

Strengthening the Hands that are Weak and the Knees that are Feeble

Hebrews 12:12-17

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, June 4, 2023

Good morning, everyone. We have an exciting opportunity today to do our first ever quarterly meeting after the service; I would encourage you to stick around and be a part of that if you can. The intention here is to talk about body life, church life, and what's going on in the life of our congregation for the next few months. There is a lot going on that we can't communicate on Sundays; there just isn't enough time. And so this will present an opportunity for us to do that. We're gonna be doing it every three or four months or so. And just to inform you and keep you posted and give you an opportunity just to interact some on what's going on here at Grace Fellowship Church. One thing to point out, just to kind of give you a little plug for the type of ministries we're going to be discussing is we're talking about starting a new missions program here at the church. And we've done a little research on that; looked around a little bit. We don't know exactly what route we're going to do just yet. But just as part of the preliminary investigation, we contacted the Master's Academy International, they plant Master's Seminary graduates overseas to start seminaries in different countries. And they pointed us to a group of guys that's starting a seminary in Sierra Leone, Africa. And so I talked to them this week, just to hear a little bit about what they're doing.

Sierra Leone is a country just on the western coast of Africa, I believe it's right next to the Atlantic Ocean. It's a population of 8 million people. Sixty percent are Muslim, 10% of Christians, and then 30% have native religions that they have. The people make about \$50 a month Canadian. Ebola and diamond mines are a real problem there. They said one pastor had 21 people die in his family from the Ebola virus. Fifty percent can't read. So when they're trying to reach them and help them and people send resources to this mission, what they do is they buy them radio Bibles that are solar powered, because you can't give them a book, you don't know if they could actually read it or not.

But they have a Master's Seminary student their full time and he's teaching Bible classes for eight pastors who are enrolled in the program. They'd like to build it to something even more than that. It's a pretty humble project because they've got a small unfinished building, I saw a picture of it, I'll show you during the meeting, where there's no walls on the sides, there's just a roof and floor and that type of thing.

But I don't know about you, but when I hear stories like that, I get fired up. Because we're studying Hebrews 12, and we're talking about the race for the Lord and how we're all running hard toward Christ. I think about the fact that we're not running alone. Amen? There are people running with us. And they're all over the world. I mean, they're in Africa and South America, they're in Haiti, they're in Brazil, they're in United States, Canada, Europe, you just name it. And it's good to be aware of that. It just thrills my soul makes me want to get under a mango tree, I don't know if they have mango trees, or whatever, and just preach and help these people. And so we're going to be talking about that during this quarterly

meeting. Again, we may not take it in the direction of Sierra Leone; but we'll do some kind of missions here as a church because we want to encourage the work God is doing overseas.

And with that said, I want I would invite you this morning to open your Bibles to the book of Hebrews chapter 12 because we are talking about this race, and it's mentioned in this chapter of the Bible. Hebrews chapter 12. And it says this, I want to read the whole text to you so we have it in our minds. But it says,

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons,

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
Nor faint when you are reproved by Him;
For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines,
And He scourges every son whom He receives.”

It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes

trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

We'll end the reading there, and we do have a lot to discuss this morning. So if you would go to the Lord with me in a word of prayer, I would just like to ask His grace to help us as we jump into this.

Heavenly Father, we pray for Your Mercy this morning, as we discuss a very encouraging part of Scripture and a very significant one in our lives. And there's not a person here in this room, I guess, who has not been tired in this race and weary and worn out. And yet the words here are given to encourage us in that. So Lord, I pray that that would be preached in that spirit this morning, that the things we talked about would be uplifting and build us up, and light a fire under us to run faster for Christ. When we see brothers and sisters in Christ in Sierra Leone, or other parts of the world, Lord, we want to run faster. We want to take encouragement and joy from the examples that they set for us. So Lord, I pray that that would happen this morning; that your church would be edified, Christ would be glorified, and your saints would be sanctified. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, as you read all of that text that I just read to you in Hebrews 12, it's not really hard to figure out what he's talking about there. He's talking about the act of running. If you look back in the text, you see the word "running" in verse one. He mentioned the need for endurance in verse one, verse two, verse three and verse seven because this is a marathon; it's not a sprint. He mentioned strengthening the hands that are weak in verse 12, and the knees that are feeble. He talks about making straight paths for your feet in verse 13. And pursuing something in verse 14; and coming short of it in verse 15. Because what the author is doing in Hebrews 12, is he's showing you what the Christian life is like, and that is a race. It's not a walk, or a jog or a crawl, where you become apathetic and lazy; it's a full-on rush towards God.

And just to say a few words about this, if you notice, our passage for this morning in verse 12, starts off with the word "therefore." And I've told you that anytime you see a word, "therefore," in the Bible, you ask What's it there for. What's it pointing you back to? And it's pointing it back to everything that's been said so far in the text. So if you look way back in verse one, at the start of all this, it says this, "Since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." What that means is that since you have so great a cloud of witnesses who have run in the Old Testament, this is what you should run to. Since you have men like Abel and Enoch and Noah in Hebrews 11, who have distinguished themselves as world class athletes and set off down the track and gone at full speed with the wind blowing through their hair and the sun in their faces until they crossed the finish line. You need to imitate their example. You can't be flippant in the Christian life. You can't just let go and let God and be careless about it. You've got to approach this with earnestness.

