

DON'T GIVE UP

DEVOTIONAL BY KYLE IDLEMAN & JEREMY LINNEMAN

read

“Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles” (Hebrews 12:1b).

reflect

In sports such as running, cycling, and swimming, every ounce matters.

In Greece thousands of years ago, marathon runners trained with leg weights and then removed them on race day. Many of them even ran in the nude or very little clothing to reduce unnecessary weight during the long run. (Thankfully that’s not a thing anymore.)

These days, when marathon runners pick out their shoes, they’re counting not in pounds but ounces. While most running shoes weigh 10 to 12 ounces, some are as light as 5 ounces. Similarly, road bikes are counted in grams, an even smaller margin; carbon road-bike frames are advertised to racers as weighing about 200 to 300 grams less than aluminum-frame bikes. That’s a difference of half a pound.

And while swimmers don’t worry as much about weight, their “technical suits” are designed to minimize drag while cutting through the water.

The message is clear: If you’re racing to win, you don’t want anything weighing you down or holding you back.

After the famous Hebrews 11 Hall of Fame that we looked at last week, the author begins Hebrews 12 by calling us to “fix our eyes on Jesus.” But even before he does that, notice what he writes:

“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, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

As we prepare to run the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, we must first “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.” Let’s look at each of these phrases in detail.

Throw off

To throw off something is to identify the source of weight or drag that is slowing you down or holding you back, and to take the initiative to take it off, cut it away or replace it with something lighter.

The book “Don’t Give Up” says, “And yes, ‘throwing off’ implies something is on you. You can only know that something’s on you if you feel it, experience it or see its effects. The challenge is to identify these things in your life that are weighing you down and take action so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

Everything that hinders

What are we to throw off? First: “everything that hinders.” Be specific in what weights or sources of drag need to be eliminated. What unnecessary weights might be holding you down? Even a small weight or a bit of extra drag can have a significant negative impact on your long run of faith.

Here are some examples to consider:

- ▶ Anxiousness: “Everything will go wrong.”
- ▶ Unhealthy relationships: “No one really cares about me.”
- ▶ Fear of rejection: “Everyone will hate me.”
- ▶ Guilt over past mistakes: “I always do this.”
- ▶ Misplaced shame: “There’s something wrong with me.”

Sin that entangles

Of course, not all the things described above are sins. We might rightly feel angry when someone or something we love is hurt, and we might feel anxious or worried in a situation that may cause us harm. When another person consistently mistreats us, it may be wise to “throw off” the relationship.

But much of what hinders us is rooted in the sin of pride. This pride can be displayed in many ways:

- ▶ Anger: “Everyone should just listen to me.”
- ▶ Lust: “I should get whatever I want.”
- ▶ Greed: “I should be able to have it all.”
- ▶ Insecurity: “If they really knew me they wouldn’t think I’m worth it.”
- ▶ Self-sufficiency: “I should be able to do it all.”
- ▶ Envy: “They don’t deserve that—I do.”

The author of Hebrews is wisely instructing us to throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us. Why? He wants to encourage us, to put “courage in” us.

“Don’t Give Up” continues: “Sometimes we think we need comfort when what we really need is courage. This is what we’ve learned so far. Sometimes what we want is sympathy when what we’re really missing is strength. Sometimes we want someone to feel sorry for us when what we really need is someone to challenge us.”

This life is not a casual weekend race; this is a serious run for your life. Identify the weights slowing you down. Throw off the drag that holds you back.

Don’t give up!

respond

- ▶ Review the list above of everything that hinders. What resonates most personally? What would you add to the list?
- ▶ Review the list of examples under the sin that entangles. Where do you feel some conviction?
- ▶ Based on your responses to the last two questions, what will it look like for you to throw off these things?

pray

Ask God to show you what things are hindering you and any sins that are entangling you. Pray for a soft heart and strong spirit for the long-distance race of faith.