tempted to complain about the sacrifice of doing the right thing. We do the right thing and things are hard, or we get a few critics or enemies, or we lose opportunities or privileges. You know, we just say we're lightweights. Come on! I mean, we are not the people we read about in the Scripture. We haven't shed blood in our striving against sin, in our struggle to do what's right. We haven't done that yet. Yeah, I mean, words. We've had a few people not like us, but I mean, come on. Shedding our blood? We're not martyrs. We were inconvenienced. We get our feelings hurt.

The writer of Hebrews is saying, come on, think about it. You're lightweights. And the goal of that is not just to make you feel inferior, it's not "put a big F on your paper; look, you losers." The writer of Hebrews is trying to say, "You know what? Can't we do more?" Couldn't we have a greater resolve? When we're saying in our hearts, "God, you wouldn't put this desire in my life if

you didn't want me to fulfill it"—yeah, you know what? It's about taking up our cross. There's going to be sacrifice involved. And maybe we shouldn't complain about the splinter in our finger when the greats of the Christian life have hauled around the beam of a cross and been killed for the cause. And we're worried about missing a television show. Let's admit we're lightweights.

When I think about it in ministry, I always go back to 2 Corinthians 11. Why don't you turn there with me real quick. Here's Paul's list. And it's great that it's there for us, because it's so instructive and it's needed. But Paul is reluctantly saying all this. Because here's the deal. There were some in the Corinthian church that were stepping up and saying, "Follow us." It's kind of the precursor to the prosperity gospel. Here's a bunch of people saying, "Follow Christ and it won't have to cost you." And Paul says, "No, no, no. That's not how it is at all." As a matter of fact, people that are really servants of Christ, they pay the penalty. There is a price tag. There is a sacrifice involved. In resisting the wrong and doing the right, there is a struggle. And he says it's going to be part and parcel of the whole deal.

Verse 23. Now remember, he's making a comparison and he's doing it reluctantly. If you glance up from verse 23, he's made it clear, you know I'm not doing this because I think you need to really look at my resume, and I'm polishing my badges here so you can see what a great guy I am. He's just saying, your leaders have got the wrong gospel. They've got the wrong perspective on all this. He says, Are they servants of Christ? This is 2 Corinthians 11:23. Are they servants of Christ? I'm out of my mind to talk like this. I get it. But you need to know I am more. Why? I've worked harder and been in prison more frequently. Because my commitment to do the right thing, it's costly. I've been flogged more severely—and I think that's all tongue and cheek and definitely sarcastic; you know there's a ton of sarcasm, by the way, in 2 Corinthians. Why? Because these people hadn't been flogged. The leaders that they were (?) they hadn't been flogged. Probably none of them had ever been in prison.—He says they've been exposed to death again and again, and let me explain that to you. He says in verse 24. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Now that was a death sentence. Forty lashes minus one, well, it wasn't going to kill you but it was going to hurt. They were going to take that cat-o-nine-tails and dig those shards of bone and teeth into your skin on that leather scourge, and they were going to rip and plow and your back, and you were going to bleed. Thirty-nine lashes. He received that five times. Can you imagine, after Paul's morning ablutions as he's putting on his smock, his robe. Can you imagine what his back looked like? Think about that. And you've got some people that might treat you funny at the office. Look at his back in your mind's eye. This is someone who's giving his all for the cause. He says this: And you know what, they took me out back—verse 25—like with baseball bats behind the church and beat me with rods. Ah, that happened to me, what's that—uh, one, two—three times I think I got beaten by baseball bats behind the church. Hmm. And you got folks turning their nose up at you? And we're saying, "Well, I don't know. Maybe I'm too much of a radical Jesus freak now, maybe I should back it down. I don't know, relationship's important to God, you know? So I . . ."

Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. They threw rocks at me. And I'm sure there were broken bones involved. This was not good. Three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I mean, this is a long list, and you can read the rest. He's gone through it. And most of this—as a matter of fact, drop down to verse 29—most of it was because he was caring about the things that God was caring about, including a walk of righteousness, and a battle and a resistance towards sin. He says whose not weak and I don't feel weak, who is led into sin and I don't inwardly burn? He can't even put his feet up on the coffee table and kind of relax at night because his heart is breaking for those that are being lured into sin. Yeah. That was his life. And we need to say, "I don't know. Is it really that big of deal for me to stand up with a little bit more resolve and be willing to tell my appetites to take a hike because God's word tells me not to do that, and I'm, you know, whatever. Yeah, I got desires, but I'm going to say no to those."

