

How To Keep Going Despite Everything

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Heroic Faith Series
Hebrews 11.8-16

Last week, as part of our vacation, Marlene and I took our granddaughter, Naomi, on a brief Civil Rights history tour of the South. We visited Montgomery, Alabama and the church that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. pastored, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, where I had the privilege of standing behind the same pulpit that Dr. King used back in the 1950's.

Photo of Rich standing behind the Dexter Avenue Baptist Pulpit that Paige sent

Last Sunday we were in Birmingham, Alabama where we attended church at 16th Street Baptist which was the church where in 1963 four little girls were killed in a Klu Klux Klan bombing. Three of the girls were 14-years old.

Photo of the 4 girls killed in the 16th Street Baptist bombing

But as we visited the various sites, the place where Rosa Parks decided enough was enough and refused to move to the back of the bus, we saw exhibits of separate water fountains for blacks and whites.

Photo of Segregated Water Fountains

We saw different windows at the Dairy Queen for whites and blacks.

Photo of Dairy Queen

Separate everything. And then you realize that the infamous Nuremberg Laws in Nazi Germany which separated Jews out from German life in the most humiliating and degrading ways, were patterned on the racist Jim Crow laws of the American South. And South Africa also borrowed the laws from the Jim Crow American South in fashioning their oppressive apartheid laws.

So, the United States, our country generated these humiliating laws to segregate the races that were used by the Nazis and by South Africa.

So when we went on this little tour of Alabama and we saw this massive evil, from big things like denying people the right to vote, to little humiliations like denying people the right to use the bathroom or get something to eat after a long Interstate bus trip on a Greyhound Bus; when you look at all of these laws and customs that have been on the books for a century and it was backed

up by the police and the sheriffs, and threats of murder, bombings, and church burnings, and you realize that Dr. King was only 26 years old when he was elected head of the Montgomery Boycott Committee, you have to ask yourself the question: how did he and thousands of other people keep going despite the threats, the beatings, the jailings, the fire hoses, and the police dogs?

Photo of Police Dogs

As you are sitting listening to me, many of you might be saying, “I’ve never faced that kind of monstrous evil. I’ve never been denied the use of a bathroom because of my race. I’ve never feared that my house would be bombed, or that my church would be burned. My life is really easy. In fact, it is going really well. I just got my new dream kitchen.” Maybe in your dream kitchen you have the Italian Meneghini Arredamenti Refrigerator.

Photo of the Meneghini Arredamenti Refrigerator

The advertisement says that this refrigerator which only costs \$41,000 comes in solid oak or ash wood and can be lacquered in dozens of colors. It masquerades as a free-standing armoire which is really what you want for your refrigerator – to look like an armoire in your kitchen. So forget Subzero. That’s so 2014. The Meneghini Arredamenti Refrigerator is what all of us need.

I was looking at pictures of dream kitchens. You know what’s in contemporary dream kitchens – a Rohl Swing Arm Pot Filler.

Photo of Rhol Swing Arm Pot Filler

This is an amazing invention and only costs \$2200. What it is is a faucet next to your stove so that you can fill a pot with water right next to your stove. You don’t have to lug 10 gallon pots of water for miles from your sink to your stove, like you do right now. For \$2200, you can get water right at your stove.

And dream kitchens today have the Rachiele Ultimate Kitchen Sink which is made of copper.

Photo of Rachiele Ultimate Kitchen Sink

This sink which costs \$8000 is extraordinary! You can wash dishes in this sink. You can wash your hands in this sink. It has a garbage disposal. You can clean a whole bunch of stuff using this sink. Instead of throwing your dishes away like you do right now, or walking around with dirty hands all the time, you can use this \$8000 copper sink and clean stuff with water and soap.

But I tell you, even if you have the kitchen of your dreams and your life is super easy, there is always something wrong in this fallen world. There is always a snake in the Garden of Eden, isn’t there? Maybe you have a parent with Alzheimer’s, or a wayward child, or a pinched nerve that drives you crazy every time you roll over in bed, or just turn funny, or you have a horrible boss,

or you are facing a lawsuit, or you are going through a divorce. There is always something. All of us face some opposition and even our best efforts will ultimately fall short of complete triumph.

On the way back from Alabama, Marlene and I listened to a great book called The Big Burn.

