

LOOKING BACK

“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.” —HEBREWS 12:1

The moment we come into union with Christ, we begin a journey that will one day culminate in heaven. We will then fully enjoy all the provision God has for us, but in the meantime, we are on a journey to spiritual maturity.

The writer of Hebrews encourages us to look back on men and women of faith. Chapter 11 of Hebrews is the classic chapter on faith, citing men such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses who were among many led by God. With the exception of Moses who grew up in the palace of Pharaoh, these were ordinary people, and because of their faith, God accomplished His purpose through them. The writer urges us to look back at this great cloud of witnesses, whose experiences of God are witnesses to us of God’s total sufficiency in our times of need.

If we’re facing a big problem, go back to Abraham. How did he handle it? Facing a crisis, what did Moses do by faith? In effect, the writer of Hebrews is telling us we’re not the first ones on this journey, facing trials and hardships, but we can go back to these great Old Testament men and women of faith, and know that ‘their God is our God’. Therefore, we need to ‘throw off everything that hinders and the

sin that so easily entangles' if we're going to press on to maturity, and reap the harvest God has planned for us.

This 'throwing off' isn't something we hear a lot about, because we want to hear the positive, but self-denial is as much a part of Christian experience as living in the fullness of God. Taking up the cross is as much a part as enjoying the resurrection life of Christ. Brokenness is God's agenda as a prelude to wholeness. Dying with Christ, submitting all we are to Him, is necessary that we might truly live with Him. Too often we want the positive without the negatives; the benefits without the obligation.

Moses threw off all the privileges of Egypt for the sake of Christ because "he was looking forward to his reward" (Hebrews 11:26). Abraham left his homeland, not knowing where he was going because "he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (11:10). Whatever our particular sin may be, or whatever hinders us, the writer of Hebrews is telling us to throw off these things that bog us down and look back at this great cloud of witnesses, knowing their God was sufficient for them and is sufficient for us. He is Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.

PRAYER: Thank You, God, for these wonderful men and women in Scripture, who serve as an inspiring example of faith. Their stories encourage me.

TO REFLECT UPON: In times of need, am I looking back at this great cloud of witnesses?