We're lightweights. And I think it's important for us to think through Scripture that way. That's what Hebrews 11 was all about. Daniel. Lion's den. Let's think that one through again, real quick. Daniel could have done what most of us would do because we don't want to be persecuted. We'd say, you know what? Prayer's not all about an open window and getting on our knees. Right? Can you pray without all that? He could've said, "Well, God knows my heart. I can pray silently and kind of walk around while I'm vacuuming or whatever, and you know, I can pray. I don't need to get on my knees and open the window." But that was his custom. And he was not going to compromise. And that ended him up, one night, in a lion's den.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. How many people would say, "Well, it's just food. I don't know, what does it matter. It doesn't matter. I know that's the tradition of the Jews, and I know that's Levitical rules, but God understands. He wants us alive." Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego could have said to each other, "He much more cares about being alive here. He doesn't want us to tell the king of Babylon, 'No, we're not going to eat your food.'" They didn't compromise. And they got thrown into a fiery furnace.

Jesus. That's the closest comparison, who endured the cross. I mean, there's so many reasons for him not to go to the cross. And then his apostles just stood up. Steven? Did Steven really have to tell all those leaders they were wrong? Couldn't he have just gone to his closet and prayed and said, "God, I know they're wrong. Just, you know, convict them in your own time." He stood up and said, "You guys are leading people down the wrong path. You're the blind leading the blind. You're wrong." And they picked up rocks and they killed. And God in his providence didn't protect him, and he died that day.

Peter. I mean, now we're getting outside of the scope of biblical history. But history tells us that Peter, because of his commitment to Christ, was crucified naked upside down. And you could do the list of the rest of the eleven, right? With the exception of John, they were all killed a brutal death because they would not compromise.

And if that's not enough, I want you to turn your worksheet over and I want you to be inspired by the stories of those in the books that are listed in the box at the bottom. And I know you'll see familiar titles there, because some of them I keep putting in front of your face all the time. But maybe you've read some of the familiar ones so just pick a new one on the list, and say, "God, you know what? I need to read about those that are willing to go the extra mile and give of their lives for the sake of the gospel. The sake of doing what's right." I often recommend that you read this book, right here. The Fox's Book of Martyrs. I don't usually bring books up to the platform, but I wanted to show you this. This was on the nightstand of most of our spiritual forefathers in America. Those that turned the world upside-down, and the reason that we are not yet in massive persecution in the church, because the early Christians in America under the preaching of Whitfield, and Edwards, and all these guys that got up there and said, "We need to stand up for what's right and not cower." They had these two books on their shelves. They were the two bestselling books of early America. First of all, of course, our Bible, the word of God. And underneath that on their nightstand sat this book, The Fox's Book of Martyrs.

It was the bestselling book second to the Bible in early America. And what did our spiritual forefathers read? They read about people that gave their all, from the time of the New Testament all the way to the time of the writing of this book in the twentieth century. And they said, You know what?—um, at this point Fox had done it much earlier than this; it's been added to since—but they were reading about all the things that took place in England and in Europe of saying I'm going to stand up for what's right. And these two books right here inspired our spiritual forefathers in America to stand up and say, "You know what, we're willing to be ridiculed or maligned but whatever they want to do to us, but we're going to stand up for this book, God's word."

And if you haven't read this, you need to. And if you have and it's, you know, kind of, or you start and it's all antiquated, get another book on the list and spend some time thinking through

people like Perpetua, a 22-year old, who is told by the Roman government that she had to deny Christ and say Caesar was lord and she wouldn't do it. And she's nursing a child, and her father—you can imagine, grandparents, can't you?—trying to speak reason into your 22-year old daughter who is cradling your grandchild, saying, "Listen, just tell them whatever they want to hear. God will understand. God will understand. Just say what you have to say in your heart. God knows your heart." And Perpetua said, "No, I will not deny Christ." And Perpetua gets thrown into the arena of the lions and the Romans stand there, the pagans in their revelry, and they watch this young girl get stripped and ripped limb by limb by the lions in the coliseum. All because she wouldn't say the words that the pagans in her life wanted her to say.