In fact, not only that, but verse five says God is so earnest about the race, that this is what He does to help you in it: He disciplines you. We talked about that last week. Like a good coach would do, He puts you through hardship. And like a good trainer, He makes you pass through the fires of affliction, so you can run faster and go farther and do more for the Lord. He loves you too much to leave you where you are. And God cares too much about your race to let you get lazy. He puts trials in your life to light a fire under you. You could look at it as if He's taking you to the gym and making you punch the punching bag. Or He's bringing you to the weight room and forcing you to pump iron. Or He's getting you up at 5:30 in the morning before the sun comes up to tell you to hit the trail and do some drills. Verse six even says He scourges you as He does that, see the word scourge there? It means He takes out the whip and He flogs you until you bleed. Which makes you wonder why? Why would God do such a thing? And the answer is found in verse 12, which is our text for today, when it says He does this so you can strengthen the hands that are weak. In other words, He's doing these hard things in your life, so you won't get tired and get halfway through the race and quit.

God understands it doesn't do you any good to start the race; you have to finish. And it doesn't help you to begin the journey with Christ, you have to see it all the way through to the end. Let me tell you why this is important. Everybody in this room knows what it's like to get saved and start the race with Christ. Because you begin with a burst of energy, don't you? You guys know what I'm talking about? I mean, you hit the ground going 100 miles an hour when you first get saved; so you're excited. It's all so new to you. Nobody has problems. Church is perfect. Because for the first time, the burden of sin has been lifted away, and your guilt has been paid, and heaven has been thrown open wide. So there's nothing you wouldn't do for Christ. Praying, you do it. Reading your Bible, you do it. Mission trips, bring it on. Witnessing to your neighbor, absolutely. But what happens over time? You get tired. And what takes place as the years go in and out and in and out? You find out there are problems. And you realize everything's not perfect. And things have flaws in them. You begin to go like this, until every little step is a grind. And every little movement is painful. And every little march of the race is just flat out hard. It chips away at your enthusiasm. And the author writes this in verse 12, to say I understand that I get it happens to everybody. If you haven't experienced that yet, you will stay in the race.

But the solution now here is to get a second wind, you gotta get a boost of energy. Because you got further to go, you're not in heaven yet. You're not done. You haven't crossed the finish line. You haven't met Jesus. You haven't taken the last step. You haven't gotten the victor's crown. So you've got to find a way to keep pushing through. And the way you do it, and this is just a little summary here, is to go back to the things you learned at first. If you notice, the author doesn't tell you how to strengthen yourself in verse 12. We'll get into that in a moment. And he doesn't give you 10 easy steps for finding your spiritual strength because he feels like he's done that already. That's already been discussed. If you look back in your Bibles here in verse two, it says, to fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Why? Because that's your burst of energy. He's the starter and finisher of your faith. He's the one who puts you in the race and keeps you in all the way to the finish line. So if you're wrestling with something, put your eyes on Him, amen. With a laser focus and a 2020 vision.

It tells you in verse two, you do this because He endured the cross. And that means that Jesus had a race to run too that led Him to the cross. So if you're feeling hopeless, it's almost like you're running in your lane and Jesus is running in His lane. He's got His path, you've got your path, and you need to train your thoughts to go toward His. That's where you find hope.

Verse three says you are to consider Him who endured such hostility by sinners against himself so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Does anybody feel like they're losing heart this morning? Does anybody feel weary? Like the heart that you had in the beginning is left somewhere back there on the track. The answer is the same. Think about Christ.

And I mention this because I don't know where everyone's at on this today, but I know a lot of people really struggle with the subject of discouragement. As you shepherd people and talk to them, you know that this kind of weariness and tiredness is a very, very common thing in the Christian life. They've done studies on this and found one of the most common maladies in British Columbia is depression. And that's in the church as well because Christians look to the world and it depresses them. And they look to the culture and it depresses them. Sometimes believers look to the church, and it does the same thing. I was talking to a woman yesterday at a barbecue in our area, and she was explaining how her father-in-law was a pastor who served the church for 40 years, and then abandoned the faith. That is depressing. That's discouraging. And it makes you slow down. It begins to make you feel like you got lead weights on your feet, or that parachute on your back and you just can't move forward.

And Christians do all sorts of things to fix this. They go on spiritual retreats, that's fine. Some of them are enrolled in Bible college, and that's okay; they want to study more theology. Some go to a big crusade. What the author's saying here is that when you struggle with this issue, you got to go to something greater than that, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ because that retreat is only going to last so long, and that crusade is only going to go around for a weekend, and that Bible College is going to end one day. Christ will never end. Your relationship with Him will go on and on and on forever. And the fact is, friends, you don't just need Jesus for the beginning of the race, you need him for the end, amen? And you don't just rely on Him at the start, when things are going well, you're so excited, and you're going 100 miles an hour; you need to rely on Him when you get exhausted. You never come to a point where you don't need Christ. You could run this race for a million years, you'll still need Him. It's been said that when you think about this passage, you find it's not the speed of the Christian race that wears you out. It's the endurance. It keeps going, and you have to keep running. You got to run today, you got to run tomorrow. You got to run when this nation is doing the right things; you got to run when it's not. You got to run when your family is doing well, when it's not. You got to keep at it forever. And there's no one that can give you the power like the Lord.

