

Keep Going

Hebrews 12:12-17

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Introduction:

As we go through this section in Hebrews, I think it is important for us to keep the central exhortation of the whole book before us:

- It is found in Hebrews 12:1-2:
 - **Hebrews 12:1-2: Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

A true Christian is on the roadway to God.

- We are those who have come to recognise that our greatest problem is that we are estranged from God, and that the great sin of the whole human race was to rebel against Him as our God—to essentially say to Him: “We do not want you to be our God. We want you to make things nice for us, but we do not want you to rule over us. We do not want to follow your will, and your commandments. We want to follow the dictates of our own hearts.”

In Hebrews we are taught what Jesus did to bring us to God.

- And then we are exhorted to continue to trust in Him to bring us to God.
- This exhortation is presented to us as running a race on the road that Jesus opened for us to go the Father.

Last week, we looked at how God chastens us with loving, fatherly discipline that is aimed at helping us come from our sin to Him (to conform to Him).

- We are coming to Him from sin.
- This makes the way hard.
 - We spoke of some of the analogies that the Bible uses of what must be done to separate us from our sin so that we can keep going on the way of Jesus and get to our Father at last.
 - We looked at the refiner’s fire (heating us to separate out the impurities), threshing (smashing us to separate us from all the chaff—vain idols we cherish), and pruning (cutting off our pride).
 - God’s chastisement goes on through our lives and climaxes with death.
 - It is painful—but it is all to keep us making progress in going to the Father.
 - But be sure you understand.
 - It is not that we are making our own way to God—no! Christ is the only one who could make the way for the whole church. He is the author and finisher of our faith.
 - But once we are on that way, the Father begins His work to separate us from our sin.

The way is hard. We must not allow ourselves to become weary and beaten down by our Father’s discipline—by the refiner’s fire, the thresher’s sledge, and the pruner’s shears.

- That is what our text, Hebrews 12:12-17, is about.
- Give attention. I will read it to you. This is God's Word. Hebrews 12:12-17:

Heb 12:12-17: Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. ¹⁴ Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: ¹⁵ looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; ¹⁶ lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. ¹⁷ For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

Thus far the reading of God's Word. Praise God for His word.

The overall concern is the same as in verses 3-11... the passage we looked at last week.

- that you might not, as verse 3 says, **"become weary and discouraged in your souls."**
 - We were pointed to all that Jesus had to endure to purge us from our sins...
 - And reminded how the Father's purging of us demonstrates that we are His true sons whom He is preparing to live with Him in His glorious house.
 - We saw that this fatherly chastisement produces the peaceable fruit of righteousness in us.
 - We ought to humbly accept His chastisement and eagerly learn from it.

I. Today's text calls us to pick ourselves up when we have allowed ourselves to be beaten down by God's fatherly discipline.

- You can see this exhortation in the first two verses again—Heb 12:12-13: **Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.**
- A. This recognises the reality that we are often beaten down by God's fatherly discipline.
1. We ought not to be—
 - because we see all that Jesus endured...
 - because discipline shows that we are God's true sons...
 - and because His discipline is designed to make us better.

➤ We ought not be beaten down, but we often are.
 2. Look at the image of us here that is painted by these words.
 - Our hands are hanging down, our legs are feeble and limp, we are drifting about.
 - There is no zest, no zeal, no clear focus and direction.
 - We are not running with diligence at all—we are lethargic and aimless.
 3. It is hard.
 - God, in His wise discipline, puts His finger right on our weakness.
 - He exposes us. He hammers on the idols that are so dear to our hearts and the sins and vain things that we cherish and cling to.
 - It hurts to have things burned off, hammered loose, and cut out.
 - And so, at times, our hands hang down and our legs become like putty.

B. We are in grave danger at this point.

- We are in danger that what is lame may become dislocated.
- If that were to happen, we would not be able to go on in the way of Christ!