Photo of the Book titled The Big Burn

If you like history, it is a wonderful book about the nation's largest forest fire back in 1910. President Teddy Roosevelt worked for years to preserve and conserve our nation's natural beauty. He was a huge conservationist. He was concerned about our forest, streams, lakes and mountains. So he worked for years during his two terms as President to protect the natural environment. And then he hand-picked a successor, a guy from the state of Ohio, William Howard Taft, who was one of Roosevelt's closest friends for 20 years. Taft looked Teddy in the eyes and told him that he would continue the conservation efforts of the Roosevelt Administration. But the moment that William Howard Taft got into office, he turned the national forests over to the big lumber companies who clear-cut hundreds of thousands of acres, stripped mined the parks.

Even things we think we've succeeded at don't last. They can always be undermined at some point in the future.

So, how do you keep going despite great evil? How do you keep going despite nagging problems? How do you keep going despite the realistic assessment that whatever we build in this world and how great it is, it is really just temporary? That it probably won't last and the next generation may take it apart. And whatever we build, even if it continues, it will always be less than perfect.

How Do You Keep Going Despite Everything? That's the title of my message today. Let's pray.

Hebrews 11:8–16 (NIV)

8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. 12 And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. 13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

16 Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Now, you should have been hearing every week while I was away that Hebrews is a book written to people being beaten down by life. They were beaten down by difficulties, persecution, by the brutality and difficulties of life. And the writer of Hebrews writes this pastoral letter which is designed to help readers in his day, but also today, to face whatever difficulties we might have with life and to keep going. The whole book of Hebrews is designed to provide God's counsel to us concerning how we can keep going despite everything. If you are thinking about quitting anything or throwing in the towel, read the Book of Hebrews.

I don't know what you are facing today. It could be the illness of a loved one. It could be a child in jail. It could be bankruptcy or a desperately unhappy marriage, or unwanted singleness, or infertility. It could be a rejection from a college, or the grad school that you really wanted to get into. It could be the death of a friend. Whatever it is in your life, how do you keep going despite everything?

We can keep going because of faith in God

The writer of Hebrews says what keeps you going is faith. That's what Hebrews 11 is all about. That's what we read about in v. 8.

Hebrews 11:8 (NIV)

8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

Abraham is the great model of the man who went through this world walking by faith and not by sight. We keep going by faith.

I need to immediately clarify something about faith. So many people today say it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere. They say the key is faith whatever you believe, whatever your higher power is. You can place your faith in the goodness of people, or in romance, or in your family, or in your kids, or in your own stick-to-it-iveness, or aliens, or whatever. It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere.

That's not what the Bible means by faith. Look with me at v. 11:

Hebrews 11:11 (NIV)

11 And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise.

Biblical faith, Christian faith, is not just a matter of having faith in anything or anyone like Sarah. Christian faith considers the object of our faith. We don't place our faith in our faith, we place

our faith in God. That's what gets you through – faith in God. Faith is a channel. Faith is an instrument.

Faith is a way to receive God's gift. Faith doesn't save us so much as faith receives God's salvation. God does all the work in saving us. And faith trusts God and what God does. It is the object of faith that saves us. So we never boast about our faith.

Let me try to explain this by one simple illustration. You know, in the Bible one of the ways that faith is described is by using the analogy of the human body. Sometimes the author will say that faith is like the eye that looks to Jesus. Faith enables a person to stare at Christ who saves. Faith looks at Christ. Faith looks at the cross with the eye of faith.

Now, if you have ever been in love and stared into the face of your lover, did you immediately think, "The only thing I can concentrate on now is my eyes? Thank God that I have eyes." or did you rather think, like most people, "The only thing I can concentrate on now is my beloved." Thank God for her. Thank God for him.

See, faith always draws attention away from itself onto the object. It doesn't boast in itself. The Bible says that faith is like a hand that grips Jesus and the gift of salvation. When someone hands you a gift, do you say, "Oh, aren't I great because I have hands to receive the gift?" Or do you say, "Thank you for the gift" and your focus is on the gift.

John 6 says, "Faith is like the mouth that eats the Bread of Life." If you are given a piece of luscious cake, do you say, "Well, right now as I eat this delicious cake, the only thing I can think of is I am just so glad I have teeth".

