



# Stay the Course

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Hebrews 12:1-2

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Throughout the summer, we have talked about taking the adventure our Lord has for us. Some of our adventures are marvelous and others may be rather miserable. Our truest adventure is the interior adventure of the soul, trusting Jesus, the Lord who loves us. Our Scripture for the morning speaks directly to this matter of trusting Jesus in the adventures of life. *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, <sup>2</sup> 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* (Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV).

The Christian adventure amounts to a race and *we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses*, who are people who have gone before us and lived through the toughest circumstances, yet who trusted the Lord who loves them. In essence, cheered on by those witnesses, the Book of Hebrews tells us at least three things about the race: First, lay aside weight and sin that clings so closely. Second, run with endurance the race set before us, and most significantly, look to Jesus. *So let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely.* Want to run a race? Get rid of the excess weight that weighs you down – whether it is things you own or things you are involved in. Throw off the clutter. Kennon Callahan tells of sailing with his family near the Florida Keys. They saw a storm coming and they headed toward the shore. Kennon says, “As we neared the beach, I could see through the crystal-clear water that the ocean bottom was just a foot or two under water. I picked up the anchor and jumped off the boat and was startled to discover I was rapidly sinking down through over twenty feet of water. The water was so clear that things looked closer than they were. After I had sunk perhaps ten or more feet, it suddenly occurred to me, ‘Let - go - of - the - anchor.’ I did and rapidly rose to the surface.”

*Lay aside every weight* – whatever excess weight that holds you back *and sin, which clings so closely.* The phrase “clings so closely” literally means to stand around, to just hang around. So, the sin that clings is something that is hanging around you, constantly harassing you, surrounding you, tempting you. The sin that clings is that to which you are personally vulnerable; that habit, that attitude, that addiction, that old resentment, that way of reacting, that inclination that so easily trips you up. First, lay aside the weight and the sin.

Second, run the race with endurance, looking to Jesus. Over the years, I’ve shared some key concepts with you that just happen to start with the letter H. There is the Hebrew word *hesed*, which is typically translated as “steadfast love” but I love it that *hesed* means, “I will never remove my love from you, never!” It is the rock-solid love with which God loves you and how we are to love each other. Inspired by this *hesed*-love we respond with *hineni*, “Here I am, Lord, ready to serve. My answer is yes, before you even ask.” As we say, “Yes, Lord,” we experience the New Testament word *hilaros*, which is the root of our word hilarious which speaks of great joy. More on *hilaros* next week. So, the *hesed* love of God inspires our *hineni*,

our yes, and we know *hilaros* God's joy. Love leads to yes, which leads to joy. Now if any of you can actually recall all of those H words there should be some special award for you. Just to add to the fun, I want to introduce you to one more H word. Interestingly, although it's one of my favorite words, I've never talked about it at VPC. The word is *hupomone* and like *hilaros*, it, too, flows out of the ideas of *hesed* love and *hineni*, "yes."

*Hupomone* is typically translated as "endurance, resolution, perseverance" or even "sheer dogged endurance." So, when we read, "run the race with endurance," it's, "run the race with *hupomone*." The *hupo* of *hupomone* means "under" and *mone* means "remain" so it's literally "to remain under." Remain under what? Pressure! The idea is that there may be something difficult pushing down on your life such as a demanding, even impossible boss or parent or friend or husband or wife or child, a crushing health condition, a neighbor with a barking dog, a financial crisis, a never-ending pandemic. Whatever the source of the pressure is, you want out, you want to escape, you want it over. You are so done with it. But you endure – you remain under, trusting God to help you through whatever you are going through. That's *hupomone*.

Now, as a brief aside, I am not talking about remaining in an abusive situation, however you want to define abuse, but I am talking about situations that are perhaps exhausting, unreasonable, demanding, annoying, that you know our Lord would have you see through. "Father remove this cup from me, yet not what I want but what you want." Jesus saying, *hineni* to his Father as he *hupomones* (endures) the cross.

One of the ways my Greek professor, Cullen Story taught me to memorize the meaning of new words was by imagining pictures that explain them. When I hear *hupomone*, in my mind, I instantly "see" a basketball hoop – *hupo*, and *mone* - and a big bag of money on the floor, "remaining under" the basketball hoop. Hoopo-money! It's kind of silly, but it works! We are challenged to run our race, take our adventure, with *hupomone*, endurance, remaining under.

The question is where do you get the strength, the capacity to *hupomone*, to endure, to remain under? Perhaps it's the power of positive thinking. We all love the positive thinker who, while well aware of the problems, remains positive, forward-looking, and upbeat about the future. Yet, we realize there are times when a positive spirit isn't enough to sustain *hupomone*. I have a friend who has been diagnosed with ALS and four other friends suffering with a COVID infection, two of them seriously. While the power of positive thinking may help them endure, sometimes *hupomone* requires something more.

Perhaps it's the power of positive will-power. The famous words of Winston Churchill: "Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never – in nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense."<sup>1</sup> That's the power of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/never-give-in-never-never-never.html>  
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positive willpower. We know that a positive spirit and an indomitable will are human attributes that can help us to *hupomone*, to endure. However, there are circumstances for which the human spirit and our strongest willpower are simply inadequate.