And so that's what we're talking about this morning. One poet said "Christ for sickness, Christ for health, Christ for poverty, Christ for wealth. It's all about Christ." And so let's talk about that with three

steps the author is encouraging you to take in order to overcome the issue of discouragement, Is anybody discouraged today? You don't have to raise your hand, but I think a lot of us would put our hands up. So this is very real thing for you today. So let's talk about this. Three steps to take to overcome the issue of discouragement.

The first one and these are all taken from this text is to strengthen your hands and knees. You can see that in verse 12. You see the wording right there. But the first step is to strengthen your hands and knees. Which means that as you run the race, you gotta realize you can't do it on your own. You need strength and it's found in Him. It's not found in you. It's not found in your coffee. It's found in something greater.

And if you notice, the author begins verse 12, with the words "therefore strengthen." That could be translated "therefore you strengthen" or "all of you" that's being addressed here. This is a plural command. So it means every single person who's being addressed in Hebrews 12, and running the race in verse one, and laying aside the encumbrances and putting away sin, and being disciplined by the Father in verses five through 11; here's what you need to do. Strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble. The reason he says that is because the Jews had become discouraged. If you're just reading between the lines in the text here, the people of Israel that he's writing to are getting depressed. Because when they were first saved, they started the race with a burst of energy. And when they first came to Christ, they began like they were shot out of a cannon, wind blowing through their hair, fire under their feet, nothing would stop them. Trials wouldn't stop them. Tribulations wouldn't stop them. Distress, bring it on. Famine, nakedness, sword, I don't care. But the problem is, over time, they began to slow down, and the feet that were going so fast, are now just trudging along in the Christian life. And they didn't know what to do about it. So the author tells them this. They need to find a way to overcome it by going back to their source of power. They don't need a new source of power; they need to go back to the old one. They don't need a different channel of strength; they need to return to the strength they had when they first were saved.

And if you look at the verse here, the key word is the word "strengthen." It's a Greek word that means to straighten something out or set it right. Some of your translations use the word "lift". The idea is that Jews had fallen down in the race, they needed to be lifted up again. And they had stumbled in the journey and tripped, and they need to be restored. This Greek term actually has made it into our English vocabulary when we speak of the word orthopedics, it comes from this word. It's the science of healing a bone when it's broken. And the meaning is that the Jews had been broken and snapped in two in the journey, in their work for Christ; and so the author's encouraging them to help each other out so they don't quit.

When it says, "strengthen the hands" here, the way that's worded that can refer to anyone's hands. Doesn't have to be yours, can be yours, mine or the guy next doors, if he's a believer. And it says, "strengthen the knees." That's not talking about one person's knees, that's all of our knees, everybody's knees. Because you shouldn't just be helping yourself out in the race, you got to help others too. Victory

as a team effort. Winning is about a community thing. We're not trying to win by coming in first; we're trying to win by bringing as many people as we can to the finish line with us. Because as you run the race, you realize there are people whose hands are weak, and that means they can't hold them up anymore. They don't have the strength. Their hands are like this when they need to be like this. Some have said that's a boxing term that the hands are down, there's getting punched all over the face. And there's others whose knees are feeble. It means they're frail because they're coming to the final turn of the race, and they can't make it. And they're coming around the bend and they're about to fall. So you need to put your arms under them and carry them through. If you've watched videos of runners of the Boston Marathon or something like that, it often happens that they start off very good and doing very well. But as they come to the end, their arms start to quiver, and their legs start to bow. And their chest begins to heave because they can't get any air. And that's the impression you get here. This is a call for endurance. This is a plea for perseverance in the race, where we all help each other out to win.

And in fact, I've told you this before as we've studied this passage, but I don't know about you, but as I get older, as a Christian, this means so much more to me. Because it's one thing to race in the beginning when you're excited, and everything's great. But it's a whole other thing to do it when it's not, Amen. It takes a different set of skills to keep following Christ. When you find that everything is not as wonderful as you once thought it was. It's called the greener grass syndrome. Things start going bad and you think maybe the grass is greener over there. I've heard if it's greener, that means it has sewage under it. And the passage is telling you you've got to learn how to be strengthened in those times too; not just the good times but the bad times. Not when you're on the mountaintops only, but in the valleys. So many people struggle with this because a few hurdles come along, and they want to quit. And a few problems get in their way in the race, and they can't handle it; they fall to pieces. The author of Hebrews says you can't do that. Listen, trials are going to come. Tribulations are going to stand in your way in the race. There's going to be hurdles.