When I hear people say, "Oh, I wish I had your faith," I realize the person doesn't understand faith at all. Because faith doesn't talk about itself. What faith talks about is the object of faith, namely God.

At the end of the day what Christians want people to say is not what a great faith we have, but what a great God we have. Don't look at your faith – how strong it is, or how weak it is. Fix your eyes on God's faithfulness. Faith receives, faith eats, faith looks at, but the key to what is or who we're placing our faith in. What keeps us going despite everything is faith in the God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ.

But specifically, what is it about God, what has God done that enables us to keep going despite everything? The first thing is

We can keep going because of the call of God

Hebrews 11:8 (NIV)

8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

Why is being called by God so important in order to keep you going despite everything? Because we always face opposition and discouragement and because despite our best efforts nothing ever works out according to our best laid plans. And so when you face opposition, when you face difficulty, you need to know that it was God who directed you to leave your job. It was God who directed you to start this small group. It was God who called you to move into that neighborhood, or to start that business, or to marry that woman or that man. That you did pray about it and your felt that God was saying yes, go ahead, and it wasn't just your great idea.

You see, if the thing that we're facing opposition in is just our great idea, then we will lack confidence when we pray to God for help and assistance. Our prayers will sound like, "God, I got myself into this situation. I decided to spend all that money. I decided to put myself in debt. I decided on my own to move to this other city. I decided to quit my job because I hate my boss. And now when things aren't working out, I'm saying to you, hey, help me out here. Back up my act. I never consulted you. I never listened to you, but backup my decision." It is hard to pray with confidence when you suspect at bottom you're in the situation you are because you didn't listen to God in the first place.

But on the other hand, if you know you are called; if you know it is God who directed you to make the decision you're making then when you face opposition you can pray with confidence. God, you got me into this. It was you who directed me. I'm just going about your business. I can count on your help.

It was knowing that he was called that enabled Dr. King at the age of 26 to hear the news that his house had been bombed. How does a young man like Martin Luther King, Jr. keep going despite having his house bombed, despite being spit on and cursed and jailed, having his followers murdered, being doubted by his closest friends, being hounded constantly by the FBI? It was the call of God that kept him going.

In one of Dr. King's sermons he says that for the first 24 years of his life he had no basic problems or burdens. Because of having concerned and loving parents, who provided for his every need, he sailed through high school, college, theological school, and graduate school without any hassle, without any interruptions. It was not until he became the leader of the Montgomery Bus Boycott at age 26 that he actually confronted any real trials in his life. And then almost immediately after the protest was started, he began to receive threatening phone calls and letters at his home. At first, it was just a few, but they continued day after day. King said he took it all in stride. Oh, there are a few hotheads out there, who are just being idiots. But they'll give up when they realize that King is not going to fight back.

But the weeks passed and he realized that some of the threats were in earnest and he found himself faltering. He felt like he couldn't hang on anymore. One particular night after a really

strenuous day, he couldn't sleep. The telephone rang and heard a man's voice say, "Listen (and then he called him the N-word), we've taken all that we can take from you. Before next week you and your wife and your kids will be sorry you ever landed in Montgomery." He hung up and all of his fears came together at that moment. King said that he got out of bed. He couldn't sleep. He began walking the floors. He went into the kitchen and made himself a pot of coffee. He sat down and tried to think of a way to get out from the leadership of the Boycott without being humiliated, without being counted a coward. How could he get out of this?

And then he decided to turn to God. He said, "Lord, I'm trying to take a stand for what I believe is right, but I'm afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership. If I stand before them without strength, without courage, they, too, will falter. I'm at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone."

He heard the voice of God. "Stand up for righteousness. Stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever." He said at that moment his fears disappeared and he was ready to face anything. The outward circumstances didn't get better, but inwardly he had the peace of Christ because he knew he was doing what God wanted him to do. Calling from God is what enabled Martin Luther King, Jr. to keep going despite everything.

In a much less spectacular way, about 30 years ago the Lord spoke prophetically to me in a variety of ways in which it was unmistakable that it was God. He called me to leave my job where I was a professor at OSU and become the first pastor of this church. We were meeting at a little church building south of Morse Road off of Cleveland Avenue. Some of you know the area. On a particular Sunday they were running the Columbus triathlon. We were living in Worthington at the time and I needed to cross Indianola Avenue to get to church on a Sunday. But all of the cross streets that crossed Indianola Avenue were blocked. I started at 161 and there were saw horses there and all these bicyclists coming through and police. I turned around and went to Morse Road and it was blocked off. I went down to Cooke Road and it was blocked off.

