

Hebrews 12:12-17

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Open up your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 12. So, the book of Hebrews, we have been working through it for quite a while now, and we have just one more chapter after this one that's been encouraging to my soul.

We're going to pick up reading in Hebrews 12, verse 12, and read through verse 17.

It says in verse 12, So, our writer is, if you look at the beginning of chapter 12, he begins this metaphor of a race or a marathon, comparing that to the life of a believer.

And he's kind of picking back up on that metaphor in verse 12. But there's really only two questions we're going to walk through, I guess, in unpacking this text, but some different things underneath those.

But number one is, what must we do to finish the race well? What must we do to finish the race well? And this is verses 12 through 14.

[2 : 17] Therefore, lift up your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather healed. Strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

And sort of at the outset of this, I think that it's great to kind of begin with this, but one way we can answer this question, what must we do to finish the race well?

We need to run together. And we see this all throughout the book of Hebrews. This is not meant to be a solo marathon or a solo race that we're running.

It can feel like that. Many of us, even myself this week, just felt alone, felt by myself, like I was running this race by myself. And I think that that's a tactic that the enemy uses to discourage us, to make us feel like we're all alone.

But we really are not. And God hasn't designed the Christian life to be that way. So though there is a personal running, personal striving, there's only one you.

[3 : 22] It's also one that we're meant to run alongside other brothers and sisters in the faith. If you look at verse 14, it says, With everyone, implying along with everyone, together with all other believers.

The language in the letter addressing the whole church, the whole community of faith. It's filled with language like this in Hebrews. Hebrews 10, 23. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.

So part of God's design and actually helping us to finish the race is to be encouraged by other people running it with us, fellow believers that are running it with us.

This is why being a part of a local church, a local community of believers is so important. And some, many even, neglect meeting, like he addresses here, as is the habit of some.

[4 : 28] And so we can't go on without mutual support. No one is meant to be a lone ranger. No one's meant to run this race alone. We need help from other believers.

So we run it together. And then secondly, underneath this, we run tough or run hard. Sounds like sports language, right? Run tough, run hard. Sort of what the point is.

Run tough. So the offer is using the race metaphor. And we all know that the telltale signs of a runner who's running out of energy, low in spirit, toward the end of the race, the sign of them wearing out is drooping arms, flopping hands, and wobbling knees.

So knowing that the race of a believer's life is really difficult, almost seemingly impossible, it feels like at times. Those who are running it, you and I, can get really discouraged, weary, and fatigued in the midst of it.

So he incorporates poetic Old Testament language to further exhort his readers to run hard with endurance the race that is set before them. In verse 12, we see, Therefore, so then, lift up your drooping hands and strengthen your weak, trembling knees.

[5 : 48] And it's the image from the prophet Isaiah speaking to the people of Judah where they would be in exile in Babylon. And their hope was beginning to wane. I'll read this part to you.

Isaiah 35, 2 through 4. It says, They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God.

Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees.

Say to those who have an anxious heart, Be strong. Fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with recompense of God.

He will come and save you. So look ahead. Don't be anxious. Don't throw down and quit. The Lord has come. And we all know that this writer is using that to kind of tie into the believer's life in a broader context, promising his weary people that he will come.

He will save them. He will deliver them from this broken, sinful world. Jesus will come. Jesus will come. So just stop and think. If you were to kind of like measure your life on an average week, is it characterized by victory?

[7 : 03] By overcoming? It shouldn't be characterized by perfection or a stoic mentality. But are we allowing the difficulties we face to get the better of us?

Are we allowing the circumstances around us to make us anxious and weighed down and disheartened? So any of us that are runners, I definitely am not a runner.

I have half my lung function. Running is not my thing. I go hiking instead. But anything that's going to weigh you down, like you get rid of quick. Like you throw it off quick.

It's going to hinder you from finishing. And in the backpacking world, man, I've learned a lot since I started. But like you just learn, next time I won't bring that.

Next time I won't carry that. That little Bible, little Bible that's about that big. Like I'll still carry that.

But a lot of other junk I just don't need. So throw it off.

[8 : 03] Get rid of it. But the point is an anxious heart weighed down and discouraged can hinder you from finishing. In Proverbs 12, verse 25, it says, anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down.

