**ONCE UPON A TIME**

**GALATIANS 5:7-8**

**I. THEY HAD A TESTIMONY**

 Notice that Paul said they “*did run well*,” past tense.

 They *had* been so full of joy and of love in their relationship with the Lord and with Paul.

 Galatians 4:14-15, “*And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.* 15 *Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.*”

 We are judged by our own past selves. Our history is witness against us.

 The past *proves* that we could run well.

 It was seen in our worship.

 It was seen in our giving.

 It was seen in our holiness, and desire not to be defiled.

 It was seen in our vision.

 It was seen in our testimony.

 It was seen in our devotion to God.

 It was seen in our work.

 Our past shows that we admitted to the *responsibility* and *duty* to run well.

 Those who have never known Christ may plead ignorance. But they who have *tasted* of His grace and *experienced* the blessings of it and *used* it for some work in the Christian life, are **without excuse** if they turn aside at last.

**II. THEY GOT TRIPPED UP**

 Somewhere along the line they encountered a roadblock.

 WHAT IS A ROADBLOCK?
 A road block is an obstruction in a path or course which prevents passage.
Something that stands in the way of achievement.

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 A block can be something solid that is used to hinder, impede, or obstruct a common action, goal, plan, or purpose.

 Are you closer to God now than you were a year ago? Paul said that obstacles “*hinder you from obeying the truth?*”

 *Partial* obedience is *total* disobedience.

 You may need to take a *hard* look at your priorities and make some changes, if any of these things are *keeping* you *from* Christ.

 Paul had some great things to say about the Ephesian believers in Ephesians 1:15-16, “*Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,* 16 *Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;*”

 But 35 years later Jesus had some very different words for them. Revelation 2:4-5, “*Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.* 5 *Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.*”

 Jesus said that there’s only one thing to do when you get off track… Remember, Repent, and Return.

 Somewhere in the midst of their running something *hindered* them and *tripped* them up.

 D.L. Moody said, “When visiting a gentleman in England, I observed a fine canary. Admiring his beauty, the gentleman replied, “*Yes, he is beautiful, but he has lost; his voice. He used to be a fine singer, but I was in the habit of hanging his cage out of the window, the sparrows came around him with their incessant chirping, gradually he ceased to sing and learned their twitter, and now all that he can do is to twitter, twitter.*”

 Oh! How truly does this represent the case of many Christians; they used to delight to sing the songs of Zion, *but* they came into close association with those whose notes never rise so high, until at last, like the canary, they can do nothing but twitter, twitter.”

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 What has caused you to trip up?

 Who has hindered you?

1)Did I do it? Pray, then, for your minister.

2)Did your fellow-members do it? You ought to have been proof against them; they could not have intended it. Pray for them.

3)Did the world do it? Why so much in it?

4)Did the devil do it? Resist him.

5) Did not false teachers do it, as in the case of the Galatians? If so, quit them at once, and listen only to the gospel of Christ.

6) Did you not do it yourself? This is highly probable.

(a)Did you not overload yourself with worldly care?

(b)Did you not indulge carnal ease?

(c)Did you not by pride become self-satisfied?

 (d)Did you not neglect prayer, Bible reading, the public means of grace, shun the Lord’s people, etc.? Mend your ways, and do not hinder *your* *own* soul.

 Do not let *people*, *problems*, *pressure*, *pleasures*, or *possessions* impede your spiritual progress.

 A Mr. Cheever said, “Sailing from Cuba, we thought we had gained sixty miles one day in our course; but at the next observation we found we had lost more than thirty. It was an under-current. The ship had been going *forward* by the wind, but going *back* by the current.”

 So a man’s course in religion may often seem to be *right* and *progressive*, but the under-current of his besetting sins is driving him the very opposite way to what he thinks.

 An old proverb says, “*The horse that draws its halter with it is only half escaped;*” so long as any remnant of a sinful habit remains in us, we make but an *idle* boast of our liberty; we may be caught, and by that which we drag *with* us.

 True and seasonable is the remark of Adams, of Puritan times, who said, “*He who will not be a mortified saint on earth shall never be a glorified saint in heaven.*”

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 A lost pound of candy delayed a train crowded with passengers for a considerable time on June 24th, at New London, U.S.

 Just as the special train was about to start, a well-dressed young man went to- the guard and asked him if he would delay his train a few minutes while he went for a valuable package he had mislaid. He replied, “*I will*,” and kindly waited. The young man sped on his mission and returned without finding his package. The guard then gave the signal to start. Thinking there might have been *Government bonds* or *priceless jewels* in the missing package, he asked the young man what was in it, that he might aid him in recovering it. At first the young man declined to answer, but he finally replied, “*A pound of French candy.*” The guard’s vexation and displeasure at having lost time and hindered over fifty passengers for so trifling a cause may be imagined.

 Is that thing really important that is hindering you?

 Every morning when you wake up you have a choice. You can choose *not to run*, but if you don’t run you can’t win. You can choose to run but *not run your best*; and if you don’t run your best you are sure to lose. You can choose to run, *run your best*, and strive for the prize by focusing in the finish.

 As believers we are to run the race without allowing ourselves to be hindered by any obstructions and without *giving out* or *fainting* along the way.