C. So the exhortation here is clear.

1. Pick yourself up!

- Strengthen those hands that are hanging down! Stand up straight! You have an important race to run!
- Strengthen those feeble knees—get them going—you are going to your Father!
- Walk in a straight path—you know where you are going and you know the way. Jesus is that way. He has opened the way.
 - You have no business dragging along like this.

2. If you are going on an important trip and you want to get there, you will make sure that your car has good tires and brakes, and that the engine is in good shape.

- You don't go limping along in a vehicle that is half broken down!
- You make a priority of making sure that everything is in good condition.
- Should you do anything less with your spiritual hands and legs and feet?
 - You are going to the most gracious, the most beautiful, the most kind, the most wise, the most loving, the most just, the most majestic, powerful and admirable Father of all.
 - It is inappropriate for you to be so sluggish in your walk to Him, to drag yourself along as if you have nowhere important to go!

3. Ask Him to forgive you if this has been the case and get going.

II. There are two specific things that you ought to pursue eagerly... peace with all people and holiness.

- These are two things that you lose sight of when you are dragging along under God's discipline.
 - Let's explore them.

A. Peace with all people.

1. When you are running down the highway of Christ to the Father—when your vision is clear and your gait is strong—

- You have a great desire to bring everybody with you.
 - a. You are full of encouragement to your brothers and sisters who are already on the path—and you talk to them and remind them of our hope.
 - You talk to them.
 - You talk of Jesus and all that He did to make the way for us.
 - You talk of the grace that He gives us to help us and refresh us.
 - You talk of His mercy and forgiveness and of how His blood cleanses us from all sin.
 - And when they are faltering, you address them about it.
 - You reason with them.
 - You do all that you can to get them going.
 - You bring them along with you.

- b. You also want those who are outside to come.
 - You plead with them to come.
 - You tell them of the glory of your Father's house and how all the difficulties of the way are nothing compared to the blessing of seeing Him.
 - You warn them of the danger of opposing Him—and of the wrong in it... of how it is reprehensible to reject our creator who came here to bleed for our sins all that we might come to Him.
 - Like Paul you feel that you have so much from God that it makes you a debtor to everyone else—that you can't do enough for them.
 - Even if they are enemies, even if they actively persecute you, you do all you can to pursue peace with them.
 - Not by compromise of the truth, but by constantly seeking to lead them to God by your example and your carefully chosen words.
 - c. What greater joy could there be than to see them rejoicing before His throne at the last day!
 - You aspire to have that brotherly unity with them now.
2. But it is quite different when you let yourself slump... when you are dragging along with hands hanging down, with feeble knees, and meandering steps.
- a. Now you find the people around you irritating.
 - You criticise them and you complain about them in your heart and often even in your words.
 - You become angry with them, and you rebuke them, not to restore them to God's way, but because they annoy you.
 - b. Instead of pursuing peace with them in the LORD, you sow discord and dissension.
 - Instead of helping them along, ministering to them, and showing kindness, you selfishly pursue your own agenda with them...
 - Whether it is to get them to like you or to keep them away—you are not pursuing peace with them—the peace that comes from going to God.
 - You desperately need to get your eyes back on Jesus, back on the way to God, and pick up your stride again.
- B. And you are to pursue holiness.
- 1. Holiness is being conformed to your heavenly Father.
 - He is very perfect and pure in every way—in love, justice, and wisdom.
 - Being conformed to Him means that as one who is made in His image, you seek to be perfect and pure like Him, in love, justice, and wisdom and every other way.
 - That is one way you pursue holiness...
 - But there is another way that you seek to be conformed to Him.
 - His holiness also refers to His greatness and superiority as the infinite, eternal, sovereign, majestic, unchangeable God.