But a good word makes him glad. And the Hebrew word good means a personal, kind, pleasant, sweet, timely word.

Like a word spoken at the right time. And it's kind of like God is calling out to us and we need to call out to one another. Like, hey, like look at me.

Finish. Stay focused. Trust me. Trust me. Look to me. Ask me to strengthen your heart. Keep pressing. Keep pressing on. Don't allow the difficulties to get the better of you.

I'll strengthen you. I'll help you. So we're called to consider other believers while running the race. You could write down Galatians 6, 1 through 5. It's a good example of that.

[9 : 02] So are you actively glancing over at other believers who are running with you who may need your help?

A lot of us just kind of live in our own personal bubble. This is why that independent me and God alone but no one else mentality just won't work.

Because you're going to need help. But also you're supposed to be able to help strengthen those around you who aren't doing well. So if you are a part of this church, a member of this church, I think that we look out for one or another pretty well.

But we always could do better. And to think about who is struggling around me. Are you even aware of what's going on in the lives of the other believers that are part of this church?

Do you know what they're dealing with? I have a friend in Athens and he's been a part of a church off and on. He's in the military so he's just gone a lot. He's gone through some rough stuff.

[10 : 01] And I asked him, how's the church you're being a part of? And he goes, well, you know, it's okay. And I said, well, do they know any of the stuff that's going on with you? He goes, not really.

And I'm like, well, you probably either need to tell them or go find like another body somewhere. But you need to move on. But we need to be aware of those who are running around us to help them.

And we can temporarily, back into our text, many in the race can temporarily, either due to temptation or discouragement, kind of veer off the path that we're supposed to be running on.

So the writer in Hebrews ties in a verse from Proverbs 4, 25 to 27. It says, Let your eyes look directly forward and your gaze be straight before you.

Ponder the path of your feet, then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left. Turn your foot away from evil.

[11 : 03] And we all know that when you're running or walking, hiking, whatever, if you're like in a dangerous place, you need to kind of like pay attention to like what you're doing or you're going to like really fall and hurt yourself.

And that's kind of the image here. Like fix your gaze on what's ahead and run hard. And so stick with Christ. Don't be distracted.

Don't idly be just looking over to the side of other things going on. Make straight paths that are level, safe, going in the right direction for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather healed.

Stop idly looking around and getting distracted. There's so many things that the world uses to just pull us this way or pull us that way. And we have to sometimes get shaken out of that to remember that we're heading toward Zion, which is in the next few verses.

And so brace yourselves. Move straight ahead. Don't look back. Find your second wind. Keep going. Keep fighting. The salvation that we already possess in Christ will soon be fully realized.

[12 : 16] So keep pressing forward. My only, I told you I'm not a runner, but I'm a hiker, a backpacker. And one of the very few times that I actually had to give up my backpack to somebody else, it was like a huge shock to the pride, was on the east coast of Ireland, north of Dublin, there's a mountain range called the Morne Mountains.

And Daniel Swanson was with me. And we were looking at the map and we saw this hike going through the morns on the Irish Sea. And we thought, this looks awesome. It's like not raining, which is a miracle in the morn.

So we were like going to go for the day. The book said eight hours. And I thought, we got this. But I already was in a little bit of poor health.

I had an appendix surgery maybe like a month and a half before. But y'all know me. I'm like, I'm always just pushing it. So we get there and we're hiking and we're enjoying it.

And there are several, several like steep inclines where it would be labeled, if you know hiking language, strenuous. And I thought, I can handle a couple of those.

[13 : 28] Like, no problem. But, man, when we went over to the second one and made it out of that, I was just like, man, good Lord. I don't know if I'm going to make it out of here.

And I said, I hope there's not like another hill like that on our path. And he was looking at the map and he was like, there's another one. There's probably a couple more. And I just thought, man, we're not going to make it out of here.

I'm not going to make it out of here. And so the eight-hour trip turned into almost a 12-hour hike for me. And we actually ran out of food, ran out of water.

There were streams everywhere, but there was also sheep everywhere too. And that was not a good idea. So I was getting dehydrated. And finally, like, I said, dude, I don't know if I'm going to make it, man.

And I was just kind of being, like, dramatic on purpose. Like, one way you deal with fear is just kind of laugh at it and make fun of it. I'm like, if I die, eat me, man. Or, you know, like, just leave me, save yourself, you know, kind of language.