Someone told me the other day in our care group. I love having care group after sermons because a lot of you guys tell me things that I can put in the next week's sermon, it's really great. I want to get a coffee mug that says, "Be careful what you say. It could be used as a sermon illustration." It's true. And I was talking with someone who said, "You know, when you think of the Christian life as a race, you often want to picture it as a race like this. But it's not really a race like this. It's more of a race like this, you know, and there's obstacles and there's pitfalls, and there's mountains to climb, and you get black eyes, skinned knees, broken arms. But the reality is you can make it if you stick together."

And if you understand what he's saying here, because if you read this verse, you notice, he doesn't tell you how to strengthen your hands and knees. He doesn't go into all that information here. And the reason he doesn't though is because he's already mentioned that in the book of Hebrews, so I want to walk you through some of what he said before. We have talked about this but He's tying all this together.

For example, if you look in verse one, this is how he's telling you to strengthen your hands and knees. He says there in verse one, "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us. What that means is, since you have people in the Hall of Faith, like Rahab, and Gideon, and Barak, and Samson, who have run ahead of you, and reached the finish line, this is what you do to be strengthened. You follow their example. They're sitting down in the bleachers now, they're surrounding you in the stands to be a witness, not a witness as a judge, but a witness as an example, to say that I did this, and you can do. I ran the race and finished, and you can do the same thing by the grace of God. You could look at them as those people in the stands at the Chiefs games with those cowbells making all that noise, cheering you on. So if you're feeling low, go back and look at them. See what they did; draw hope from that.

I could also say that if you're discouraged as well in the race, and you need strength. Another thing you can do in verse one, is to lay aside every encumbrance. You see that phrase there? That means to give up any burden that's working against you in the race and slowing you down unnecessarily. That's what runners do. They shed weight. They do anything they can to get the pounds off so they can go faster. And the author places that here to remind you, you've got to approach it with that kind of commitment. In fact, when you read this part of the passage, you get the impression of a man coming up to the start of the race, with a three piece suit on and an overcoat, carrying a briefcase in one hand, and a bag of gold and the other and some real fancy office shoes. And the author's asking the question, what do you think of a man like that? Is he serious about the race? No. Does he want to win? Absolutely not. If he was he would leave that behind. You need to leave those things behind.

Because the encumbrances here is anything, not sinful things just neutral stuff. possessions, money, hobbies, sports, games, job, career, golf clubs, not the golf clubs, right? No, anything. If it stands in your way, throw it out. Then he says, as you do that, you need to be fixing your eyes on Jesus in verse two. Which means that you focus on Him with extra intensity and almost a fanatical obsession, so that you go from looking at this, the hobbies and jobs and career to that, Christ. When you run a race, it's crucial where you put your eyes, and it's very important what you're looking at. You look the wrong way, you're gonna go the wrong way. So if you're discouraged, the author tells you to think about the Lord. Meditate on Him. Remember what He's done for you.

The next verse says to consider Him, which takes it even further. Because that's a word from which we get our English word algorithm, and it refers to a detailed mathematical equation that takes a long time to explain. Because the author is saying if you're battling with depression, you need to study Christ like an algorithm; and you need to meditate on Him. Not in a superficial way, but in a deep way. Not with vague thoughts, that's not going to help you when you're suffering. When you're suffering with something it doesn't help you to call Jesus, "my copilot" or "my homeboy" as I saw on some kind of poster. You need to think further than that. Familiarize yourself with His deity, humanity and incarnation, become acquainted with his Trinity, Godhead, the hypostatic union, and His suffering, pain and everything He went through at the cross.

Because the point is, how do you strengthen yourself in the race? You go back to all of this. You just read through the passage. Ask yourself, "Am I going to the Old Testament? When I'm weary in the race, am I looking at the witnesses? So that I read about Abraham, and I see what he did. And I read about Moses, and I look at what he went through. And I learn the story of Rahab and find comfort in the grace God gave her." Listen, if you're not doing that. It's like you're running in front of an empty stadium. If you're not opening your Bible and finding that kind of joy, it's like you're running in front of a dead crowd. And that's foolish. Don't do that.

You also need to ask, "Am I laying aside encumbrances? I mean, yeah, I'm discouraged right now. And yeah, I'm frustrated in the race. But is it because I've got too many things on my back? Do I feel that way because I'm weighed down with too many toys? Am I trying to follow God and money? Am I chasing after Christ and filthy lucre?" Because if you are, get rid of it. Have a yard sale. Move to a side of town that's less expensive, so you don't have to spend every waking minute working to pay it off.

Also, if you're tired, ask the question, "When's the last time I looked at Christ, and thought long and hard about Him, and studied the facts, and did the math, and added up all His benefits?" Because when you look at what He went through on the cross, you have got to admit the struggles you're facing in this life are not that bad. And when you think about what He suffered for you at Calvary, you have to realize, no matter how hard the race seems, it's nothing in comparison to Him. You've never had a bad day like He had. You have no reason to throw a pity party. He went to the cross. He sweat drops his blood. He drank a cup of wrath. He bore the sins of the world. He was crushed by the Father. All so He could forgive you.