 A preacher by the name of Wade Hughes Sr. said, “Once years ago, I was traveling playing southern gospel music.
 We were lost. I had the driver stop the bus, and I got off and approached this man for dictions. When he heard me, he turned and I could tell he had been drinking. I asked him, “*How do you get to the xxxxxxxxxxxxx Church?*”
 He thought for a while, he scratched his head, and thought a little more.
 There was a lot of road construction going on in the area.
 Finally the drunken man said, “*Hey, buddy, I don’t think you can get to there from here!!!*”

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 Well, as I got on the bus, the rest of the group was laughing, I told them the bad news. I don’t think we can get to there from here.
 We drove on a little ways, stopped again. I enquired directions and a man said, “*FOLLOW ME, I WILL LEAD YOU TO THE CHURCH.*”
 In 3 minutes we were *backing up* and *unloading* our equipment.
 What a difference, who you ask can make?
 The drunken man knew where the road blocks were, he didn’t know how to get around them.
 Well, in God’s plan there is a way around every road block!
 Every *hindrance*, every *interference*, every *obstacle* has a way of escape.
 Progress is possible.

**III. THEY GOT OFF TRACK**

 To paraphrase, Paul is saying, “*Something’s happened to your relationship with Christ. That old passion and zeal is missing. I don’t know who or what got you off track, but I know you didn’t get this attitude from Jesus, because He’s not a quitter.*”

 I heard of a sad story that happened years ago.

 It is said that when the British and the French were fighting in Canada in the 1750’s, that Admiral Phipps, was the commander of the British fleet. He had received the order to sail through the Great Lakes and wait for the land troops to arrive outside of Quebec.

 When the land forces arrived, Admiral Phipps was to support the soldiers by firing the cannons of the ship to shore and pen the French forces between land and the sea.

 As the Admiral arrived much before expected, he and the navy was annoyed by waiting. The Admiral focused the ships cannons on the great cathedral’s statues of the saints surrounding the towers of the cathedral. So, Adm. Phipps commanded his men to shoot at the statues of the saints for target practice. The sailors fired and fired the ships cannons at the statues of the saints, until not one was left standing.

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 Finally many days later, the land troops arrived, and gave the signal for the ships to fire on the enemy for the complete attack, with great embarrassment the Admiral was no help in the attack, for Admiral Phipps had used all the ammunition shooting at the saints?
 To this day, Quebec is under the influence of the French, because one man lost his focus?

 ILLUSTRATION OF PAPER WITH BLACK SPOT ON IT.

 What do you see?

 You mean to tell me you don’t see the 90% part of this paper that has nothing on it, and it *clean* and *pristine* white?

 Peter, while walking on water, got his eyes off of Jesus and on the *waves* and the *wind*.

 Marriages begin to fall apart when they start to focus on the faults, arguing, fussing, and cutting remarks.
 Many a soul has *faltered* and *failed* because they got their eyes off of Jesus.

 Hebrews 12:2a says, “***Looking unto Jesus*** *the author and finisher of our faith*”

 Ed Cole says the Cross is “*doing the will of God even at the expense of ourselves.*”

 It is possible, but you are going to have to say “*Good-bye, to ME.*”

 Felix Neff said, “When a pump is frequently used, but little pains are necessary to obtain water; it flows out at the first stroke, because the water is high. But if the pump has not been used for a long time the water gets low, and, when it is wanted, you must pump a great while, and the stream only comes after great efforts.

 And so it is with prayer: if we are *instant* in it and *faithful* in it, every little circumstance awakens the disposition to pray, and desires and words are always ready. But if we neglect prayer, it is difficult for us to pray, for the water in the well gets low.”

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 As Peter said in II Peter 3:1, “*This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I* ***stir up*** *your pure minds by way of* ***remembrance:***”

**CON:**

 An old divine says, “*To run in religion is well, to run well is better, and to accomplish the race is the best of all.*”

 Every day has its new duties. We must not waste to-day in congratulating ourselves on the success of yesterday. The tide is against us; to rest on the oars is to be swept back.

 No nation can prosper on its past history if the spirit of heroism has forsaken its citizens.

 As Christians, we never reach the goal till we have crossed the river of death. Till then we must be ever “pressing on and bearing up,” or we shall assuredly make shipwreck even after earnestly running over the *longest*, *steepest*, *roughest* course.

 **This race is worth it.**

 It is well in its beginning; so it was emphatically in Galatia.

 It is well in its progress, and the apostle gives us a fine example of running in his own case when he said, “*I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*”—Philippians 3:14.

 It is well in its end.

 Hebrews 12:1, “*Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,*”

 II Timothy 4:7,8, “*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:* 8 *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*”

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 Robert Robinson, author of the hymn *“Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*,” lost the happy communion with the Savior he had once enjoyed, and in his declining years he wandered into the by-ways of sin. As a result, he became deeply troubled in spirit. Hoping to relieve his mind, he decided to travel.

 In the course of his journeys, he became acquainted with a young woman on spiritual matters, and so she asked him what he thought of a hymn she had just been reading. To his astonishment he found it to be none other than his own composition. He tried to evade her question, but she continued to press him for a response.

 Suddenly he began to weep. With tears streaming down his cheeks, he said, “*I am the man who wrote that hymn many years ago. I’d give anything to experience again the joy I knew then.*”

 Although greatly surprised, she reassured him that the “streams of mercy” mentioned in his song still flowed. Mr. Robinson was deeply touched. Turning his “wandering heart” to the Lord, he was restored to full fellowship.

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