

# LIVING A LIFE OF RESILIENCE

*C. Stephen David | Ekklesia Evangelical Fellowship | January 28, 2024*

**GotQuestions:** Resilience is the quality of being able to adapt to stressful life changes and “bouncing back” from hardship. Resilience is a response to tragedy, crisis, or other life-altering changes that allows us to move on despite the loss. Resilience is the human heart’s ability to suffer greatly and grow from it. When people refuse to give up..., even after misfortune, they are being resilient.

**Illustration:** In the 2023 World Cup, India played to the best of its ability, was unbeaten, and won all ten matches, but finally lost the tournament to Australia. After India lost the match, I saw Sachin come and personally meet the whole team. He later said (came up in news article):

"I can imagine the agony of the players, fans and well-wishers and what they must be going through. Losses are a part of the sport but let us remember that this unit gave their all for us throughout the tournament."

This is what the author of Hebrews is trying to convey to the recipients of his letter. This passage is filled with athletic imagery.

❖ **Hebrews 12: [1]** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...

**Recipients:** Apostatizing from their allegiance to Christ under the threat of persecution.

**Therefore**—In light of what was said before.

**Hebrews 11 speaks about the cloud of witnesses** (not a few but many): Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and many others.

**Church History:** Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, William Carey, Spurgeon...

- We are surrounded by them, cheering us to persevere in our faith in Christ till the end.
- These witnesses are not just the audience cheering us to press on; they are the ones who themselves have gone through the storms of life and persevered in their faith till the end.

## 1. LAY ASIDE HINDRANCES

**Hebrews 12:** [1] Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely...

**Lay aside every weight (strip off every weight, NLT)**—In Greek athletic practice, the athletes would compete unclothed to put away the weight of clothing. This may be in view. **A weight is something that pulls you down spiritually...**

**And sin which clings so closely—The nature of sin**—the sin which so easily and cleverly entangles us (AMP).

**Apparent Sins:** It is Lust... Anxiety... Pride... Laziness... Anger and Bitterness... Distractions... Discouragement... Jealousy... Fear... Greed... Rebellion...

**Seemingly Good:** Television, phones, hobbies, friendships, overwork...

**John Owen** (17th-century Puritan theologian): "Be killing sin or it will be killing you."

**Exhortation:** Strip off / throw away everything that hinders your Christian progress, whether it be good or bad.

## 2. RUN WITH ENDURANCE

**12:1** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and **let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...** [athletic language]

**Note:** Running with endurance is required because the race is not easy.

**Observe:** Resilience doesn't mean you will **not fail**, you will **not become weak**, you will **be unhurt**. It means you **do not give up but keep bouncing back and press on forward**.

**William Lane, Bible Commentator:** The exhortation to run δι' ὑπομονῆς, "with endurance," identifies the race **not as a contest of speed but of stamina** (resilience). The allusion is to a distance race requiring disciplined commitment and endurance.

## 3. FOCUS ON CHRIST

**[12:2]** looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith...

**The language of a runner:** Where would his focus be when he runs? **Finish line.** What happens if he looks back? What happens if he looks on the side?

**Looking Jesus:** Pay careful attention to, keep your utmost focus on, fix your thoughts, deep contemplation

“Lay aside every weight”, and “sin which clings so closely” **by looking to Jesus.**

- THE FOCUS IS NOT SIN BUT JESUS.
- THE FOCUS IS NOT EVEN THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES. Christ alone is our FOCUS. Think about the cloud of witnesses but focus on Christ.

**[12:2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith...**

**William Lane:** “the champion in the exercise of faith and the one who brought faith to complete expression.”

- ❖ **12:2**, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before **him endured the cross, despising the shame** [*CHAMPION IN THE EXERCISE OF FAITH*], and **is seated at the right hand of the throne of God** [*CHAMPION IN PERSEVERING IN FAITH TILL THE END AND FULFILLING THE WILL OF THE FATHER*].
  - **Thus, keep looking to Christ who is our role model in the exercise of faith from beginning to end.**

Observe the command “**Run with endurance**” with “**Christ enduring the cross**”.

Observe the command “**Lay aside every weight**” with “**Despising the shame**”

- Consider Christ’s most gruesome public humiliation—group mocking, flogging, and carrying the cross on the streets, publicly hung on the hill.