The saddest song I have ever heard is sung by Fantine, “I Dreamed a Dream,”<sup>2</sup> from *Les Misérables*, which begins with, “I dreamed a dream in times gone by, When hope was high and life worth living.” The song begins with joy but descends into tragedy. Fantine ends with, “But there are dreams that cannot be, and there are storms we cannot weather. I had a dream my life would be, so much different from this hell I'm living, so different now from what it seemed. Now life has killed the dream I dreamed.” Oh my! Sometimes, positive thinking and indomitable willpower are not sufficient for *hupomone*. What is? Corrie Ten Boom said, “There is no pit so deep that God isn't deeper still.” Yes! The key to *hupomone* is in our text. *Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with – hupomone – endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus. Hupomone is all about the power of positive trusting. Looking to Jesus.*

Think about that paralyzed person we read about in Mark 2. We don't know if the paralytic was a positive thinker or a grump, whether he was weak in spirit or a never, never, never-give-in person. We do know his attitude and strength of will had no effect on his paralysis. We also know that the paralytic was loved. One source of *hupomone* in your life is the people who love you, which is why we talk frequently about getting in a small group here because you will find real friendship there. The four men brought the paralytic, we presume on a stretcher, to Jesus and finding the house packed with people, they went on the roof, made a hole in it and let the paralytic down. To me the most fascinating part of the whole story is that Jesus does not look down at the paralytic and say, “Your faith has made you well,” as he said to others. Instead, he looks up and sees the stretcher-bearers on the roof who were looking down, who were literally running the race with *hupomone*, looking to Jesus on behalf of their friend, and Jesus seeing their faith, healed the paralytic. Thank God for the stretcher-bearers in your own life, whose own *hupomone* sustains your *hupomone*! *Hupomone* is not sustained merely by your power of positive thinking or positive willpower, but by the power of positive trusting – looking to Jesus and to your supportive fellowship.

Allan Emery was a follower of Jesus who experienced what it means to trust Jesus to stay the course, no matter what is going on at the moment.<sup>3</sup> Allan describes working in the Coast Guard, “I was Officer-in-Charge of a small vessel. One night I prayed, thanking the Lord that I was in harbor as the seas were twenty-foot waves with gale force winds. Then the phone rang,

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<sup>2</sup> Alain Albert Boubli / Claude Michel Schonberg / Herbert Kretzmer / Jean Marc Natel

<sup>3</sup> Allan C. Emery, *A Turtle on a Fencepost*, (Word Books, 1979, Waco), pp. 65-68

the Captain of the Port, said, “Emery, we have a Navy pilot who has gone down and you’ve got to go out.”

I reminded Captain Scott that I had just returned from a two-day patrol. My men were out on liberty. “Round them up.” I told him that in 19-degrees no pilot could live but a few minutes. Through the roar of the wind. I could clearly hear the officer shouting through the phone, “Emery, when the Coast Guard took over the U.S. Lifesaving Service, they also accepted its motto, of which ‘Semper Paratus’ (always prepared) is used today. The old motto was ‘You have to go out, you don’t have to come back.’” “All I could say is, ‘Aye, aye, sir.’” Essentially Allan said *hineni!*

Allen said, “Soon we felt the full force of the gale. We found no wreckage and no pilot. Suddenly, a flashing light shone flashing three short, three long, three short. S.O.S. We sent back the message, ‘Stand by, we are coming.’ We found a small Navy craft, its bow hard aground on a reef and it was taking a beating from the seas. They couldn’t last long and we had to go. With rocks under the surface, we could well go aground ourselves, but we got a line to that ship and I gave full power to haul the other vessel. Nothing happened.

“The ship was stuck and now with my stern fixed by the cable, the wind and waves caused my ship to rotate until I felt my ship jam on the reef as well. Now all that was left was for us, too, to break up. No help could come in time. We’d had to go out, but we did not have to come back.”

Sometimes we choose *hupomone*, to remain under a situation. Other times we have no choice. In such a moment, positive thinking and strength of will won’t help, however there is the power of positive trusting, of looking to Jesus. Allen said, “I remember quietly telling the Lord that it was all right, but if he wanted anything more in the life of one Allan Emery and the men in these ships he’d have to move quickly. Our ship was helpless.” Allan was looking to Jesus.

“As I was gazing to the northwest, suddenly the distant darkness that was land disappeared. I realized that a great sea like a tidal wave was charging down upon us with the speed of an express train. By reflex I gave the engines maximum power. And the sea lifted us like a cork and we were free. We towed the other ship back to base and learned later the pilot we originally sought was safe. Allen concluded by saying, “I determined that with God’s help I’d remember Captain Scott’s words to me and apply them to my Christian life. “You have to go out (that’s *hupomone*), but you don’t have to come back.” The *hesed* love of God inspires our *hineni* “yes Lord,” which creates *hilaros*, God’s joy in our lives and sustains *hupomone*, the capacity to remain under by looking at Jesus and trusting Jesus!