

Heb 12 – Clear the way and run for Jesus

Last Sunday morning, there were 3 things shared during the spiritual gifts time.

- Kirk shared that God desires a pure people. Only by the blood of Jesus and walking with Jesus can we be pure.
- Pete shared that God has spoken to some of us what he desires of us to do, but we are holding back and not following through on that thing.
- Andrew shared about putting on our spiritual glasses, so we won't stumble but so we can see clearly. Not tripping or falling into pits.

I wanted to recap these things because it ties in well with the section of Hebrews we are in today. I'm going to pick up where Kirk left off in Hebrews 12:

Heb 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.

I see 3 key points in this chapter that enable us to run with endurance and look to the promise, just like Jesus did.

1. God puts us through this hard life because he loves us and is forming holiness in us
2. We need to run unencumbered by distraction, sin or bitterness.
3. Run in a way that watches out for our brothers and sisters.

If we do these things it will keep us from missing out on the grace of God.

Last week Kirk described the life of faith this way:

“Faith makes what is unseen, and our future hope so real that it shapes the way we live.”

Faith is enduring in obedience. We see this call to run for Jesus. To run with endurance. The idea is that IF we are going to run well and run till the finish line we can't be bogged down.

We are called to cast off weights and sin. This includes discouragement and fear. Not necessarily wrong things, like stuff in our life that distract us, delays us, or keep our eyes off the finish line, but also the sin that “easily” trips us up.

So what is the purpose for the suffering we go through?

1. God puts us through hard times because he loves us and is making us holy

Let's pick it up in: Heb 12:5-11

And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said,

*"My child, don't make light of the LORD's discipline,
and don't give up when he corrects you.*

*6 For the LORD disciplines those he loves,
and he punishes each one he accepts as his child."*

7 As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? 8 If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. 9 Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever?

Let's talk about the discipline of the Lord, the discipline of a loving Father

- This passage quotes Prov 3:11-12
- It reminds us that God is not a force, or a far-off ruler, but he wants to be our Father
- Our circumstances are not just "our fate"

What does "God's discipline" include?

- **Not just punitive** – we think "I messed up so God is taking away my blessings."

We need to think about the bigger picture. When you raise a child you shouldn't just be correcting them when they go wrong, but more importantly teaching them the way they should go. You put them in situations to grow, to learn, to become who God created them to be.

Think of the **Olympic athletes** and how they train for years to compete in some obscure sport like the luge or freestyle skiing. They put themselves through this rigorous process of training to perform at an elite level.

Remember the **context of the letter to the Hebrews**: Jewish believers were undergoing persecution, and some were leaving the faith. The encouraging word for those being persecuted is that God is treating you like a son or daughter.

- God's discipline is intended for **growth and instruction**
- To make us better, developing our knowledge and character
- To become everything God has designed us and called us to be!

God is telling them and us that **hardship should not be surprising**, but rather it should be considered part of God's **loving work** in our lives.

- How many of us today have difficult circumstances?
- You may feel the attacks of the enemy against you as you try to do good for Jesus.

Reflecting back on the exhortation last week to be pure, to obey God and do what he has put on your heart, and to put on your spiritual glasses and not stumble:

- Don't be discouraged, don't give up, remember hardship is part of the process because God loves you!
- Don't be fearful to step up, step out, and move ahead.

But Why? Why does God put us through hardships?

*10 For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, **so that we might share in his holiness**. 11 No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.*

We are put through hardship to become holy.

There is an old saying, and I'm not sure who to attribute this quote to, but it says

"God is more interested in your holiness than your happiness."

Once again, I regret to inform you that if you were led to believe that following Jesus would result in a life of worldly prosperity, perfect health, and an abundance of wealth, you have been misled. The true gospel presented in scripture is that following Jesus is difficult. And the goal is to make us more holy, not to live "our best life now". **Our best life is yet to come.**

Don't get me wrong, **there are great benefits to sharing in the holiness of God**, and we'll talk about that in a moment.

2. We need to run unencumbered by distraction, sin or bitterness.

Now comes the exhortations:

Heb 12:12 So take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees. 13 Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong.

- Tired, limp hands hanging down – lack of strength due to discouragement or fatigue
- Weak knees – implies instability and fear
- Make a straight path. Get serious! Don't meander. Get after it!
 - Renewed effort and resolve to move ahead
 - Stand firm and don't be swayed by challenges
 - Strengthen yourself for battle
- Note, it's not just for you, but also so those around you can become strong.

We need to clear the way for success in God! Cast off weights, deal with sin, renew our resolve, go to battle!