Now, it is getting later and later. I'm looking at my watch and I realized that there were people already at church and they're waiting for a sermon and I'm not there. These were the days before cell phones and I had no way to communicate, "Hey, I'm having a problem getting to church!"

So I finally go to one other cross street and I'm driving down the street and I see the saw horses. I said to the Lord, "God, you're the one who called me to preach. You got me into this and if you don't want me to be at church this morning, that's fine. I will just go home and go back to bed. But if you want me to go there and preach, you are going to have to get me through."

I pull up and there are a couple of cars in front of me. I see this red-faced police officer screaming at people to turn around. So there are three cars and one of the guys turns around. The second car turns around. The car in front of me turns around. And I drive up and the police officer is just about to yell at me. I rolled down my window and I said, "Look, I'm a pastor. My church is across this road and if you don't let me through, there are a few hundred people this morning who won't

have a sermon.” He looked at me and said, “Oh, OK.” And he started pulling the sawhorses through and yelled at the other police officers, “Let him through. Let him through.” They held up the bicyclists and are pulling barricades out of the way as I’m weaving through as they continued screaming down the line, “Let him through.”

That’s the confidence we can have when we are called. God will remove barriers. He will somehow get you through.

You say, “Rich, I haven’t had a dramatic calling experience like Dr. King, or even like you. I haven’t had a particular encounter of being prophesied about regarding the situation I’m in.”

I will tell you, friends, some of us need to pray. We need to get down on our knees and pray until we know that we know that God has called us to a particular job, to a particular ministry, to bring a foster child into our home, to adopt, to engage in international missions, to make a radical change in our lives. And, of course, we know from scripture, we don’t need a prophetic word, much of what our calling is.

Listen, if you have parents who are still alive, then you as a son or daughter are called by the 5th Commandment to honor your father and your mother. You don’t need a prophetic word to fulfill that call. If you are a child and you have a parent who is alive, no matter what age you are, you are called to honor your father and mother.

If you are a husband, you know your calling from scripture. Ephesians 5.25

Ephesians 5:25 (NIV)

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

...lays out our calling.

If you are a worker, we have a calling.

Colossians 3:23–24 (NIV)

23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

This leads to the next point. How do we keep going despite everything?

We keep going because of the Word of God

Hebrews 11.8 is all about the Old Testament examples of faith. But why should any Christian today care about what the Old Testament says?

Let me make a simple point here. I said the way we keep going according to Hebrews 11 is faith – faith in God, who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. How do you grow your faith in God? The way that we grow our faith in God is to learn to rely on all that God says in the whole of the Bible – not only in the New Testament, but also in the Old Testament, not on the parts we like, but also on the parts we don't like, not only the parts we agree with, but also the parts we disagree with. To have a faith that will enable you to keep going despite everything requires us to take the entire Bible seriously including the parts of the Bible that cause us great tension.

So many people today pick and choose. They say, "I like what the Bible says about social justice, but I don't like what the Bible says about sex." "I like what the Bible says about love, but I don't like what the Bible says about divorce."

The principle upon which Jesus staked his life was his submission to Holy Scripture. I'm told that there are 1800 verses of Jesus' actual words in the New Testament. 1800 verses. If you have a red-letter Bible you can count them up. 1800. Of these 10% or 180 verses are scripture quotations from the Old Testament. Jesus frequently says, "It is written."

Let me put it this way. To say that you are a follower of Jesus, but you disagree with this or that in the Bible is to deny the very principle upon which Jesus based his life. It would be like saying, "I agree with Rich on most things, but I just don't get this Christianity that he is into. I personally think that it doesn't matter what you believe, so long as you are a decent person. And I don't think it really matters what you believe about Jesus – whether he died on a cross for sin, or rose from the dead. After all, those things happened 2000 years ago and they are pretty irrelevant to us today. But, otherwise, apart from that, I really agree with Rich on most of the way that he thinks about life." I would respond and say, "You don't understand me at all!" The entire basis on which I have staked my life – the way that Marlene and I have arranged our marriage, the way we arrange our finances, my career choice and what I do in the morning, what I do during the day, what I do in the evening, my friendships, my politics, my future – it is all rooted, it is all staked on my view of Jesus!