Or how about guys like John Hus. John Hus, who would stand up to the leaders and say, "You know what? This is not a small issue, this is the gospel, this is a big issue. This is about issues of salvation, and heaven and hell. I'm not going to be swayed, and I'm going to tell you you're wrong." And much like Steven, they took John Hus, they took him out, they bound him after incarcerating him for years, and put him in a public display and executed him so everyone could see.

Or guys like William Tyndale. William Tyndale, you know his name? William Tyndale, known for one basic passion. He wanted to get The Bible in the language of the people. And the leaders of the church said, "Oh, no, we don't want you to do that. We want them to listen to us. We don't want them to have this in their hands." And Tyndale said, "No. We want the ploughboy plowing the field to know the scripture as well as the clergymen in the church. We've got to get the word of God in their hands." He knew the calling. He knew it was right. And the leaders said "no." And they ended up taking him, and strangling him after incarcerating him, telling him to recant, telling him to burn all of his works. And then they put him in the square so everyone could see as his family stood by, and they lit his body on fire, and they burned him on a stake.

Come on. Do you have to be such a radical for God? He said, "Yeah. I'm not going to compromise. I'm going to say no to compromise. I'm going to say yes to what's right." And these people spilled their blood. And I'm telling you, all you have to do is to get into stories like that, and then ask yourself a question when God's call and conviction is on your life to go the extra mile or deprive yourself of some appetite in your life. And you're going to go, "Come on, I'm a lightweight. I think I could do more. I think I could say no with a little more resolve, and I think I could say yes to the right thing with a little bit more passion." Because you and I'll see that the leaders of the church in times gone by, and even the rank and file like a twenty-two year old Perpetua, looks over the rails of heaven when we're pulling the splinters out of our fingers from the price that we pay for our godliness. And when we start to say, "Oh, I'm such a martyr!", they lean over and go, "Pbbbbbb! Come on. Grow up."

In your struggle against sin, you have not resisted to the point of shedding blood. How far are you willing to go to do the right thing? Are you willing to pay a little bit more of a price? There's two sides to it, and there's two words here that you should circle and underline. They're the verbs that help us understand what this fight is all about. Now the calling in the whole verse is that we're not really doing it to the extent that our spiritual forefathers have inside and even, for us,

outside of The Bible. So we need to recognize that we're relative lightweights. We're playing T-ball. We need to be thinking about the major leagues, though. So let's grow up in that.

But how do I it? Two things. Two words. And if you have your Greek New Testament—I know some of you bring it—you can see in this text that the verse is inverted. A lot of verses sound like Yoda when you read them in Greek, because they're all turned around. Well, that's what happens here. The word that's translated "struggle" is at the end of the verse. It's the last word in this eight-word verse. Okay, and the word "resisted" in the second part of the verse is at the beginning of the verse. And he's talking about the fact that there's been no blood spilt in your resistance, and in the last word he talks about his struggle. So let's take them in order, which for us

will seem like we're turning the verse upside down, but really we're putting them right side up. Okay? Did you follow any of that? Okay. Good. Some of you are going, "What?"

Okay. Here. First word that I want us to look at. The first component of this is the word, "resisted." You haven't resisted to the point of shedding blood. That is a very defensive word. It's a word that is really elaborated on. It's the most colorful use of this word in the Greek New Testament. The standard word that we usually see is a word called histamine, and histamine is the word, "to stand." Stand up to it. Stand firm. Ephesians 6. Stand firm. Do everything to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. Stand. Histamine. He adds a compound to the front of this word: antihistamine—it's not antihistamine, by the way, just so you know. Antihistamine. Sounds same, but it has no relation. Antihistamine—stand against. One wordy compound is "stand against it." It's not like just don't just stand firm, it's like lean your shoulder into it. Put the shield up and make sure that when sin's lure and the pressure of sin keeps knocking you back, that you're standing firm. Sin, according to this passage, is like a force that is being put upon me, and I have to stand against it. So the first part of this whole thing, this fight against sin, is a defensive posture. And the question for us is, how hard are we resisting it?

