

Keeping On  
Sept 6, 2015

American Indians often have names with significant meanings. Sometimes the meaning comes from the day of their birth. On the day one Indian baby was born, his father survived a rock slide. So the dad named the baby Falling Rock. When the boy was a young man he wanted to get married. So he went on a search for a wife. He was gone so long that his parents got worried and put up signs so people would be on the lookout for him. Maybe you've seen one that says **Watch Out For Falling Rock**.

Life is full of warnings: There are many different kinds of road signs that announce hazards in the road due to construction, or animals, or people at work or play. It might be a narrow bridge or a tunnel.

On the drive to my mom's house, we almost always go the way of the one lane tunnel near Blue Ridge Summit, Pennsylvania. The tunnel is not long, but only wide enough for one vehicle. So you have to slow way down and make sure no one is coming the other way. We also encounter warnings in our homes concerning gas stoves, grills, smoke alarms, CO2 detectors, and more. For example, I hope you know not to mix ammonia and bleach, for it forms a poisonous gas. Life is full of warnings. Such warnings help to prevent accidents and keep people safe.

In the Bible, the writer of the book of Hebrews is also intent on warnings. The purpose of this letter is to warn his readers. He is writing to Christians who were being threatened. The Jewish religious leaders threatened to block their entrance to the Jewish temple if they did not reject Jesus.

This letter was written to warn these Christians not to turn their back on Jesus. Their future lay in the sacrifice of Jesus, not in the sacrifices of the temple. In the part that we will read he refers to God's promise of salvation as "rest".

**Hebrews 4:1 (NIV) Therefore, since the promise of entering his (God's) rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.**

In the time of Moses, God's "rest" was the land of Canaan, nicknamed the Promised Land. God promised to resettle the Israelites there, giving them rest from their wandering life as nomads (Ex. 33:14; Deut. 3:18-20; Deut. 12:9-10). In this letter of Hebrews the meaning of "God's rest" is broadened to include the promise of salvation that we have in Jesus (Matt. 11:28; Hebrews 4:9; Revelation 14:13). Our salvation is a promise from God.

**But here is the warning: God's promise of salvation is a conditional promise. Make sure you meet the conditions.**

Not everyone who hears the promise gets to receive what is promised. You must meet the conditions in order to receive the promise. He uses as his example the ancient Israelite people. God had rescued them from Egypt and had promised to resettle them in the land of Canaan. But they had to put their faith in God and obey Him. That was the condition of their receiving the land. Unfortunately, they did not meet the condition. Our writer describes their response this way...

**Hebrews 4:2 (NIV) ... the message they heard (God's promise) was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith (resulting in obedience).**

The Israelites heard the promise of God but did not trust in God to deliver them from their enemies. They did not have faith in God. Because of their lack of faith in Him they did not obey Him. The result was that they were not allowed to enter the Promised Land. They did not get to enter God's rest. They fell short of it.

The writer wants to prevent such a thing happening to his readers. He is warning them not to choose the temple over Jesus. He goes into much detail in his letter as to why and how Jesus is far superior to the temple. Jesus as a priest is far superior to the temple priests. Jesus as a sacrifice for sin is far superior to the temple sacrifices.

God's promise also applies to us today. God has promised to forgive our sins and give us eternal life. But we too can fall short of receiving these if we fail to keep our faith in Jesus. We can fall short of God's rest by forsaking Jesus for someone else or something else. You are not tempted by the temple, but you are tempted in other ways. I do not want that to happen to any of us.

So how are we to be careful not to fall short of receiving the promise of God's rest?

**1. Persevere in faith.** Faith is the key here. We need to persevere in our faith in Jesus.

**Hebrews 4:14 (NIV) Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.**

Under the Jewish covenant with God, the high priest represents us to God and brings an offering to God on our behalf. Under the new covenant, Jesus is both our high priest and our perfect sacrifice. We must, therefore hold firmly to Jesus. We must put our faith in Him and persevere in doing so. Some people, after their initial faith in Jesus, slide into doubt about their salvation in Jesus. I spoke some of this last week. You can read that sermon on our website under "Resources".

Another temptation is to replace Jesus with someone else or something else. But there is no other salvation provided by God other than that which is through Jesus. So we **MUST** persevere in our faith in Jesus. We **MUST NOT** let other things become more important to us than Him.

So how do you keep your faith strong? How do you persevere in faith? Let me share with you what works for me.

