

Fathers and Sons, Volume 2

Hold Fast in a Broken World

Douglas Bond

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LEARN TO STAND AND HOLD FAST

Hebrews 3:6, 14

Off the Track

Seth, a downhill skier, told me about a race in college where he found himself, at the last minute, requisitioned to fill in for an injured Nordic ski racer.

“I was a pretty good downhill skier,” he told me, “but I’d never cross-country-skied in my life.” But he was nineteen and invincible. “How hard could cross-country skiing be?” he thought as he latched on the narrow skis. The Nordic 10K freestyle race was the last event of the day, and the winning skier would cross the finish line in around fifteen minutes.

Seth figured that he’d show these weenie Nordic skiers a thing or two about real skiing. But a fraction of a second after the start gun, he

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began to realize that he might have miscalculated. Lean, spandex-clad Nordic skiers skated off the start, leaving Seth in a heap. But he was a competitor and staggered to his feet, lurching after them as he tried to imitate their powerful stride—a thing growing rapidly more difficult as they disappeared in front of him.

“10K of this?” he thought.

The last skier of the pack crossed the finish line half an hour later, but there was no sign of Seth. Granted, it was getting hard to see; night falls rapidly in the Cascade Mountains in winter. Forty-five minutes—still no Seth. Now it was fully dark.

Hopelessly far behind the other skiers, Seth had gotten off the track. Alone, he’d lost his way in the darkness. He spent the next two and a half hours staggering around in the cold and snow, trying to make his way back to the start line. He’s never been cross-country skiing since.

The race of life has a particularly “icy, slippery way,” in it called *youth*. Don’t underestimate the difficulties. Add cultural enticements lying in wait around every corner, and youth becomes a skid road to disaster. Therefore, you must learn to hold fast, or you will lose your way.

Truth

War correspondent Stephen Crane wrote a perceptive verse about life that begins, “The wayfarer, perceiving the pathway to truth.” Though he perceives the pathway, he immediately faces an obstacle. The path to truth was “thickly grown with weeds”; few travelers were going to the trouble to take that road. Little wonder. It’s a pathway that looks painful, one that is sure to be hard on the feet. At the last, Crane’s persona concludes, “Doubtless there are other roads.”

The world offers you a smorgasbord approach to life. Blaring at you from every pop-cultural signpost are messages urging you to find your own path, to make your own way in the world, to take one of the “other roads.” But there’s a problem. “To live after the course of the

world,” wrote Samuel Rutherford in a letter to Ninian Mure, a young Scottish man, “will not bring you to heaven.”

The path of truth is singular; it is absolutely exclusive. And yes, Crane was right; the pathway to truth can be hard on the feet. But only one pathway leads to heaven. So how does a young man stay in that way; how does he hold fast to his course when the path is littered with sharp obstacles?

By taking heed to the Word of God. Young men who know the truth, who are determined to hold fast to truth, to stay in the pathway, must be daily students of the divine travel guide, the Bible, the only perfectly reliable guidebook, devoid of error.

The “other roads” require you to stop thinking. But the Word and the Spirit renew your fallen reason, so that by God’s grace you can think aright. A young man who stands fast for truth, who holds fast against error, must become a skillful thinker. He must cultivate sanctified thoughts, thoughts reined in and kept on a leash, thoughts full of awe and wonder at Christ.

And he will do this early. “I entreat you,” wrote Rutherford, “now in the morning of your life, seek the Lord and his face.” Wise young men seek early, like King Uzziah, who learned the fear of the Lord as a boy. Then, as a sixteen-year-old king, “he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD” (2 Chron. 26:4).

Pride

Until he became proud. It was Uzziah’s undoing, and it will be yours, if you don’t hold fast to humility. Pride always has gone and always will go before a fall, yet so few young men take the crushingly destructive power of pride seriously.

I was reminded of just how early pride sets its hook in young men while reading about the latest golf prodigy, Reese Matthew Campbell Murphy, from Newmills, Scotland. Hold this kid’s childhood golf record up next to Tiger Woods’s, and he’s impressive, including not one, but two holes in one so far. In an interview, he was asked whether he

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wanted to be a great golfer someday. He looked askance at the reporter and replied in his baby brogue, "I'm already a great golfer."

He's only six years old!

Many things fuel men's pride, but sports ranks highest for most young men. You want to win. You want to be the greatest. You want to run the fastest, jump the highest, hit the hardest. You want to crush your opponent, and get all the credit for doing it. All this is pride, and though the Scriptures clearly warn us that God resists the proud man but gives grace to the humble man, we persist in our pride.