Number two on your outline. Let's just at least say, because our spiritual forefathers did a better job at this, let's at least say this. We need to step up the resistance. There needs to be a harder resistance in our life to the draw of sin. And I think it's helpful to kind of even personify it. Because there is a draw, a lure, an enticement that sin has. And to put it in the context of its goal, I want you to look at a passage, and this is Romans 12. It's a familiar verse. We have our kids memorize it in Sunday School. You probably are familiar with it. Let's look at it again. Romans 12:1-2. And it will show us that the goal of this force is to fit us into something. Okay? Look at it. Romans 12:1. Romans 12:1 and 2.

Romans 12:1 says, "Therefore,"—and that's a big "therefore" because he's talked about an amazing set of events about how God's sovereign plan and salvation and his work to redeem us, and it's amazing, isn't God good to us to allow us to be a part of this thing, he says—"Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy"—that's the summary of where he'd been, okay? Here's the upshot. Here's the practical point—"offer your bodies as living sacrifices." Now that's a hard, contrasted juxtaposition of two words. We're all into living for God, right? And that's the first word. I mean, we want to offer our bodies to live for him. But it's compounded with the contrasted word, "as a sacrifice." That is reminiscent of the call of Christ. "If anyone would come after him, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." There's this pain involved. There is this sense that if you're going to follow me and do the right thing, there will be a sacrifice. It will be difficult. And you need to offer yourself as a living sacrifice, and—again, this is the theme of our series—holy and pleasing to God. You need to recognize that's the goal. And to be holy, there's going to be some components to it.

There will be that sense of offence in that I'm going to live for God, but there will also be defensive posture. Look at verse 2. "And do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world." Do you see that? There's the defensive posture. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world. That is such a descriptive phrase. In other words, the world has a template for you. There's a pattern there. If you're teenager, there's a template of what the world expects teenagers to be. If you're a young married couple trying to make your way in Orange County and establish, the world has a template for you. There's a picture of what that should be and the values you should have. If you're in the middle of your career, picture for you, there's a template the world has. If you're retired, oh, there's a big template for you, and the world's got what they expect that you ought to be. And The Bible says that all of that is pressing you into that template. As J.B. Phillips said, and many people quote it but it's a good way to put this verse, he said, "Do not let the world pour you into its mold." Right? And that's a good way to put it. The world's trying to do that.

And it's not an inanimate system. You realize that it is a satanic force, according to Ephesians 6. That we're standing firm against the schemes of the devil, and he's trying to force us into a mold. And the mold is not a godly mold. It's a compromised mold. It's a mold in a template of misplaced loves. It's a template of passivity and cowardice and timidity. It's a mold of self-pleasing and self-interest and self-esteem. It's all of that. And the world's got a mold, and it looks a certain way for kids, for teens, for young people, for middle, married, for elder. Got a template. And The Bible says be resistant to that. You got to fight the draw. Does that sound like—remember Hebrews 2:1. It says we got to pay much more careful attention to the things that are being preached to us or we will drift. Remember that word, drift? That's so important that we get that. If we relax, here's the thing. You're going to be downstream and it's not going to work out for you. You are going to be less of a godly, holy, pleasing person to God if you relax for the next year. You're going to take a step backwards. We've got to fight the pressure of the world to have it be like it. There's a defensive posture there. Compromise and sin, it's constantly pressing in on us.

Took to the kids to the water park this summer. Did you do that? You got grade school kids, they wanted to go. So Dad gives in and we go to the water park. Now, the water park usually, it's a great thing because I just have to sit there and just, you know, chill out. They go do all those crazy rides, and I've got kids that want to do the drop; you know, the straight down drop, and it's just no way your dad's doing it. I had kids way too late in life. No. Right. Nah, I'm not doing it. Sorry. I'll wait here with your mom and we'll listen to our iPods or whatever. You just go do whatever. Have fun, come back sometime. That's it. That's the water park for me. Well, at the end of the day, my two boys go, "Let's do the Lazy River." They say, "Let's do the Lazy River." Now that had a good title. I thought, okay. Let's check that out. Lazy River. And I'd seen that of course. I'd seen the Lazy River. The Lazy River, you kind of get in here, and it's got a little slope like a beach, you get in, and it takes you all around the park, all around the park and drops you off right back where you started, and you have tubes you're riding on. Oh, I can do that. I never thought that kids would be into it, but okay, yeah, I'll do that. Let's take everyone, let's just go, we'll go do the Lazy River. Right?