So to say that I'm a follower of Jesus and deny the principle of his life which was his confident embrace of the whole of scripture is to simply conjure up a Jesus of your own imagination. It is simply the crudest form of idolatry which is always about re-making God in our own image. To grow your faith in Jesus means that you follow the real Jesus' approach to the Bible.

That's what Jesus whose life and example we follow did. He stakes his life on what God said in scripture.

Let me make this really practical. At the depth of Jesus' sorrow and suffering, he quoted scripture. While he was on the cross, we read in John 19:28:

John 19:28 (NIV)

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”

Why did he say, “I am thirsty?” when he was on the cross? To fulfill scripture.

In Luke 18:31, Jesus is going to Jerusalem. What does it say?

Luke 18:31 (NIV)

Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.

And in Luke 23:27-30 here’s Jesus carrying the cross. He sees women and quotes scripture to them:

Luke 23:27–30 (NIV)

A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then” ‘they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!” ’

Those words were not original with Jesus. He is quoting from the Old Testament prophet, Hosea. Think about this scripture. When Jesus was carrying his cross, he was quoting from the Old Testament. Jesus based his entire life on scripture. Growing in faith requires us to do the same thing. Notice that when Jesus was facing the hour of his greatest need, when he was suffering, when he was overwhelmed, when he couldn’t possibly move forward in his human strength – when he faced the cross and when he was hanging on the cross, what does Jesus rely on? He relied on scripture. Over and over, especially as he approached the cross, Jesus quoted scripture.

When you are at bottom, friend, when you are facing your own cross, when you are out of resource, when your world is collapsing, when your marriage is collapsing, when you face severe health problems, or financial problems, when you are overwhelmed – you are out of work, your daughter is pregnant out of wedlock, your son is in prison, your family members are using drugs, you are wrestling with a problem, life is going entirely in the wrong direction and you have reached the end of your rope and at the end of your wisdom, how do you find faith? How do you grow faith? You rely on Scripture. In Scripture I find God’s promise. In Scripture I find God’s plan. Here is God’s person. I might not be able to feel anything right now, or experience anything right now, but I am relying on the Word of God.

Friends, I tell you in good times feed yourself with Scripture so that in bad times when you are squeezed and pressured and at the end of your rope, what comes out of you is the Scripture. Dig into the Bible. Read it. Know it. Meditate on it. Memorize it.

What else? I keep going because of the call of God on my life. Friends, if God has called you to something, then you need to keep going and not quit until God calls you to something else.

The founder of the Vineyard movement, John Wimber, used to say:

Old orders are good orders until you receive new orders.

You say, “What I’m experiencing is really hard. I’ve been rejected. No one seems to want me. I’m facing lots of opposition. I’m going to quit.” You can’t quit. What about the call of God? Old orders are good orders until you receive new orders.

What else keeps us going? Not only the call of God, but I cling to the Word of God. And we keep going because of the promises of God.

We keep going because of the promises of God

Look at how many times in this text the word “promise” is used.

Hebrews 11:8–16 (NIV)

8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. 12 And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. 13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Last weekend we stood in Dr. King’s Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama with another very large family. This guide from the church took us around; she was a wonderful Christian woman, very inspiring. At the end of the tour she said, “Now, I want you to all cross arms, grab the hand of the person standing next to you, and we’re going to sing together that great Civil Rights anthem, We Shall Overcome.” And so we just swayed back and forth, “We shall overcome. We shall overcome. We shall overcome some day, though deep in my heart I do believe, we shall overcome some day.”

See, Abraham and the patriarchs kept going because they grasped by faith that something better was on the horizon for them. Something bigger than they were experiencing. Something more wonderful was just around the corner. They knew they weren't there yet. They knew they were exiled and strangers as the scripture says. They weren't living in houses. They were living in tents. They didn't fit in. They faced opposition. But they kept going because by faith they knew that God's day was coming. The day when the kingdom of God would be revealed.

We face so many disappointments in life – things that we wish were different and aren't. In one of Dr. King's sermons that he titled Shattered Dreams, he said people typically have one of three responses to shattered dreams and disappointments. First, we can have within us a core of bitterness and frustration, develop a cold heart and a bitter hatred toward God and toward those we live with and those we're around. When we're disappointed and frustrated, we can lash out at God and other people.