- Pursuing holiness, in this, does NOT consist in trying to imitate Him, but rather to live to as to be in worshipping, adoring, joyful submission to Him as the only one who is God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - In this, you don't strive to be like Him—that is what we did when we fell—but you strive to be in your rightful place under Him, praising Him, thanking Him, yielding to Him, depending on Him—conformed to Him in your place before His holy majesty.
2. When you are dragging along with feeble knees and sagging arms, you are not so interested in being conformed to His holy purity and majesty.
- You are more likely to be found grumbling at Him and complaining about Him—maybe even accusing Him of being unjust or unfair—and perhaps doubting whether He is dealing wisely and kindly with you.
 - You are in grave danger of being dislocated so that you are unable to go on at all in the way of Christ... you are likely to wander off the path.

TRANS> And that brings us to the next thing in our text—

III. Here we have an extensive warning about the danger of failing to pick up and get going when you are dragging along.

A. The warning is that you will never get to God if you don't get going.

1. That's right. It's right there in verse 14: **“Pursue peace with all men and holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”**
- If someone professes that they have trusted in Jesus for salvation and they come on the road as if to go to God's house with us,
 - But then you see that they have no interest in being conformed to God—no pursuit of holiness—that person will never see God.
 - If they do not pursue holiness—conformity to Him—it is obvious that they are not interested in Him.
 - They are not looking to be reconciled to Him.
 - They have obviously come for some other reason, but it is not to be restored to a right relationship with God.
 - They are not on the road for that. They are on the road for something else.
2. If you are dragging along with hands hanging down and weak knees, you dare not go on like that!
- It indicates that you are not in Christ, because He came to save us from our sins that we might come to God... and you aren't going to God.
 - If the salvation you think you got from Him does not bring you to God or make you interested in being holy and in loving other people the way He wants, then it's not His salvation. His salvation brings you to God.

B. Obviously, this is vitally important.

1. Verse 15 begins, **“Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God.”**
- a. To fall short of God's grace is to never receive the grace by which we are saved.
- It speaks of one who never trusted Jesus our Saviour to bring him to God.
 - Perhaps he tried to get to God another way, but the grace of God in Christ is the only way—He must do the saving that brings us to God.

- You can't change your own heart, can you? Of course not!
 - You can't atone for your own sin, can you? Of course not!
 - If you miss the grace of God, you miss the only way to get to God and you will die in your sins and go to hell.
- b. That's why we want to look carefully.
- We want to make sure they don't fall short of grace.
 - If we see someone dragging along—or, God forbid, if we are dragging along—we don't want to ignore it!
 - Such a person may have not yet found the grace of God—they have come short of it.
 - It is not that they fall from grace, but that they never got to His grace—and so will never get to Him!
2. We do not want to see anyone apostatise—to reject the way of the Lord that they once professed to be following.
- Verse 15 describes this further step to coming short of grace like this: **“Lest there be any root of bitterness springing up to cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.”**
- a. A root of bitterness is that root of opposition to God in a person.
- It is that which keeps them from ever coming to God.
 - They are hostile toward Him—they are bitter—they don't want Him.
 - They don't want to conform to His way—that's why they are always dragging along and never picking up their step.
- b. The root of bitterness is said to spring up when it starts to be seen and exposed.
- It was hidden before, but now they start to complain about the church and its doctrine (when the doctrine is right). They start that way.
 - They might say that the people in the church are insincere, or that they are too severe and are not compassionate.
 - It is never long until they begin to express doubts about God and His commandments. Is He really just? Is He really wise? Is He really loving?
 - How can He send people to hell?
 - How do we know if He created the world—and if He did, why is the world such a miserable place—and perhaps the unspoken issue—why is it going so badly for me here?
 - This is a root of bitterness springing up.
- c. When this happens it causes trouble and often many people become defiled.
- Verse 15 ends with these words: **lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;**
- 1) A root of bitterness causes trouble because it discourages the saints.
 - They agonise over the bitter person and they pursue them, as the Lord Jesus directed, to try to win them.
 - They have great sorrow if they are not able to help them.
 - 2) But even worse, it can cause many to be defiled.