And so the author is saying here that when you're slowing down in this race and stumbling and being frustrated and falling over, you go back to this. Don't go to a retreat first. Nothing wrong with retreats; retreats are fine. You don't have to go to some crusade. You go to the cross.

I remember, some time ago, I had the opportunity to witness to a man who I worked with at a window cleaning company. And he was struggling with alcohol. In fact, he was struggling with it to such an extent he was about to go, and he just got fired, and he was about to go into rehab. And the boss asked me to talk to him to try to help him some. So I did. I gave him the gospel as best I could. And afterwards, he said, the young man said this, he said, "Isn't there something else?" I said, "I'm sorry, what do you mean?" And he said, "Well, I've heard all this stuff about Jesus before and I think it's fine. But I have a real problem here. Isn't there some other way to solve it?" And I said, "No, there's not. And here's why. Because you have a sin problem. That's what's causing you to drink so much. Your heart is as black as coal, and I don't know of any other way to deal with that but Him." All the psychologists in the world can't fix that problem. All the drugs or pills or medication you'll take won't fix that problem. Neither will 1000 hours of therapy. You need Christ. And you need Christ alone. That's where you start.

Philippians 4:13. You guys know this verse? What does it say? "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." What can you do through Christ who gives me strength? All things. How far does the cross go? As far as you want it. If you need help to overcome alcohol, He can give you help. If you need help to overcome pride, He can give you that. If you need His grace to break free from the chains of addiction, He will give you grace upon grace upon grace upon grace, you have to trust Him. You trust Him as much now as you ever have. In fact, the more you grow as a Christian, you realize you have to trust Him more. And you grow closer to Him not farther away.

And all this brings you to another step to encourage you in the race. That first one was a good one; I like preaching this stuff. Very encouraging. First one, strengthen your hands and knees. Here's the second step the author encourages you to take in order to overcome discouragement in this race. Make straight paths for your feet. Strengthen your hands and knees. And then you need to make straight paths for your feet, which means you have to use discernment and make sure that you're going in the right direction and not the wrong one. Listen, it doesn't matter how fast you run in the race, if you're going the wrong way, right? And nobody cares how hard you try if you're going here when you need to be going there. So make sure you're going here.

Verse 13 continues this train of thought, when he says exactly what I just read to you. But he says, "Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak, and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet." And that's a symbolic way of saying choose the right road. Pick the good lane. Go down the correct track, and don't get distracted from it. The image here is not just that of a runner who's weak and tired in verse 12, but he's also confused in verse 13. It's like he's standing at a fork in the road, and he doesn't know which way to go, and he's at a bend in the track, and he's not sure how to handle it. He's kind of dumbfounded. So he's telling you to choose straight path.

That's something that's a little hard for us to understand living in Canada in the 21st century, but the Jews would have been familiar with this in the first century, because they didn't have any cars. So in order for them to go somewhere, run a race or walk or whatever, they had to do it on paths that were carved out in the countryside, you would see them everywhere you went. They had them in the farmland, they had them in the cities. They had these dusty paths by the ocean; they had them in the desert; they would have them in the mountains; they would have them in the valleys. And some were big, and some were narrow, wide and narrow. Remember that Jesus talked about that. Some were long; some were short. Some were safe because they were well paved, and they went in a straight direction. While some are not because they went like this; and they were very unstable.

And with this in mind, the author says you need to make straight paths for your feet, which is a way of saying you need to choose the road that leads you closest to God at all times. When you're in that fork in the road, or that bend, pick the trail that takes you in His direction. This phrase was often using the Bible as a metaphor for obedience. Because when you took the straight path in Scripture, the idea is that you went toward God not away from Him. And you walked in His will and not out of it because you kept the

commandments. The commandments, the law, the Scriptures, they tell you what the straight path looks like. So when you follow that you're going down that way. When you don't follow it, you're not.

The author is telling you, you have to make sure to run the race like this, or else you'll be disqualified. You can't just run quickly, you got to run straight. There's a lot of people today, by the way, running around like a chicken with their head cut off in churches going everywhere. You shouldn't live like that. You got to wake up each day and ask yourself, "Am I going to obey God today?" And then you get up the next day and say, "Am I going to live by the things He's taught me in His word? Or am I going to do the opposite?" Because if you do the opposite, it will hurt you. Listen, if you're a believer, you can't fall out of the race; you'll fall in the race, you won't fall out of it. But when you fall in this area, it's gonna go bad. The Lord is going to discipline you like we just talked about last week. So the author's reminding you here to be wiser than that. Here's why. If you look in verse 13, it says, "So that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed." And what that means is that when you run off path, the wrong way, your limbs go out of joint. You break your knee, break your ankle, sprain something, but when you run in the straight line according to His Word, it brings healing to you. And where there's injury, there's restoration. And where there's bruising, it's restored. Not because you're earning your salvation, nobody does that, but because you're receiving the benefits of it. God is taking your obedience and using it to make you whole again. And He's taking your faithfulness and allowing it to get you back on the right track, back on course, back in the fight when you've messed up.