So. We go over there, you know going on the Lazy River. There's people on tubes everywhere, so I grab a tube, kids grab a tube, they grab the little tube, Dad's a big guy, grabs big tube. We get in the Lazy River, we start going. You know, just the Laaazy River. Well, there's all these 16-year olds that get these summer jobs as life guards at the water park. And they give them a whistle, right? Little red outfit, little floaty thing in case someone drowns in the three foot, you know, deep Lazy River. And they walk the edge, and they watch. They're in charge of the Lazy River. A 16-year old girl looks down at me and she sees my tube, and she goes, "Hey! That's the wrong tube for the Lazy River. Tube's not authorized in here."

I'm looking at her like, you've got to be kidding me. Right? That's what I'm thinking, but my kids are all watching now, right? Authority figure telling dad to do something. What's dad going to do, you know? And I gave her the look without my kids seeing, like, No, you're kidding me, right? Don't do this to me, right? Because we're way down from the start of this thing. "Oh, that's the wrong tube for this." I'm looking at my tube, and what's the—I don't understand the damage caused by the tube that I'm in. "That's for another ride," she said, just kept on, right? And I'm going like, Okay, trying to be a good example for my kids, submit to governing authorities, okay. She's got the whistle, kids. So, reluctantly, and slowly, I disembarked from my big tube.

And the girl points and says, "There's one over there." And it was on the bank that I had passed about, I don't know, 30 seconds ago. Upstream. Okay? So I gave her the tube. Here's your special little tube for the other ride, okay, and I'll go get that one. So I start going, realizing now, that the Lazy River, not real lazy at this point. I'm fighting traffic here. People floating by me going, "What's that guy doing?" You know? And I'm walking upstream. And my kids at this point, they're like small on the horizon. They've written off Dad. And I'm going. And there's the tube, it's

there. I can see it. And I'm going, and I'm starting to feel my feet. You know at the bottom of this little three-foot Lazy River, I'm picturing blisters tearing off the bottom of my feet. And then, as I get closer to the tube and I'm getting there, I'm making progress. I realize the Tube is right near the jets at the side of the Lazy River that keep the river moving. So the closer I get to the tube—bughghgh!—this water is shooting at me. And about that time, I thought about how much I paid to get my family in to the water park, and I said, "Forget it. This guy's going to ride the Lazy River without a tube." Which, by the way, is not a lot of fun. I don't float well or something, but I wanted the tube. But I gave up. I'm not going to get this tube. Forget it! Forget it.

Bible says God's got a calling for us. Be godly. The problem is, the world's going to try to push you away from that goal. It constantly wants you to move away from it. You have to resist. And as I'm sitting there trying to resist the flow of traffic, and people are floating by going, "What are you doing?" Uh, I'm thinking, I don't want blisters. I'm not going to get bloody over this thing I paid a hundred bucks to get my family into. Forget it. And so, done. If you relax in the Christian life, you're going to be downstream next year. You cannot relax. The world's trying to press you into a mold. You will adopt more values that Satan wants you to adopt, unless you antihistamine. You lean into the battle, and you say, "I'm not moving." If God says don't think this way, I'm going to fight this thing. I know the propensity of my mind, I know the temptation of the devil, I know the system of this world is going to want me to adopt that thinking pattern. I know it's going to want me to adopt those values. I'm not going to do it. I'm going to stand firm. I'm going to stand against. I'm going to resist. And if it causes blisters on my spiritual feet, I will not stop fighting. Even when people float by and say, "Well, come on. I don't understand. God wouldn't want your feet to hurt now, would he?" Right? Think about all the rationalization we give to give in to sin.