**Daily, re-affirm your faith in Jesus.** Start your day with this kind of prayer.

**Sample Prayer:**

**"Jesus, I believe that You died for me and were raised from the dead. Based on You as my high priest and perfect sacrifice for my sins, I will trust You with my life. I believe that You love me and will be with me wherever I am today. "**

Just as you greet your family members when you awaken in the morning, greet Jesus. Greet Him in the joy of your salvation. Your body may be groaning, but your spirit can be smiling. Take joy in your relationship with Jesus because He died for you. Tell Him again of your faith. Start your day reaffirming the facts of your salvation. Get your head in the right frame of mind and reference for living this day. Remind yourself of who you are and who you belong to, and why. This makes everything else clearer. Jesus has freed you from your sins by His blood.

**2. Persevere in obedience to God.**

**Hebrews 12:1 (NIV) Therefore,... let us throw off everything that hinders and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.**

What race are we running? We are running the race of life. We are living the life of a follower of Jesus Christ. In order to run this race successfully you must throw off everything that hinders. You would not consider running a race fully dressed in street clothes would you? Of course not. The clothes would hinder your movement. Clothes are good, but too many are not good in a race.

Nor would you run with a weight on your back. Backpacks are really handy. When I was in school we did not have backpacks. We juggled our books and supplies under our arms. I did not get a backpack until college. But running in a backpack isn't going to win many races.

So what slows us down in living the Christian life? Pursuing the things of the world slow us down. I just finished a book titled Essentialism. It was a New York Times bestseller. The message of the book is that most of us are doing too many good things to do well the essential things of life. These are not sinful things. They are just not essential things. And what they do is water down our energies so that we are not very effective at living life. My energy, my attention, my focus is diluted so that I can't give enough energy, attention, and focus to the things that are really important. My life is cluttered, and less than satisfying. I realize there are important things that are not getting the attention they deserve. I must simply and reduce. I must do less and obey more.

You are free to do many things in Christ Jesus. But it can easily be that you are doing too many things to serve Him well.

### **3. Persevere in resisting sin.**

**Hebrews 12:1 (NIV) Therefore,... 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.**

Sin is out to trip you up. We must resist all the sinful things trying to get our attention as we run by. Sin is calling out to you, making itself attractive. You must close your eyes and minds to those things. Keep your thoughts on Jesus. Otherwise sin will get you in its grasp.

People have been amazed by names on a particular list (Ashley Madison) that has been in the news in recent weeks. Some prominent people have been on the list. Some religious people have been on the list. Marriages, families, businesses, and churches are being affected by the names on that list. The attraction of sin is strong, even to those who embrace faith in Jesus. But to be on such a list involved a decision, a choice, an action. You had to think about it. They did not fall into sin, they pursued it. One religious leader admitted that in a moment of weakness and curiosity he visited the website.

Sin is out to get you. You must do everything you can to resist it. One of the best helps is to read your Bible. Reading your Bible you learn what God is like. You learn what God values. You learn His commands. You learn how He wants you to behave, to speak, to think, and what we should avoid. Spend time daily with Jesus in your Bible.

### **4. Persevere in hanging out with, and helping, other believers.**

The church is not a group of almost perfect people. All of us are deeply flawed. Think of the church as a support group for recovering sinners. We need the help and support of each other to resist sin and serve the Lord.

**Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV) And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another...**

There is much benefit in personal prayer, personal worship, and personal Bible study. There is also much benefit in group prayer, group worship, and group Bible study. The church does not make these opportunities available because it is traditional. We provide such activities because we know that through them our faith is made stronger together.

We must make sure we do not fall short of God's rest. We must persevere in faith, obedience, resistance to sin, and doing church. But perseverance is hard. Let me tell you the secret.

**The secret to perseverance: Make yourself do the things you need to do.**

These are not necessarily things you want to do. They are things you need to do in order to hold firmly to Jesus.

Tom Landry, the famous football coach said, *"The job of a football coach is to make men do what they don't want to do, in order to achieve what they've always wanted to be."*

How many of you get out of bed when the alarm clock goes off saying, "Wow, another day. Let's get to it!"? How many drag out of bed? You get up, not because you want to, but because you have to. You make yourself get up. That is perseverance. You may enjoy what you get up for, but it is still an effort to get up. And you do it every day.

The secret to perseverance is to make yourself do the things you need to do. Keep on doing them, hour by hour, day by day, month by month, year by year, and so keep your faith firm.

Are you listening to God with your heart this morning? God is offering you His rest. God is offering you forgiveness of your sins and eternal life. Believe His promise. Accept His promise. Put your faith in the blood of Jesus and turn your life over to Him.