And in fact, if you want to go even deeper into this, verse 14 tells you what that looks like specifically in the context of a local church, and that is pursuing peace with all men. See that there? It's a very practical way to be obedient to God in the race. You need to be a peacemaker and not a troublemaker in the church. Listen, friends, few things drain you in the race more than conflict with other runners. Amen? Can we all say amen to that? And nothing wears you out in the battle more than trouble from people who are right alongside you. Sucks the life out of you. It's exhausting to run the race and be criticized, to go down the track toward Christ and have someone throwing stones at you've nearby. And the author is telling you here don't do that to people. Don't be one of them. Because if you're wondering why some people have weak hands and feeble knees in the race, the author says it's because some of you are tearing them down. It's happening because there are people beating them up instead of building them up in the body of Christ. And you need to be pursuing them instead.

The word "pursue." It's another athletic term. It means to run so quickly towards someone that you overtake them with your speed. Because you realize you've offended them. You've done something wrong to this brother or sister in Christ, so you drop everything you can to catch up to him. You don't wait for them to make it right. You don't sit back and fold your hands until they come begging for forgiveness, you go seek forgiveness from them.

This verse also shows you why this is so important when it says, "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord." And the last part of this verse means without

sanctification, and the ongoing pursuit of peace this way, and the ongoing life of obedience, it will be a sign that you won't see God. It's a total package here. You're saved by grace, but if you are saved by grace, you will show it in your works. Another way to say that is you can't love God without loving the people that He made. And you can't get along with Him if you don't get along with them. So if you find yourself acting that way, you've got to repent quickly. Now, this is something that's got to be humbling for all of us today because if we're honest about it, we're all too prone to conflict in the church.

I was talking with a neighbor the other day and he was showing me his bee collection. He collects bees in the backyard. Again, don't show pastors these things; they will become sermon illustrations. And I was asking him I said, "Well, you got like six boxes here. What happens when a box gets too full of bees?" And this guy is a professing Christian, he's Romanian. He said, "Bees are like Baptists. They get too big, and they kill each other." I said, "They're not all that bad brother. Some of them get along."

But we're all prone to not make peace in the church. If you've been a Christian for any length of time, you'll know it's oftentimes not the people outside the church that cause you grief, it's the people inside. And a lot of us are too easily offended by that. We don't show grace like we should to one another.

I've counseled people who've told me they're so tired in the Christian life right now, and so worn out. But when you look into their life, you find out the reason is because they won't forgive anybody. And anytime someone offends them, they hold on to it for years, years. Which makes her whole life look like a war zone. It's just one broken relationship after another. And the point of the text here is that Christians need to be making peace instead of that. It can take a lot of work. People can be hard to deal with. People can be stressful; they can really do a number on your patience. But you still have to be gracious even then; let love cover a multitude of sins.

Listen, what you do affects the other runners. You run well and they will run well. You run poorly and they may not. I've heard it said that you're either affecting or infecting the church. And you're either affecting it positively with your good works and good attitude, or you're infecting it negatively with your sin. One rotten apple spoils the bunch. One bad egg destroys a dozen. So you want to make sure you're not doing that. When people act that way, it makes us feel like we're running with the emergency brake on. And we're trying to follow Christ with lead weights on the feet. It's a terrible thing to do in the eyes of God.

And all of this brings us to another step the author's encouraging you to take care to overcome the issue of discouragement. Just to remind you of these other ones here, he says, in order to overcome discouragement, strengthen your hands and knees. That means you need to look at Jesus and do all you can to make Him the number one priority in your life, not just at the beginning of the race, but at the end. If you go 10, or 20, or 30, or 40 miles, it doesn't matter. It's Christ all the way. He also says when you're discouraged, make straight paths for your feet; obey the Word of God. Pursue things like peace so you find yourself doing this, instead of doing that. And you see yourself staying on the straight and

narrow, instead of getting distracted. So many people do that. They start off running well, and they get distracted, don't they? They look off to the side and they see something shiny, and then they all go off into a ditch. We want to make sure not to act that way. Which brings you to another part of the text here that's actually very different from these other ones.

And let me explain this a little bit. At this point in the passage, the author's acknowledging that there are some people who are doing this. There are some men and women who start off going down the narrow road, or they seem to, until they get distracted and wander off. Which raises an issue. And that is this. Were they saved to begin with? If someone starts the race, and they don't finish; and they begin walking with the Lord, or seeming to, and they drop off 10 or 20 years down the road, were they born again? And the answer you're gonna see here is that no, they're not. Once saved, always saved. If you begin the journey with Christ, you always stay in to the end. If you don't, it's an indication that you were never regenerate.

And so the third step the author encourages you to take here to overcome discouragement is to examine yourself. You need to examine yourself to see if you're saved. Because what he's going to tell you now is that if you've gone through these other things and strengthened the hands and made straight paths, but it hasn't helped you because you keep roaming off, it could be that there's a bigger problem here. And that is that you might be lost. You're close to the race, but you're not in the race. And you're next to the track, but you're not on the track. It's just an outward thing. You're wearing clothes like a runner, but you don't have the heart of a runner.