Step up the resistance. We need to do it. And if you want to personify this even further, you might want to jot down and study sometimes James 4. James 4 could not be more poignant in this point. It calls being conformed to the world—it analogizes it with the adulteress' enticement. Picture that. And if that brings up some passages in Scripture, it should bring up the first few chapters of the Book of Proverbs as the fatherly wisdom to the son is, "Don't give in to the enticement of the adulteress. Her lips, they'll drip like honey. She'll say things to flatter you and flirt with you, but do not go down to her house. She'll stand in the doorway and she'll look so good. Don't go there. Fight it. Fight it." And the Bible says that worldliness is like that draw and enticement of the adulteress. And by the way, and that may be the temptation you're facing. Not in kind of illustrative way, but in reality. God wants you to fight it, see. It may not be adultery. It could be materialism. God does not want you to fit into the mold of the average Orange County family. He does not want you to adopt those values. Fight it. Do not give in to the lure. Because the lure and the enticement of worldliness is like the adulteress saying, "Come on, it's better over here. It's more fun over here. It'll feel better over here. You deserve more. You deserve better. God wouldn't want you to deny yourself. He wouldn't want you to feel deprived." And whatever your temptation, it is like that river that's pulling you downstream. Fight to walk against traffic. You have to. The Bible says it is our calling.

And if you want the specifics, sometime go to Ephesians 6 and reread the armor of God. You know the passage. Put on the full armor of God so you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. Our struggle is not just against flesh and blood. That's not really it. It's about the powers of this world and this system, and the spiritual forces behind it that are trying to draw us into a pattern that is ungodly. Fight it. Push against it. And the armor of God, you remember that? The belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the gospel firmly fitted, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the word of God. And then after that—he doesn't even analogize this one—pray at all times. Right? That's a great list. And if you want to fight the draw, you want to know what your defensive weapons are, they're there in that text. You got to fight off this stuff.

We're lightweights. And if we start complaining about how hard it feels, and how much it cost us, and the deprivation of my appetites and my desires, just remember. We haven't really gone very far in our fight. We haven't shed blood yet in our striving against sin. Step up the resistance. God wants us to resist even if it costs us the shedding of our blood. It may not make sense to Orange County people, I get it. We think God would much rather have us healthy and alive and in all of our relationships. Not so. He wants us to be uncompromising.

There's another side to this and it comes first in our text, but it's really the last word of the sentence in verse 4. It's translated in our Bibles, "a struggle." We have a struggle. Now I know the context is all about this sin, but sin in that case it seems like it's almost a reiteration of resistance, but it's really not. There's more to it than just say 'no' to temptation and the drift of being slammed into a template or a mold of the world. It's more to that. As a matter of fact, this word is a word that is used usually in the context in the athletics, of someone driving toward a goal. And you may have heard me preach on this word before, and it's fun to say, so I'll say it again: agonizomai. Remember that word? Agonizomai. It's a great Greek word, used in classical Greek for the person that's driving; the runner driving for the tape. In our context, the football player pushing hard for the end zone. That's the picture. Right? Agonizomai. We get the English word 'agony' from it. Agony. Agonizomai. And the Bible says that our quest to do the right thing not only has the defensive component of leaning our shoulder against the temptation and the draw of sin, but it's got this other component to it. Like a football player driving to the end zone. Like a runner just pressing on toward the tape. There is this offensive component to it.

And I love, too, this—again, the vocabulary of Hebrews is so great. He even compounds this one. It's the concept of anti-agonizomai. Just drive hard against whatever you have to, to strive toward the goal. Because a lot of people look at sanctification and our fight against sin as purely a defensive one. But if it's purely a defensive one, you do recognize that the price tag is not the largest on the defensive side, it's the largest on the offensive side. In other words, if you're saying, "Well, I'm trying not to fall into all those sins, and I'm trying to say no to temptation, and I have to tell my coworkers, 'well I can't do that,' and 'I'm not going to do that, 'won't go there with you,' and 'I won't say those things.'" That's one side. And they may go, "Well, this crazy Christian guy." That's one side of it. That's a defensive side. Is there a price tag to that? Yes. There's deprivation inside, there's some ridicule and jeering on the outside.

