

Imagine walking into a large bookstore. As you find yourself passing by the do-it-yourself section, you notice that you can find a how-to book on almost anything. Want to know how to play piano. No problem. Want to know how to fix up your house. It is easy. Want to know how to make the perfect thanksgiving meal? Follow these 12 easy steps.

Today, in our text from Hebrews the author of Hebrew tells us to lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us. So, we must look through the bookstore for help. We need a book on how to get rid of sin in our lives. As we get over to the Christianity section of the bookstore, we can see that there is no lack of books that have their suggestions on exactly how to get rid of sin in our lives.

As we begin to read the back cover of some of the books we notice a similar message that appears in many of these books. They say that if you want to get rid of sin, you need to focus all your attention on giving up that sin. You have to just give it all your energy. Focus on quitting that sin. If your sin is lusting, place upon your mind, your hearts, maybe even in notes around the house that you are not going to give into lust this week. If your sin is gossiping, walk around with your fingers in your ears and mutter to yourself “I’m not listening, I’m not listening” whenever you hear someone about to talk about someone else. If you tend to miss church all the time, buy a new alarm that is much louder. But whatever the sin, all your effort must be placed upon quitting that sin. It is the spiritual equivalent to writing I will not whatever your sin is on the chalk board one thousand times. Most books assert that this is the way to stop sin. This message is not new. This was the message of most of the revival preachers in this country in the past. They would encourage people to come place their whiskey bottles on the altar. They would tell the people that the way to be a Christian was to quit those sinful deeds of drinking, dancing, and smoking. “True Christians are quitters of sin,” they proclaimed with great vigor.

If we are honest, most of us have probably tried this approach in our lives at different times. It simply makes sense. If sin is to be eliminated, just quit it. So at times, we focus all our energies on stopping some particular sin. But all too often the thoughts of quitting the sin only lead us right back into the same old sin. Thoughts of not lusting turn into lustful thoughts. Efforts to stop gossiping only lead the ears to itch all the more for the next juicy scoop. Our alarms awake only our body, but not our spirits. Focusing on giving up sin simply doesn’t

work. In essence, the focus upon quitting sin often makes us just sin all the more, because that sin we are trying to avoid is all we are thinking about 24/7.

But if quitting sin is not the answer, what is the solution? It is time to flip through a couple more books to get another suggestion. After all, at the end of the church year, we are focused on Christ' return to judge the living and the dead, and we are reminded to live a life worthy of our calling as that time approaches all the more. God tells us today that we are to lay aside sin so that we can run and finish the race of faith successfully. As we page through more books, another option comes through clearly in several volumes. The key to giving up sin is doing more Christian things. This was the message of the Catholic Church at the time of Luther. Want to be a Christian? Say a rosary, come to this holy city or that one, or buy an indulgence. Doing more godly things will rid your life of sin. And the books of our day often fall along the same lines. Want to stop lying, want to stop stealing, wanting to stop hurting others? The answer is clear. Fast for days on end. Pray for hours. Make sure that you read the Bible three times a day. Make sure to never miss church or bible study. That is the way to get rid of sin. These suggestions surely are admittedly better than the indulgences and journeying of the Catholic Church at the time of Luther. For all of these are things are certainly things that the bible says a Christian ought to do: pray, fast, read the Word. Surely then this is the way to cause the sin is our life to fall away.

I would assume that many of us have tried this solution as well. When distressed by the sin in our lives, we decide that if we really want to get rid of the sin, we must do more godly things. We resolve to read the Word each morning. We will make sure that we pray before each meal and at bedtime. And we will not miss church, not even once. That will be the solution. But it is not. We find ourselves reading the bible because we have to, not because we really wish to hear God's word. We find ourselves praying words without even really thinking what we are saying. And we are more concerned with the fact that we are in church rather than concerned with what is going on at church while we are there. This solution fails because it focuses us on our efforts to get rid of sin, and as we well should know, our efforts by themselves can not free us from sin.

But if the solution is not to focus on quitting sin, and not even to focus on doing the right things, what is the solution? Well for the real solution, the must look in the store for the section

containing all the bibles. We open one up and turn to our text from Hebrews 12:1-2. And there we find the answer of how to lay aside sin. It is a one step process. The answer? Fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. No, the answer is not to fix our eyes on the sin that we wish to get rid of in our lives. And the answer is not to fix our eyes upon our efforts to become more godly. No the answer is to fix our eyes on Jesus. We are to run the race of faith with eyes squarely fixed on Jesus. We are to learn from his example to keep focused on the finish line. As our text says Jesus endured everything even the cross, because he saw the joy before him, the joy of returning to paradise with all the people he had redeemed. We too can endure any of the stress that comes with living a godly life if our eyes keep focused on the joy before us, Jesus himself. We must focus on living with him forever in heaven. We don't come to church in order to somehow by coming get rid of our sin. We come to church because Jesus is here in His Word and His Sacraments. We come here to have Jesus placed before our eyes time and time again in order that our focus might be sharpened upon Him.

As we focus on Jesus two truths become parts of our daily lives. First, we know that the sins we have already committed have been paid for on the cross which Jesus endured for us. He removed the weight from our shoulders by placing it on His own. We know that because He rose we joy have eternal joy awaiting us as well. Secondly, we are reminded of who we are as we look at Jesus. We focus on the fact that Jesus has come to us in baptism and called us His own. He has removed from us the bondage to sin. He has sent His Spirit to dwell in us. This is the real means by which we lay aside our sin. The fact that Jesus lives in us assures us of our freedom from sin. For we know the one that is in us is greater than any temptation that Satan can sent our way.

Yes, if the Bible had a shortened version of its advice on how to rid ourselves of sin, it might read something like the following, "To get rid of sin, focus on the One that lived a life free of sin, and died to free you from the same. Focus more and more on Jesus and your sin will fade away. Your life will naturally become so filled with the things of God that the sinful things that used to control you no longer will be able to fit their way into your schedule. As you look to Jesus, you will find yourself in the Word, praying, and in church not to free yourselves of sin, but rather because you love Jesus who freed you from sin. Want to lay aside your sin? Fix you eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." Amen.

