

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

“Dropping the Baggage”

Hebrews 12:1-3

May 29, 2011

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

We are entering vacation season, and I sure that some of you will at some point this summer be packing up to take a trip. Connie and I sometimes are able to take a break and get away for a few days, and if we are staying somewhere overnight, it involves packing and taking stuff with us. It is amazing to me to go on a simple two night stay how much stuff we both believe that we need to take with us. As we load the car, we look like pack mules. I say “we”, it honestly is mostly “she”. I am sure many of you can relate to the hauling around of multiple bags into an airport, or relative’s home, or hotel room.

Now switch the scene to the summer Olympics and a marathon race. Can you imagine the absurdity of a runner trying to race loaded down with the baggage that we carry to our cars for a vacation? To prepare for a race, a runner will strip down to the minimum and drop everything so he can be light and free to run a long distance with endurance and energy. The single goal is the finish the race and finish well.

The Christian life is a marathon race, not a vacation trip! I need perseverance, and I need to drop everything that hinders me and wears me down. If I am going to finish well, I need every ounce of energy and strength to be focused on running well and crossing the finish line.

This morning I am challenging you to take an honest look at the baggage in your life that is weighing you down, depressing you, stealing your joy, and keeping you from running a great race. I have prayed for you and am now asking you to open your hearts to the Lord and His Word and His loving chastening hand. This morning He wants us to dump some baggage. So let’s get started.

The first step to getting rid of baggage is recognizing that I might have baggage to dump. A real indicator that there is some baggage is a lack of joy. Realize that God never intended for us to run this race bogged down with all of these weights and burdens, and when they are there, I will likely be weary and discouraged. He desires for His people to be blessed, free, and happy as they fight the good fight. Yes, I said happy. I didn’t say without trials, difficulty, challenge or suffering. The Lord promises us in this world we will have tribulation, but to be of good cheer because He has overcome the world. In his first epistle Peter tells us that we ought not be surprised or taken off guard when we have problems in this life. This is not a question about your current circumstances, trials or difficulties. I am asking you how you feel. Does life feel heavy? Are you disheartened, discouraged, overwhelmed, upset, or downcast? If so, it is appropriate to ask why and check and see if you are hauling around some baggage. The Psalmist asked a question of himself just like that.

Psalm 42:1-5

¹ *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.* ² *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?* ³ *My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”* ⁴ *These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive*

throng. ⁵ *Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*

The Psalmist recognized that he was downcast and disturbed, and he asked himself why. It is a good thing to ask yourself some questions when you are feeling out of sync and unhappy. Emotions are often indicators of what is going on in our minds and our lives. If you are not happy, there is a reason, and it often has connection to your spiritual condition. If you have check engine light flashing, don't ignore it. Find out why you are not feeling so good.

I think that I need to be clear at this point about feeling sad or down. There are times and seasons of life where it is appropriate to be down. If I have someone close to me that dies, even if they were a believer and I know they are in heaven, it is a loss and I will mourn and be sad. Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, even though He knew He was about to raise him from the dead! When I see tragedy and suffering in this world, that certainly will not make me happy. Certainly it is appropriate to weep with those who weep. Jesus wept and mourned over Jerusalem and their refusal to accept Him as their Savior and Messiah. Paul was burdened with the care of the churches. Heavy trials can lower our gladness. That's why James encourages us to count it all joy when trials come our way. Sadness is not a sin, but I believe the Bible teaches us that we can have joy in the midst of mourning! In the letter of II Corinthians, Paul expresses a plethora of feelings and emotions as he faced amazing challenges, and there is a very interesting verse in chapter 6. Paul states in II Corinthians 6:10 that he was *sorrowful, yet always rejoicing*.

The fact is that joy is a constant staple in the Christian life. It is fruit that comes from the Holy Spirit. Love, joy, and peace are a trinity of Christian qualities that appear together over and over in the New Testament. Continuous joy is commanded. Listen to this amazing passage.

I Thessalonians 5:16-18

¹⁶ *Be joyful always;* ¹⁷ *pray continually;* ¹⁸ *give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

In chapter 4 of Paul's letter to the Philippians, he in no uncertain terms commands them to *Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice*, and in His letter to the Romans, in chapter 14 verse 17 he tells them the foundational essence of the kingdom of God is *righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*, and that this is the acceptable way to serve Christ that brings edification to the body. The cornerstone piece of Jesus' most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, is the beatitudes, which are the character traits of a happy and blessed person in God's kingdom. The pinnacle of beatitudes is a joy to the extent that a persecuted believer is to literally leap for joy in face of persecution and mistreatment for his faith and righteous living.

The point is that if you are in God's kingdom and in fellowship with Him and His people, joy and happiness will be there. Though the Christian life is full of trials, challenges, hardship, and even suffering for righteousness, the same Scripture also states that life in the kingdom is filled with joy, happiness, peace, contentment, rest, and satisfaction. So if that is not your current experience, it is worthy of investigation. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any baggage that may need to be off-loaded. Jesus told us that when we come to Him, He gives us rest and peace and a light burden.