How do we go about getting “untangled”? This again points back to the book of Proverbs:

Prov 4:23 Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.

24 Avoid all perverse talk; stay away from corrupt speech.

25 Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you.

26 Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path.

27 Don't get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil.

We need to recognize that the difficulties and hardships we experience are God's discipline pointing us toward the straight path.

- What sins easily entangle you?
 - Do you use drugs, alcohol, sex, porn, golf, or video games to escape? To deal with the hardships of life?
 - Recognize the Lord's discipline, his loving instruction, and rather than just escaping reality or numbing the pain, run back to Jesus and see that he wants something BETTER for you. Something permanent and lasting.
 - When you go through hard times be QUICK to go to God and ask what he wants you to learn from the experience.

The straight path is marked by repentance. Acknowledging sin and turning from it.

- There are many men and women here who understand the battle with sin. If you want to get serious, talk to someone today. We'll help connect you with others who can walk with you to help you break free from sin's entanglements.

The straight path is a godly path.

Discipline implies good habits. Again, think of the athlete in training. They have routines and regimen for how they eat, how they train, and how they sleep. To get untangled from sin and make a straight path, you must begin making new habits.

- Start a bible reading plan – even a verse a day
- Join a small group
- Connect with someone to hold you accountable

3. Run in a way that watches out for your brothers and sisters.

The straight path connects us to others.

14 Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord. 15 Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.

Here again, we see **the walk of enduring faith** isn't just about us.

- Strive for **peace** with EVERYONE – don't look for a fight, work for peace with everyone. Even your neighbor who drives you crazy.
- Strive for **holiness**
- **Look after** each other – when you know someone is going through a tough time, be there for them. It might be a word of encouragement, or a rebuke, or sometimes that just means “be there”.
- **Don't become bitter.** If you have a broken relationship you must deal with it, to the full extent that you can. Doing your part to extend forgiveness and seek reconciliation. Don't hold onto hurts thus becoming bitter and a corrupt influence on everyone you touch.
- We must **live in the grace of God**, which means living in Christ, free from the condemnation of sin, but growing in holiness and becoming more like Jesus.

What is the End Goal?

In vs 18 thru 24 we see more comparisons between the new and old covenants. The scene is described when the Nation of Israel came before God at Mt. Sinai. You can

read about it in Exodus 19. But it is a terrifying scene where God speaks in a deafening trumpet blast out of clouds of fire and smoke and the Israelites were like “Moses, you just go and talk to God, we can’t take this”. Even Moses was afraid. But in the New Covenant we see this:

Heb 12:22 No, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering. 23 You have come to the assembly of God’s firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God himself, who is the judge over all things. You have come to the spirits of the righteous ones in heaven who have now been made perfect. 24 You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel.

*25 Be careful that you **do not refuse to listen to the One who is speaking**. For if the people of Israel did not escape when they refused to listen to Moses, the earthly messenger, we will certainly not escape if we reject the One who speaks to us from heaven! 26 When God spoke from Mount Sinai his voice shook the earth, but now he makes another promise: “Once again I will shake not only the earth but the heavens also.” 27 This means that all of creation will be shaken and removed, so that only unshakable things will remain.*

28 Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe. 29 For our God is a devouring fire.

The end goal is an unshakable kingdom

This physical world is passing away. One day it will be completely removed. How do I know? By faith. What is coming is a better, perfect, yet unseen heavenly Jerusalem. How do I know? By faith. You see over my many years walking with Jesus, he has proven himself to me time and time again. I trust what he says more than what my eyes can see.

“Faith makes what is unseen, and our future hope so real that it shapes the way we live.”

So let us please God by worshipping him with holy fear and awe.

Rom 12:1-2 And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Why should we endure in our faith, and put up with hardship and purification?

- Because Jesus went ahead of us.
- He's opened up a kingdom for us.
- He's making us pure and holy so that we can receive an unshakable and enduring kingdom!

Finally, I want to implore you to not miss the window of grace (v15-17)

Heb 12:15 Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God....16 Make sure that no one is immoral or godless like Esau, who traded his birthright as the firstborn son for a single meal. 17 You know that afterward, when he wanted his father's blessing, he was rejected. It was too late for repentance, even though he begged with bitter tears.

- ***Do not refuse to listen to the One who is speaking***
- Recall that word from last week about doing what God is calling you to do
- We cannot be foolish and assume that we can choose to obey later
- One day it will be too late. That is why it says "Today, if you hear his voice."

I want to share a clip from the Kid Rock performance for the TPUSA halftime show last weekend, and then we'll have a time of response and prayer.