**How did Christ endure the pain of the cross? v.2**, “Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and **is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**”

**What was the joy of Christ?** The right hand symbolizes a position of intimacy and authority. **John 1:1**, In the beginning was the Word and **the Word was with God...**

- ❖ **John 17:5**, And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

**Psalm 16** is considered to be messianic, and Peter quotes in **Acts 2:25**:

- ❖ **For David says concerning him**, “I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; [26] therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. [27] For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. [28] You have made known to me the paths of life; **you will make me full of gladness with your presence.**”

**Note:** The joy is also set before us—i.e., eternal glory.

The earthly life is hard when you go through it. **What encourages you to persevere is our joy in the presence of God throughout eternity.**

- ❖ **1 Peter 5:**[10] And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. [11] To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

**12:3**, Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself...

- Christ endured the cross (v.2)
- Christ endured hostility against himself from sinners (v.3)

**Note:** Endurance speaks about not giving up but pressing forward in pain.

**Lee Strobel, The Case for Christ: A Journalist’s Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus:**

The pain was absolutely unbearable. In fact, it was literally beyond words to describe; they had to invent a new word: excruciating. Literally, excruciating means ‘out of the cross.’ Think of that: they needed to create a new word because there was nothing in the language that could describe the intense anguish caused during the crucifixion.

**Question:** And why did Christ endure from sinners such hostility against Himself?

**12:3**, Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, **so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.**

- Does looking into the earthly life of Christ seem like a life of comforts?

**Christ might be saying to us,** “When you suffer from people despising you, **Consider me enduring shame for your sake.** When you suffer from going through the silence of God, **Consider me being abandoned by My Father for your sake.** When you suffer from physical pain, **consider the excruciating pain I underwent on the cross for your sake.** When you lose your heart due to the fear of suffering, **Consider my Gethsemane prayer, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”** My child, do not grow weary nor be discouraged. Fight a good fight of faith and join me in my eternal kingdom. Press on. Eagerly waiting for you.”

**A man who persevered in his faith all through the difficulties of his life and finally could say as he neared the finish line:**

- ❖ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7, 8)

**The Christian life is a life of resilience lived by continuously preaching the gospel of Christ to their souls:**

- ❖ **12:2,** looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him **endured the cross**, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
- ❖ **12:3,** Consider him who **endured from sinners such hostility against himself**, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.
  - This is done continuously, particularly focusing on Christ crucified.

**John Piper:** Life is wasted if we do not grasp the glory of the cross, cherish it for the treasure that it is, and cleave to it as the highest price of every pleasure and the deepest comfort in every pain.

**Invitation to Unbelievers:**

**Invitation to Believers:**

For many years Dr. Jeff Ray served as professor of preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He taught into the 1940s when he was more than eighty years of age. Trouble and tragedy etched their influence on the life of Jeff Ray. Early in his adult life his first wife died, leaving Dr. Ray to serve as mother and father to his children. His sorrow was compounded when one day in the 1930s he received the news that a beloved son had died. This calamity, added to life's other burdens, threatened to drive the vitality out of Jeff Ray. For a time he quit teaching and preaching in area churches. Dejected and depressed, he was unable to develop interest in anything and was ready to say, "I cannot go on!" Mrs. L. R. Elliott, wife of the Seminary librarian, sent her husband to visit Dr. Ray with a scrapbook filled with poems and articles which had encouraged her. After Dr. Elliott's departure the weary professor listlessly leafed through the pages of the scrapbook. A poem with the engaging title of "I Won't Let Go!" caught his attention. Realizing that he had been wanting to do just that, Dr. Ray read these words:

I want to let go, but I won't let go.  
There are battles to fight,  
By day and by night,  
For God and the right—  
And I'll never let go.

I want to let go, but I won't let go.  
I'm sick, 'tis true,  
Worried and blue,  
And worn through and through,  
But I won't let go.

I want to let go, but I won't let go.  
I will never yield!  
What! lie down on the field  
And surrender my shield?  
No, I'll never let go!

I want to let go, but I won't let go.  
May this be my song  
"Mid legions of wrong—  
Oh, God, keep me strong  
That I may never let go!" —Author Unknown

After reading the poem, Dr. Ray closed the scrapbook, arose from his couch of grief and defeat, and put behind him any thought of giving up and quitting. He returned to the classroom to teach and to pulpits to preach.