With athletics, you can easily find yourself running the wrong race. Instead of fixing your eyes on Jesus, instead of straining every spiritual muscle on the course of truth and life, the only path that leads to heaven, you can easily sell your soul to the god of the gridiron, the almighty of athletics. You must beware of pride. You must put it to death. By the grace of God, you must do it now.

Idols

Men are "idol-making factories," John Calvin termed us, and one of the greatest idols that men create for themselves in the modern world is money. "Money! Nothing worse in our lives, so current, so rampant, so corrupting." Come to think of it, maybe it's not just modern man's problem. Sophocles, the paragon of Greek tragedy, penned these words twenty-five hundred years ago: "Money—you demolish cities, root men from their homes; you train and twist good minds and set them on to the most atrocious schemes. No limit, you make them adept at every kind of outrage, every godless crime—money!"

Christian young men must beware of the love of money, of worshiping at the shrine of wealth, of pitching their hopes on material prosperity—and so forfeiting their souls. Sell your soul for thirty pieces of silver or thirty million pieces, it makes no difference in hell.

There are other kinds of idols, ones of the heart and imagination. Lustful thoughts after the body of an attractive young woman become

a form—a highly destructive form—of idolatry. You live in a pornographic world, a world that wears itself out making sin look appealing. The devil “will paint, and mask, and dress up sin,” wrote J. C. Ryle, “in order to make you fall in love with it. He will exalt the pleasure of wickedness, but he will keep out of sight the sting.” Men slain by sexual sin are a vast and miserable host.

But you may be operating under the delusion that you can keep sexual sins secret, just between you and your imagination. It’s a lie, one that will be exposed for all to see, to your undying shame, on the judgment day. Others may never know your secret sins, but before God’s eye every thought, every desire is laid bare.

“I lived according to my desires,” said Rich Young, former lead guitarist with heavy-metal band Lucian Blaque. He admits that his former life was full of “sexual immorality, lust, profanity, drunkenness, and wild parties.” Of his rock and roll, he said, “I used to make music for me.” Then Christ wonderfully saved Rich. And for ten years he wouldn’t touch a guitar because he suddenly understood something about his music: “I wrote music so people would get physical.”

A young man who cares about his soul will not delude himself into thinking that the music he listens to has no effect on him. What you listen to profoundly affects your desires for, your thoughts about, and your treatment of women. A man who cares about his soul knows that the kind of music he listens to directly affects his ability to exercise self-control.

Self-control

“Beware of the folly of dangerous youth,” wrote Rutherford, “a perilous time for your soul.” Young men have the ruinous inequity of strength disproportionate to their wisdom. So keeping your way pure, holding fast against the enemies of your soul, demands a virulent self-control. Rutherford offered a strategy to help young men with self-control: “Love not the world; keep faith and truth; walk with God, for he seeth you; prize Christ and salvation above all the world.”

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Self-controlled young men have sanctified affections. They love what they should love; they walk by faith informed by truth; they live for an audience of one—God; they value Christ and his salvation more than all the allurements of the world.

Self-controlled young men take sin seriously. They don't see how close to the edge of the cliff they can cavort. They're aware that the devil and sin are nothing to flirt with. They avoid sin, its occasions, and its companions because they know how devious the devil can be.

German writer Heinrich Heine explored this in a poem that begins, "I called the devil and he came." But he didn't have horns and a flame-red jumpsuit like cartoonist Gary Larsen's devil always has. "He was not hideous . . . / But a genial man with charming ways." Wise young men don't flirt with the devil and sin because they know that the devil will outwit them. He's called the deceiver for a reason. Therefore, wise young men know they must be self-controlled, or they will be devil-controlled.

But it's not only the devil. It's a three-way conspiracy, with the world and your own flesh joining eagerly to secure your soul for hell. They conspire to normalize sin and earthly things so that you, at the last, lose all appetite for heaven. They want righteousness to seem odd and sin to seem normal to you. "We children think the earth a fair garden," wrote Rutherford. "It is but God's out-field, and wild, cold, barren ground; all things are fading that are here."

But it doesn't seem that way to young men bombarded by an alluring popular culture. You can begin to long for what appears to be the "fair garden" of this world. And you can scorn the palatial splendor of eternal glory. Many things in this world are designed to thicken the veil, to dull the eyes of your faith, to make the here and now all there is.

Emmanuel's Land

While my family and I enjoyed the sights and events at the Inverary Games in the Scottish Highlands, I heard a local story that illustrates just how switched around young men can get things.