And in order to introduce this verse 15 starts off with the phrase, "See to it," which is blunt. And that's a very direct command in the passage, he tells you to give serious attention to something. "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God." Which means that make sure no one comes short of genuine conversion. Make sure none of you comes right up to the finish line and stops right up to the checkered flag and quits. Remember I told you about that pastor who served 40 years and then quit. Don't do that. Because close enough is not good enough for God. There's no such thing as an almost Christian. You have to go all the way to saving knowledge of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ if you want to go to heaven and win the race. I keep saying this in this part in our series, but remember, you're either in or you're out of this thing. You're either with it or you're not. There's no halfway.

He even adds to the seriousness of this when he says this kind of behavior can lead to a root of bitterness springing up causing trouble. And that goes back to what we looked at earlier about pursuing peace. Because the reason it's so necessary to pursue peace is because there's some people causing trouble in the church because they're lost and bitter about it. The reason there's so much trouble in churches today is because there's goats among the sheep and tares among the wheat. And they're angry. The reason they fight everybody in church is because they're fighting God. And the reason they cause so much conflict among us is because there's already conflict in their heart that's never been reconciled in a saving way. Which makes them a troublemaker.

And the author actually goes on now to give you an example of someone who lived like that, and that's Esau. If you look in your text here in verse 16, you see the name, "Esau," and I'm going to read you this verse in a moment. But let me say some words about him. The author uses him as an object lesson of someone who came short of the grace of God. If you remember, Esau was the firstborn son of Isaac, and the twin brother of Jacob, who was circumcised and raised in a believing family. Which means that Esau had access to the Word of God, as they knew it back then. And he heard about the promises. And he knew about the Lord in a way that pretty much no one else would have. His father was saved, and his grandfather was saved. His roots ran deep into the story of redemption. He had a long legacy of faith from his ancestors. You might even say Esau was the kind of person who grew up in church. He went to Sunday school. He learned the Catechism. He was baptized at a young age, singing in the choir, went on youth trips, all that kind of stuff. But the problem is that he was lost. This man's heart was as far away from God as it could possibly be. He had all the outward trappings of religion, but it meant nothing to him deep down inside.

So the verse here says, he was an immoral or godless person who sold his own birthright for a single meal. I mean, he was so lost, he gave him the most important thing in the world for something petty. And he traded the greatest gift God could give him, the right of a firstborn, the covenant all these things, for a cheap thrill because he's just thinking about himself. He just wanted to please the flesh. He couldn't see past the next five minutes, which is why the Lord rejected him.

By the way, Esau was not alone in this. There were other men who've acted this way in the Bible, like Judas Iscariot, remember him? Remember what Judas did? He betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. He turned his back on the Lord over money. He picked cash over Christ, dollars over salvation. The rich young ruler did that too. He came to Jesus and said, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said, "Sell all you have, give to the poor, and come follow Me." And the rich young ruler wouldn't do it. He saw his possessions and he said, "Those possessions mean more to me than Jesus. I'll choose my wealth over Him." Which is what we're reading about here.

Verse 17, says, "For you know, that even afterwards, when Esau desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears." The idea there is that Esau saw that what he was doing was wrong, and he regretted it. It made him sad to lose his birthright. He was sorrowful over that. But it didn't matter because he didn't repent. God had nothing to do with it. He had the worldly sorrow that 2 Corinthians 7:10 talks about.

And the warning in this whole text here is you want to make sure you're not acting the same way. And the most tragic thing about Esau's life is that it didn't have to go this way. He could have chosen another path. He heard the word, and he didn't listen. He knew the promises, but he didn't pay attention. He had salvation presented to him, but he turned his back because he just ignored it all. He was numb to it. All those things bounced off of him. Sermons bounced off of him. Prayers bounced off of him because his

heart was as hard as a brick. In fact, it's even darker than this because if you look in verse 16, when it says that he was immoral, there's been some debate about what that's referring to. But some take it to mean that he was sexually immoral because his heart was so hard to God that he was indulging in the worst sins imaginable. That's what always happens when someone acts this way. Their sin takes over, they become enslaved to the flesh. It's not a head problem. It's a heart problem.

You know, some people today say that "You know, I would believe in Jesus if I could, but I can't. There's not enough evidence. And I would trust in Him if it were possible. But it's not possible. There's not enough proof." Can I tell you something? That's a lie. There's more than enough evidence to trust in Jesus Christ. The problem is that they would rather give into their sin. And all these examples, we're talking about Esau, Judas, the rich young ruler, if you pull back the veil on their life, you would see something very evil in there. They abandoned God because it got in the way of their flesh.

This is why it's important for you to examine yourselves in these things. This is why you need to take this very seriously because you're not better than them. None of us are. We're not better than Esau. It may be tough to see it that way. Because some of you read this passage. And you say, "Well, that's not true Pastor Jeremy. Esau is coming short of the grace of God here. And he has a root of bitterness springing up, and he's immoral. And he's godless. And he sold his own birthright, I would never do that. I wouldn't act that way." Let me tell you, if you're saying that you don't understand your heart. I bet if you back that truck up several thousand years, Esau would say the same thing. It just takes one little compromise here and another one there and off you go. It takes one little distraction this way off the road, one little distraction that way. We want to be very careful in these things.