A second reaction is we could withdraw and pull into ourselves, into our shells. We can take our ball and say, "I'm not going to play anymore. You've hurt me and so I'm going to quit."

A third reaction, Dr. King says, is some people adopt a fatalistic attitude towards life. Well, I can't do anything to change it. It's all be determined. I'm just going to surrender to the fates.

He said over-against these things, hostility, withdrawal, fatalism, Christian faith calls us to hope. And in speaking to African Americans of his day who were living under the brutal injustice of segregation and Jim Crow laws, King said:

Some of us of course, will die without ever having received the realization of freedom, but we must continue to sail on our chartered course. We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope. Only in this way shall we be able to live without the fatigue of bitterness and the drain of resentment. This was the secret of the survival of our slave fore-parents. ...When a new morning offered only the same long rows of cotton, sweltering heat, and the rawhide whip of the overseer, these brave and courageous men and women dreamed of the brighter day. They had no alternative except to accept the fact of slavery, but they clung tenaciously to the hope of freedom. In a seemingly hopeless situation, the fashioned within their souls a creative optimism that strengthened them. Genuine faith imbues us with the conviction that beyond time is a divine Spirit and that beyond life is Life. However dismal and catastrophic may be the present circumstance, we know that we are not alone, for God dwells with us. God's creative power is not exhausted by this earthly life, nor is his majestic love locked within the limited walls of time and space. Even if we die without having received the earthly promise, he shall lead us down that mysterious road called death and at last to that indescribable city he has prepared for us. Our earthly life is a prelude to a glorious new awakening, and our death is an open door that leads us into life eternal.

It's the promise of God – something bigger, something better. There's life that goes beyond this life that keeps us going in this life.

How do you keep going despite everything? The call of God, the Word of God, the promise of God, and finally,

We keep going because of the glory of God

I just want to look at a parallel text in Romans 4.20:

Romans 4:20 (NIV)

20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,

Let me finish with a story. So, last weekend we are down in Birmingham and I was walking over to a Starbucks to do a little bit of reading. On my way, a woman approached me and asked me if I could give her some money. And so I asked her, "What do you need money for? Are you from around here?" She said, "No, I'm from Memphis and I'm stranded down here. I was driving with my friend and her boyfriend kicked us both out of the car. So here we are." I said, "Are you hungry?" She said, "Yeah, I'm hungry."

So I said, "Well, I'm not going to give you any money." I basically have a policy that I don't just hand out money to people. But I will buy almost anyone something to eat. So I said, "Why don't you come with and I will buy you something to eat." So I bought her a sandwich and something to drink. She didn't say thank you, she just took it and walked out.

About five hours later, I was walking down the same street with Marlene and my granddaughter, going to dinner. I see this woman knocking on a car window asking some guy for money. I immediately thoughts, "WOW, she's got this scam really going." And then I thought why should I buy these folks food? Lots of times it is just a scam. They're just hitting everyone up for cash.

But this is the thought that flashed through my mind. This is what keeps me going. I didn't buy that woman food because of her or her need alone. I did it for Christ. I did it because Jesus said, "As you've done to the least of these my brethren, you've done it unto me." I did it because of the text in Matthew 25 that says "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat."

See, if we do things, anything, just for other people, and those other people disappoint us, as they will by being ungrateful, by being neglectful, by rejecting us, then we'll just give up. We'll say "It's not worth it." But if we do things not ultimately for the person standing in front of us, but for Christ, then we'll keep going.

Colossians 3.23 says this:

Colossians 3:23 (NIV)

23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,

As Marlene and I and our granddaughter went to dinner after I saw that woman, I rejoiced in my heart. I said, “You know, Lord, I gave that money because of you and I’m grateful that I have you in my life. I did it for you.”

Do things simply for Christ because you love Christ and want to honor him and you’ll keep going despite everything. Let’s pray.

How To Keep Going Despite Everything

Rich Nathan
August 1-2, 2015
Heroic Faith Series
Hebrews 11.8-16

- I. We keep going because of faith in God.
- II. We keep going because of the call of God
- III. We keep going because of the word of God
- IV. We keep going because of the promise of God
- V. We keep going because of the glory of God
- VI.