

HINDERED

What happens when a runner loses momentum? They have not quit. They are still moving, still placing one foot in front of the other, still technically on the track. Yet something fundamental has changed. Every stride grows heavier. The finish line seems to retreat into the distance, and no matter how hard they push, they cannot regain the pace they once possessed. Before long, the others have pulled far ahead, and the runner finds themselves lagging behind.

This same loss of momentum happens in the Christian life. We remain believers. We have not abandoned the race. We still attend church, open our Bibles, serve, teach, and go through the familiar motions. But something has stolen our drive. The race feels burdensome. Obedience requires effort it once did not. The joy that used to propel us forward now feels distant, and we find ourselves quietly asking, "What happened? What slowed me down? What stole my pace?" The writer of Hebrews offers a remarkably simple answer. Before urging us to run with endurance, he instructs us first to lay something aside. True endurance, it turns out, often begins with carrying less.

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses," Hebrews 12:1 declares, "let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." The verse identifies two distinct hindrances: weights and sin. They are related but not identical, and understanding the difference is vital.

A weight refers to any bulk or burden that slows us down. It is an outside hindrance that makes the race harder than necessary. Sin, by contrast, is moral failure. It is missing the mark of God's perfect holiness. Like an archer whose arrow fails to hit the center, every sin falls short, no matter how small it seems. There is no harmless sin. Each one required the sacrifice of Christ. As Romans 6:23 reminds us, "the wages of sin is death."

Yet not every weight is sin. Every sin is a weight, but some weights are not inherently sinful. They may be good things. Commitments, hobbies, relationships, or even ministry opportunities can grow too heavy for the specific race God has given us. Excessive busyness, unresolved regret, social media, draining relationships, or the fear of disappointing others can all become burdens we were never meant to carry. Something that one believer carries faithfully may become an encumbrance for another. The key question is not merely "Is this allowed?" but "Does this help me run the race set before me?"

When God clearly calls us to lay something down and we refuse, that weight crosses into the category of sin. As James 4:17 warns, knowing the right thing to do and failing to do it becomes sin for us.

The Galatians learned this the hard way. They had been running well until false teachers convinced them that grace was not enough. They tried to carry the heavy burden of the law alongside the cross. Paul's question cuts to the heart: "You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" (Galatians 5:7).

They had added a weight they were never meant to bear. Legalism replaced resting in the finished work of Christ.

The Ephesians faced a different challenge. They were clinging to their old selves while trying to wear the new. Paul urged them to put off the old self with its corrupt practices, to be renewed in the spirit of their minds, and to put on the new self created in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:22-24). Like a speed skater who must shed bulky winter layers before the race, we cannot simply layer Christianity over an unrepentant life. The old garments must come off.

Maintaining focus is equally essential. Proverbs 4:25-27 calls us to keep our eyes looking straight ahead, our gaze fixed forward, refusing to swerve. Jesus warned that no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62). We move in the direction we are looking. The world constantly tugs our attention sideways, but endurance requires eyes fixed on Christ.

Perhaps the most tender picture comes from the pool of Bethesda in John 5. For thirty-eight years, a man lay paralyzed among the invalids. When Jesus asked if he wanted to be healed, the man responded with years of accumulated disappointment. He had no one to help him. Others always got there first. Hope had worn thin. Yet Jesus met him right where he was, spoke life into his stalled existence, and told him to rise.

Many of us know that place. Trials knock us down and we stop running. Disappointment, loss, shame, or exhaustion can bench us beside the track. Some weights we can lay down immediately. Others, like deep trials, we must carry through by God's sustaining grace. In those seasons, endurance is forged in the fire, and Christ walks with us.

The good news is that Jesus meets us in our weakness. He does not deny the difficulty, but He offers His presence and strength for the next mile. Runners finish strongest when they stop carrying what was never meant for them. So lay aside every weight. Confess the sin that clings so closely. Release every burden Christ never asked you to bear. Fix your eyes on Him. Then rise, take the next faithful step, even if it is slow and unnoticed, and keep running the race set before you.