Matthew 11:28-30

²⁸ *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* ²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* ³⁰ *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

Here Jesus invites the listeners to leave the heavy burden of trying to please God by keeping the Law and living under the religion of the Pharisees, and take on His burden and yoke. He promises that His yoke is easy, and that they would “find rest for your souls.” The yoke that Jesus puts on your neck doesn’t wear you out and make you weary, discouraged and overwhelmed. It is a rest, a joy, a delight, a blessing, a privilege, and full of love and peace.

Listen to these words of Jesus as recorded in John’s gospel:

John 15:9-11

⁹ *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

It is God’s design for His people to live in a full and complete joy. As a believer matures in His relationship with the Lord, his joy will deepen and mature to fullness. This mature joy that transcends this life is what fuels and sustains us as we fight the battle. Even the godly sorrow that we feel when we see our shortcomings and sins is designed to lead us to repentance and change, not discouragement and depression. This concept was illustrated so clearly in Nehemiah’s instructions to God’s people as they started to sorrow and mourn over their shortcomings and sins. The people had just completed the reconstruction of the wall, and had been listening to the reading of the Law. As they recognized their sin, they were becoming downcast and mournful:

Nehemiah 8:9-12

⁹ *Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, “This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. ¹⁰ Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” ¹¹ The Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve.” ¹² Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.*

Nehemiah was telling them what we need to hear as well, that as the people of God, we need to be joyful and uplifted as we move forward. God wants you to enjoy His blessings and provisions as an encouragement from His hand. When we listen to the Word, we will certainly mourn and weep at our failures and weaknesses. But beloved, we should never linger there. In our sorrow and admission of our sin, we need to flee to the cross and plead the death of our Savior. He alone has delivered us from all judgment and condemnation. Our Lord Jesus bore the burden of our guilt 2,000 years ago on a cross on a hill called Calvary. Our grief and sorrow has been carried away by Him, and we are now free! We are justified, declared righteous, and fully accepted by God the Father in Christ. We have entrance and an open invitation to be in the very presence of the Creator of the universe. He has provided the way for us to come to Him in our need. He is our Father and our friend, not because we are worthy or deserving, but because He provided a covering for our shame, the precious blood of His Son. He is merciful and kind beyond comprehension and measure. Why would we continue to carry our shame and depression when our Savior bore our sorrows and carried our guilt? Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day to enter into the joy of the Lord, and receive the strength and power you need to sustain you as you face the trials and tribulations of this life. Beloved, we have good news today. We have peace. We have joy. We have deliverance. We have reason to celebrate. Why are you downcast, O soul!! Put your trust in Christ today. He will take the burden off your back, and place His gentle and easy yoke around your neck that

will join you with Him forever. Come and dine, and be restored and encouraged today. Allow Him to refresh you for His service. In the words of Nehemiah,

“Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

This means that we can boldly roll up our sleeves today and search and destroy this baggage that is pulling us down. I want to help you identify the baggage that you are dragging around so that you can drop it and leave it behind and run the race with perseverance and joy. All of these heavy bags cause us to be downcast, tired, weary, discouraged, and self centered. It pulls us out of the race, and takes us out of God’s service.

One reason why people don’t deal with baggage is that they mislabel it as a trial or a cross to bear. They mistakenly believe that all difficulty and heaviness in a believer’s life is good and that God has placed it there for some reason. They base that concept on a shallow interpretation of Romans 8:28, that teaches that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. These misinformed folks think that everything that is in their life is there for their good because everything in their life is put there by God. Though it is true that God is absolutely sovereign over all things, that same sovereign God tells me that I am responsible to throw off all baggage and hindrances to my Christian life. It is imperative that we make a distinction between the things that we are to graciously accept as trials, and other things that we are commanded to eliminate. Here’s one example. I am not called to attempt to control other people and how they treat me. However, I am absolutely responsible for how I think about and treat them. It is always God’s will for us to throw off everything that hinders us and robs our joy, and we are to resist and turn away from sin that so easily entangles us. None of those things are for our good, but are hindrances that drag us down and get in our way and need to be removed. They rob our joy, peace, and strength, and they are to be put off and replaced.

So with that in mind, I am going to give you five categories of common hindrances and weights that may be in your life. This list is in no way exhaustive. It is just a list of common baggage. The New Testament gives us practical instruction on putting off old sinful practices and attitudes and replacing them with new godly practices and attitudes. It’s the familiar progressive sanctification. So here goes.

