

DOUBLE NEGATIVE

Scripture Reading: Read Hebrews 13

English teachers will mark a sentence as grammatically incorrect if the writer uses a double negative. For example, “I can’t hardly walk” is incorrect grammar. “He cannot just do nothing” is as well. In fact, in English, when a double negative gets used like this, it traditionally combines to form an affirmative statement, which may be the exact opposite of what was intended by the writer or speaker. So, in the example of “He cannot just do nothing,” it would grammatically mean “He must do something.”

The original language of the New Testament, Greek, doesn’t follow our English rules, however. Writers could add negative after negative and instead of getting a positive, they would simply get a stronger negative. So, why the grammar lesson today? Because of what the writer of Hebrews says in the last half of verse 5 in today’s chapter reading. Let’s take a look at in the New International Version of the Bible: “*God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’*” At face value, God’s assurance is twice shared that he would never leave us nor forsake us. That alone is a great comfort to believers to know that God will not abandon us.

But, let’s go back to the original language and see if there is more to what God is saying than is revealed in our English translations. In the first statement from God, we find the author actually uses a double negative for emphasis. In the second statement, he goes beyond a double and uses a triple negative for a very strong emphasis. So, if we were to translate this passage literally, we could do so as follows:

***I will never, never leave you;
never, never, never will I forsake you.***

Or, we could paraphrase it this way:

***There is no way at all that I will ever leave you;
There is not even a chance that I will ever abandon you.***

The next time you fail and wonder if God is going to kick you to the curb, consider this verse. The next time you face a trial and question whether God has abandoned you, remember this Scripture. He has promised, and promised, and promised, and promised and promised yet again by way of five negatives that there is absolutely no way that he will walk out on you. Your parent might have. Your spouse might have. Your best friend may have. But God will not. He is faithful. He will never leave you nor will he forsake you. It’s not in his nature.

Action Step: After reflecting on the “never”s of God, commit Hebrews 13:5 to memory.

Prayer Focus: For the Lord to remind you of his promise the next time you fail or go through a trial.

Take-a-way: ***Never, never, never, never, never will God forsake you!***