But you want to know why they burn people at the stake? It's not because they didn't go to parties with them. You realize that, right? They weren't crucifying Jesus because he wouldn't go drinking with them. That wasn't the point. They crucified Jesus—let me show it to you—John 3. Here's why. They crucified Christ not because of his defense against sin, it was because of his offense against sin. It was because he came to proclaim the truth. And here's what John 3 says about this. Remember those famous verses, in verse 16? A lot of us, this is the first verse we ever learned. Look at 17 and 18; those are familiar verses. He says this. In the vernacular of our language, we often say, "The bottom line is"; and in Greek it's the verb krino, and it's translated here, 'You know, the final judgment is, the verdict is this. The bottom line of all of this, Christ coming into the world, is this.'

Verse 19. John 3:19. "Light has come into the world." Here it comes. It's shining brightly. John 3:19. "But men love darkness instead of light." Why? Because their deeds were evil. Here's another way to say it. Verse 20. Everyone who does evil"—underline these three words—"hates the light." They hate it. They don't like it. "And they will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." They crucified Christ, and they burned John Hus, and they burned Tyndale, not because they wouldn't party with them. They burned them because they were out there saying, "You may not like it, but here's what says, and here's what God wants done." They held up the truth.

Number three on your outline. We not only need to step up the resistance, number three: we need to step out to make a difference. That's part of what it means to be sanctified. It's not just fighting the battles against temptation. It's fighting the battle of the temptation of cowardice. It's fighting the battle of the temptation of timidity. And that inverted is an offensive move. That's going in and saying, "You know what? I got to confront you on this because this just isn't right." It's going out there and holding up the light of the truth in dark places. As Paul said to the Philippians, "You're going to shine like bright stars in a dark and perverse generation." And the darker it is, the brighter you shine. And the brighter you shine in a dark and perverse generation, the more persecution you'll have. It's going to happen, and it's happening more and more right now. There are things that I have to think three times about before I say them on this platform because I know it's being recorded and I know it's being broadcast across the country. Because there's coming a time in our country where I will be jailed because of the things that I say from this platform. And all I'm trying to do is talk about what this book says clearly and forthrightly. And there are preachers all over the place that don't even want to talk about half the book anymore because it gets them in trouble.

Same thing's going to happen in your workplace. You could lose your job over it. It will no longer just be, "Well, I think he's kind of the little bit crazy religious guy in our office." You may lose your expense account, your company car, and your pension over this issue of saying, "I'm going to stand up for what's right." It's no longer about, "I'm just not going to compromise." It's about, "I'm going to stand up for truth." It will cost you and your family. According to Matthew 10, it can turn a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law. It can take families and it can polarize those families, not because you just won't go out with them and compromise, but because you're going to stand up for what's right.

You want to talk about being lightweights versus being a heavyweight. You want to talk about T-ball versus Major League baseball. It's more about the offense than it is about the defense. It is about the agonizomai of running toward the goal line, and not just trying to protect the football but driving the football forward. Jesus said though, there'll be a price tag attached. Jesus said it so well in Matthew 5. Let me turn you here, real quickly. Matthew 5, Sermon on the Mount. He says the problem is if your whole commitment to Christ is a defensive commitment to say 'no' to temptation, then what good are you here on earth? That's really the bottom line. In other words, if your whole thing is, "I just want to be godly and not commit any sins, I don't want to transgress any of the rules," then God might as well kill you this week, take you to heaven where you can live righteously for eternity. But he's leaving you on the planet for a reason. Why. Because he wants you to make a difference. Because you are, verse 13, supposed to be the salt of the earth. You're supposed to make a positive impact. You're not just supposed to avoid the wrong, you're supposed to move forward the truth of the Bible in the world.

Matthew 5:13? "You're the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?" You don't put sand on your popcorn, am I right? That's no good. Why would I want that? Little gritty sand, you know. Here, pour some sand. I know it's not that—I know it doesn't have any taste to it, but put it on there. Salt has to be salty or it's just sand, right? It's no good. And the Bible says if you lose your saltiness, look at the second half of verse 13, it is no longer good for anything except, let's find a place to throw it out. And yeah, so it gets stepped on doesn't really matter because it was really no good for its intended purpose. And if that didn't work for you, the analogy of light comes back here again. Verse 14: "You're the light of the world." And a city if its filled with light at nighttime, it cannot be hidden. You're going to see it. It's impossible to hide that. Neither to people on a small scale, where you could, it doesn't make any sense, you certainly shouldn't, you shouldn't cover up light.