Remember, Esau, he's been mentioned here in the context of those who are suffering in the race. And they're weary, and they're vulnerable, and they're tired, and they're discouraged, and they want to quit because they're on mile marker 10, 20, 25. And they're several years into this whole endeavor. And they're slowing down. And they're doing this and it's making them ask the question, "Is it worth it? is following Christ all it's cracked up to be? Should I just give up? Should I throw in the towel and go back to my former life? Look at the world; they're having fun. Look at the culture; that sin looks great." The author is telling you here it's not great. God will reject you if you do that. He will turn you away. You have to stay with Him to the very end.

In his book called *The Case for Faith*, Lee Strobel interviewed a man who had once professed Christ and was an evangelist, so to speak, but he gave it up for a life of atheism. And so Lee Strobel asked him the question, he said, "Well, what do you think of Christ now after you've left Him for all these years?" And the man actually teared up, and he said, "I miss him because I have no one to forgive me now." And friends, let me tell you something. When someone leaves Christ, they always miss Him in this sense. They have no one to forgive them. So that when they come to the end of their lives, they face God alone. And when they stand before the Judge of all the universe, after they die, there will be no one to speak up for them and say, "My blood covers them."

So let this man's life serve as a warning to you, whatever you do, finish the race. Stay the course. Don't go away from it. It's not enough to begin the journey; you have to see it to the end. It's not enough to start; you got to conclude with the Saviour.

In fact, if you read this verse, and you find yourself acting like Esau did, and you're wanting to quit in the race, or maybe you've never even trusted in the Lord to begin with, I have good news for you. And that is that you can change. There's hope. You can call out to Jesus Christ and He will save you. You can turn to the Saviour and He will pardon your sins. He did go to the cross. He did sweat drops of blood. He drank the cup of God's wrath. He bore the sins of the world. He allowed the Father to crush Him, all to forgive sinners like you. He's the Son of God. He is one with the Father, second member of the Trinity, born of a virgin, suffered under Pilate, died, buried, resurrected on the third day, He ascended into heaven, and one day He's coming back to rule. But the point is that all of this is being offered to you this morning if you will give your life over to Him. Because if you do that, this is what Christ will do for you. If you've never been in the race, He will put you in it. And if you've never been on the track, He will place you on the track. You might be going next to the track now; He'll drop you in the middle of it. And when He does, you'll start out with a burst of energy. You'll hit the ground going 100 miles an hour, people will have to hold you back by the collar. That's what we have to do with new believers in this church, hold them back, they want to take on everything. Some of them have already bought plane tickets to Sierra Leone right now; they want to go. And over time, you will get tired. And as the days drag on, you will get weary. But let me let me tell you this, the same Jesus who started with you, will hold you up all the way. He will lose none of those the Father has given to Him. He will be faithful. It goes back to the question of will you believe it now? Will you place your faith in Jesus' name?

Next week, we're going to look at this next passage here in Hebrews where it says, "For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched, and to a blazing fire, but to Mount Zion and the city of a living God." And that means that this is the final destination of your race. It is Mount Zion or heaven. Because the author mentions two mountains here, two ways to approach God. You have the way of the law or Mount Sinai. And you have the way of grace in mount Zion. And as he's kind of summarizing the book of Hebrews here, he asks you the question which one are you gonna pick? You've been listening to this book for 12 chapters now. Which one do you want? You want law or do you want grace? You want to go back to the Old Covenant; get out of the race? Or do you want to stay with the New? And please come back next time we'll talk about that. And ask the Lord to reveal His Word to us in a fresh way next week as well. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, Lord, I do pray for my brothers and sisters in Christ this morning. And my prayer for them is that they will stay in the race, Lord, and I pray that those who are downcast and frustrated and things have just been hard for them, we all get it, we understand. But Lord, I pray that the words we've read this morning and the things we've studied would give them a boost of energy now. That they would get a second wind.

Father, we want to go strong for Christ. We want to hear You say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." We want to kneel before the throne one day and see Your approval. So Lord, we pray for Your grace in this in our lives.

And if there are any this morning, who read the story of Esau, and they relate to that, Lord, I pray You would open their eyes and show them it's not enough if they come to church. It's not enough that they have a Bible. It's not enough that they're a nice, good person, Esau fit the description for a lot of those things. They have to believe Christ for themselves. They got to come fleeing to the Saviour.

Lord, as we take communion this morning, it's always a reminder of what the Saviour has done for us. It's always a reminder how sufficient His perfect Redemption was. So as we partake of that, we pray You will be glorified and honored. As we examine ourselves, may we turn away from anything that distracts us in the race. And then even afterwards, Lord, as we approach our quarterly meeting, we look forward to talking about the ministries and the good things You're doing in the life of the Body of Christ. May You be worshipped and praised. In all of these things we pray, in Jesus' name, Amen.