- The root of bitterness will spread to all in the church who have evil hearts of unbelief.
 - They concur with the bitter member and they follow him.
- An example from history would be with Charles Russel, the founder of the Jehovah's witness movement.
 - He was offended by two doctrines—hell and predestination—so he made up his own religion, a religion that did not need a divine Saviour, by which men could be saved by works.
- But even if the individual does not gain a following, their children are very often defiled by the bitter root that has sprung up—
 - whether those children are born before or after the root appears, they are often defiled by it.

C. Esau is presented as an example of someone who missed the way to God.

- Verse 16-17 say: **lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. ¹⁷ For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.**
1. This refers to the day when Esau came in from hunting and found his brother Jacob making some stew.
 - a. He and his brother did not get along very well, but Esau wanted some of that stew—he felt quite hungry.
 - In Genesis 25:29-34, the story is told: **Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he *was* weary. ³⁰ And Esau said to Jacob, “Please feed me with that same red *stew*, for I *am* weary.” Therefore his name was called Edom. ³¹ But Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright as of this day.” ³² And Esau said, “Look, I *am* about to die; so what *is* this birthright to me?” ³³ Then Jacob said, “Swear to me as of this day.” So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised *his* birthright.**
 - b. Esau was the first born, Jacob was his twin, and that meant that it was Esau's responsibility to be the priest and head of the family in place of their dad.
 - This family was the family that was called to be God's people and to bring forth the Messiah.
 - Esau would be responsible to see that they kept the way of the Lord.
 - But he thought so little of that that he was happy to trade his birthright for a bit of stew—and he went away from that meal with no regrets.
 - A profane person is a person who does not care about God.
 - Esau showed that he was a profane person.
 - c. But even though he traded his birthright, he fully expected to receive the blessing that was given to firstborn sons.
 - They were given a double portion of the inheritance so they could take care of any unmarried sisters or their mother in her widowhood.
 - Esau wanted this, but he found out that the birthright and the blessing went together.

2. You can't have God's blessing if you won't have God.
 - Many people are like that. They want to go to heaven and live in paradise, they want to be forgiven rather than punished, but they don't want God.
 - They don't realise that the birthright and the blessing go together.
 - Coming to God and being restored to true fellowship with Him is the salvation that Jesus came to give us.
 - He is not interested in blessing people who want nothing to do with His Father—people who don't want to come to God or to be holy and to pursue peace with all men.

3. What a rude awakening they will have on the day that they appear before God.
 - Some fifty or more years later, Esau came to his father to receive the blessing.
 - It's a long story, but let's just say that he did not get it.
 - He pled and he wept, but there was no blessing without the birthright.
 - If you are on the pathway of Jesus, looking to Him for blessing, but not looking to Him to bring you to God that you might come to God,
 - be informed right here and now that you will not get what you want.
 - You cannot follow the dictates of your own heart and think that you will escape God's curse because you are in the church or look to Jesus to go to heaven as you understand heaven.
 - If your heaven is not about coming to God, it is not the heaven that Jesus brings people to by His saving work.
 - If you don't want God now, you have come short of the grace of God.
 - But it is not too late to repent.

4. Come and be reconciled to God. Jesus will certainly be pleased to save you.
 - Then you will find blessing in serving God and in being conformed to Him.
 - Your whole perspective will change.
 - Now, instead of dragging along in the way when you are chastised—with your hands hanging down and with feeble knees... you will welcome God's purifying and purging work.
 - Not that it will be pleasant to be refined in the furnace, crushed and broken with the sledge, and pruned with the pruning knife...
 - But you will be eager and glad to break free from your sin that you might be more and more conformed to your Father.
 - Instead of slowing up and giving up because of persecution or other hard things along the way to God's house,
 - You will hasten along with greater zeal than ever, advancing from glory to glory as you look to Jesus to continue His work until He has finished.
 - When you slack off, you will hear God's call and you will strengthen the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees, and you will make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.
 - You will get back to pursuing peace with all men and holiness without which no one will see the Lord.