Luggage Set #1: FEAR

This is a whole set of baggage that includes fear, worry, overwhelm, upset, distress, anxiety, procrastination, and people pleasing. Some people have lived in fear so long they don’t even recognize it as baggage that needs to go. There are numerous commands in the Bible forbidding us to fear, except for the fear of the Lord. What we fear is what we worship. Fear in my life is a form of idolatry. Because people are afraid, they fail to witness for Christ, avoid challenges, and draw back even when the Lord calls them into service. They say yes to other people’s agendas, and are afraid to say no to other people based on what they might think of them. They avoid responsibilities like going to the doctor out of fear. They won’t balance their checkbook, confront their children, or speak truthfully for fear of a bad reaction.

To throw away this baggage, you need to grow in your devotion and love for Christ, and in your understanding of His love and protection of you as His child. A great principle on dealing with fear is in I John:

I John 4:18

¹⁸ *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*

Bag #2 ANGER

This includes bitterness, resentment, unforgiveness, and self-pity. A person who carries anger may also have a fear issue. Anger says there is something in my life that I don't like and that have not dealt with in a godly way. I either give way to wrath and unkindness and blow up, or procrastinate and avoid dealing with the situation and clam up. Anger is a bad habit that is rooted in selfishness and idolatry (a demand to have what I want, regardless of others). It includes resentment and bitterness and self pity for not getting what I want. James gives us a way to avoid and rid ourselves of anger – listening to understand others, and not having such a high opinion of our thoughts and desires that expresses itself in speaking too much. Our selfish anger does not accomplish God's will. We need to get to the reason we are angry, and deal with that God's way.

James 1:19-20

¹⁹ My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Heavy Burden #3 CONTENTOUSNESS

This set of baggage includes being argumentative, critical, stubborn, complaining, unreasonable, bickering, sour, cranky, pessimistic, picky, and harsh. There is an overall absence of kindness, consideration, and grace towards others. Ego is usually present, and this person usually lacks the joy of the Lord or of anyone or anything else. Arguing and complaining have no place in our lives, and we need to root all of this out and replace it with mercy and kindness.

Phil 2:14-15

¹⁴ Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe

Nasty Sack #4 SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

This backpack not only weighs down the one who carries it, but brings other people down as well. It includes things like being selfish, self-centered, proud, arrogant, independent, touchy, and arrogant. The most heinous form of this baggage is religious self righteousness, that is illustrated by our Lord in the following passage:

Luke 18:9-14

⁹ To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' ¹³ "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' ¹⁴ "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

True godly humility is the cure for this one, and it takes the work of the Holy Spirit to show us that apart from God's grace, we are not only wicked sinners, we would act no better than anyone else.

Sand Bag #5 SELF-INDULGENCE

In this bag you will find covetousness, materialism, gluttony, addictions, and excesses. This junk carries the deception that pleasure and happiness are the same thing. Big mistake. People that carry this baggage live by their feelings. If it feels uncomfortable, then it is not an option. It is a belief that my happiness is based in how I feel, and how I feel is based on my circumstances. Freedom from this baggage comes as I learn to live in gratitude for what God supplies, whether it be little or much, and also to develop and exercise self control. I will drop the burden of self-indulgence when I learn to live for the long term pleasure of God's eternal glory.

Philippians 4:11-13

¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

So if you are a believer, and you are not happy and joyful and feeling discouraged and weary, it is worth asking the question, why are you downcast? The answer to that question may well lead you to some unwanted weights and baggage. There is no condemnation in Christ. He will meet you at your point of need and help you drop the baggage and replace it with joyful obedience and godliness.

There could be someone here this morning that has not received the Lord Jesus as their Savior. He offers His yoke to you today. If you are tired and weary and burdened down by your sin and self focused living, He stands ready today to receive you, forgive you, and give you a brand new life as His child and His servant. We would be glad to talk to you about how that can happen in your life by calling on Him and asking Him to forgive you and save you.

So how are you running the race? Are you running well, running lean, and moving along? Or are you weighed down with some heavy baggage? I would encourage you to get with someone you trust, like our pastor or a deacon or mature brother or sister in the Lord, and let them help you unload and dumping the baggage. The Lord really does want you to be happy and joyful and energetic for His glory. There is a mission for us to accomplish. There is a world that desperately needs to hear the good news, and God wants His messengers to come in love, joy, and peace. There is a race set out in front of us to be run.

Our passage from Hebrews encourages us to consider Jesus as our Savior and our example. He fixed His eyes on the finish line, the joy of returning a victor to His Father, bringing with Him a redeemed people saved for the glory of God. He is coming back soon, and that is when the ultimate joy of our salvation will explode, as He sets free this world from its corruption, and the Creation that was lost at the fall will be restored and enter into the freedom of God's Son. That is the finish line that we need to focus on. Jesus has finished the race, and He is cheering us on with all the saints that have gone before us. That is the ultimate joy that keeps us going when things get tough. It will be worth it all when we physically join Him. I encourage you to dump the baggage and finish well.

I Peter 4:12-14

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.