Verse 15: "Neither do people light a lamp and then put it under a bowl." God has inflamed your heart for the truth. He wants you not to shine. That's the point. You wouldn't hide that under a

bowl. Instead, you would want to put that in a prominent place to shine. Put it on a stand so that it can give light to everyone in your office, in your cul-de-sac, in your family. He doesn't want you to be timid. He wants you to step out and shine. That's the point. Verse 16: "In the same way, let your light shine before men." What is that? Smile? To get my teeth whitened, right? Learn to bat my eyes and be nice? Right? Here's the definition of "shining before men." Are you ready? "So that they may see you"—what is it?—"good deeds." It's not about just saying "no" to sin, avoiding sin. It's about doing good things. And the world's not going to crucify you for helping old ladies cross the street. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about the kinds of good deeds that shine the truth of the gospel, the truth of God's word into places that are dark. Now this is not a license to be purposely, you know, kind of the office jerk. That's not what we're saying. Just be as annoying as you can be, right? That's not what this is trying to say. We should be shrewd about our Christian lives. But you ought to stand up for the truth. Do the people you hang out with all week, do they really know you're Christians? I'm not just talking about your friends. Do your coworkers know that you're Christians? Do your coworkers know that not only are you committed to Christ, which means you don't do some things with them, do they know by what you say that you represent the truth? The Bible says the church is supposed to be—talk about a city set on a hill—the pillar and foundation of the truth. But individually, you go to work and you are now to be salt and light. That's a stepping out. And that does cost. And the more our culture and our country continues to slide, the more it will be distinguished in righteousness and have to pay an increasing cost for that.

Hey, in your struggle against sin. Hey, in your resistance against it. In your agonizomai to move the truth forward, you haven't shed any blood yet. So let's not complain about the splinter. Let's be willing to take up the cross. Let's be willing to say, "Okay God, you have um, you've called me to this and I'm going to do it." Jesus' call to the disciples was just that. "If anyone would come after me"—what did he say?—"deny himself, take up his cross." Now I understand in our context your cross probably won't look like Peter's. You won't be probably skewered by your coworkers and stripped naked and crucified upside-down in the parking lot of your office. That probably won't happen, okay? But are you willing to incur the jeers, the ridicule, the talking behind your back? Maybe even for the sake of righteousness, would you be willing to let the chips fall wherever they may, even if it relates to your livelihood, for the sake of the gospel.

"Well, that's just not wise, Pastor Mike, that's just not wise."

Okay, well then you're calling the whole of the Christian church, and you're calling the whole of biblical history, pretty much a bunch of foolish people that should have just been more diplomatic about their Christian lives. Come on. Really? I think we're the lightweight. I know as C.S. Lewis said, "a chronological snobbery," and we think, "Well, you know, if I were William Tyndale, I probably would have worked out a better way to get the Bible—eh, they probably woulda liked me. I'm likeable. I'm the employee of the month, this month." Really? Maybe their commitment to truth outshines yours. Maybe it's okay for us to feel a little inferiority for an hour and let that resonate for an entire week, because it might motivate us to apply ourselves a little bit more. I'm not trying to create a martyr's complex in you, okay? I'm not trying to do that. I'm just trying to get us to the place of saying, "I'm willing to take up my cross." Especially in light of what Christ has done for us.

It's an old hymn. It wasn't even ever really super popular. But it was called. "Take Up Thy Cross." Maybe you're remember it. Third verse read this way:

Take up thy cross and follow me  
I hear the blessed savior call.  
How can I make a lesser sacrifice  
when He has given His all.



Just a great simple truth. It says, “Take up thy cross and follow me. I hear the blessed savior call. How can I make a lesser sacrifice when He has given His all?” Christ’s cross was bloody. It was cruel. It was humiliating. And I’m thinking, in light of what he’s done to take our sins and blot it out, am I ready to take up my cross which is really small in comparison. My spiritual forefathers, the big leaguers of the Christian life, they’ve given a whole lot more than I have. Can I go a little further this week? Am I willing to be deprived of fulfilling my appetites? Am I ready to say I’m going to do the right thing and stand up for what’s right, even if it costs me? It could cost me my job, it could cost a relationship, but I’m going to let the chips fall.

Step out and make a difference this week in light of what Christ has done for us.

Amen.