[14 : 33] And I finally, like, he's like, dude, give me your backpack. And I was like, no, my backpack, not yours. And he was like, give me the backpack. He wanted to help me. And so, and I'm like, dude, can you handle two backpacks?

And he went, y'all know Daniel. He's like, with these guns? Like, yeah, give me the backpack. So he carried both our backpacks for probably the last, like, two and a half hours. And I'm just like, just one foot in front of the other.

And we finally get over that last mountain, and you can see the Irish Sea. And I'm like, there it is. I can see Newcastle down there. Like, God, I made it. So I just sort of got excited and kept going. And, and, but like, I got my second wind when I saw the Irish Sea. Because I'm like, we're going, this is almost over. My suffering is almost over. So you see the analogies here?

I needed help. He was there to help me. I wasn't doing this solo. It was very difficult. I had to fix my eyes on what was ahead. I had to run hard and tough and made it.

[15 : 38] But like the Lord is saying, like, your salvation is near. So get your second wind and finish this. Like, like, go. Press on. And we're also called in this text to run after, run after peace and

holiness.

This is still under the first question. How do we finish well? We run after peace and holiness. He doesn't want the writers to grow indifferent to the blessings of the gospel.

So in verse 14, we see the word strive. It's a strong, aggressive verb. It means like to lock into something and seriously and earnestly pursue it.

It's actually used in Greek language to chase after one's enemy in order to finish them off. So that's the kind of language is being implied here. Continually pursue. And the direct objects of that striving, pursuing, chasing are peace and holiness.

So first, run after peace. Strive for peace with everyone. Verse 14. Though we certainly have peace with God through Christ.

[16:47] Romans 5, right? We also know that peace with other people around us isn't always easy. At times, in an unbelieving world, it's impossible. Jesus said, don't think that I've come to bring peace, but the sword.

Meaning that his real presence in our lives can cause division, can cause trouble. In fact, Christ's actual presence in our lives can cause hostility in the lost world.

Paul says, if at all possible, in so far as it has to do with you, be at peace with all men. And so, it's not peace with all people, no matter the cost.

But rather, peace, what's possible within the boundaries of what God says is right. And in fact, again, standing for Christ at times can bring immense animosity.

And eventually, peace is lost, shattered. Yet, we're still to make every effort to maintain peace with all men and all believers. Peace is not simply the subjective harmony, good vibes in the community that we feel.

[17:57] It has to do with something in our language that's objective reality resulting from the redemptive work of Christ. That brings real solidarity to the community of believers.

So, the pursuit of peace holds all believers responsible for one another. Paul also wrote in Romans 14, So then, let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

So, strive for that peace. That peaceful existence. Not just so we can have an easy life. But, that the blessing of God's peace may flow through us into the lives of others.

Believers and non-believers alike. Then, the second thing we're to run after. Strive after. Is holiness. Strive after the holiness.

Without which no one will see the Lord. This is one of those verses that make you go, Wait a minute. How is that actually being used?

[19:04] Does our salvation ultimately depend on attaining some degree of holiness before God saves us? No.

Quick lesson on this. But, our terms sanctify, sanctification are built on the Latin sanctus. And, the New Testament adjective holy can also be used as a verb.

Which would be holify or holification. Which we don't really have that word. So, we use sanctified, sanctification. So, it refers to our holiness in both senses.

A condition of being holy, sanctified. And, a way of becoming holy. Sanctification. Sanctification. It's the two primary ways.

There are others. But, the two primary ways. Sanctification is used in the scripture. Better be taking notes on this one. The first one is definitive sanctification.

[20:06] Definitive sanctification. And, this is a once for all time simultaneous act. That occurs when we're born again. Or, when we're saved.

It's this idea of God taking us out of sin. And, out of the kingdom of Satan. And, moving us into his kingdom. Setting us apart as his holy people.

For his purposes. And, for his glory. So, as we know. Like, certain things in the temple were set apart for a holy use. That's this idea of God's people.

We are his chosen people. His holy possession. Right? According to Peter. And, we see that language in 1 Corinthians 6. And, such were some of you.

You were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, by the spirit of our God. Secondly. There is what we call.

[21:03] This is the most familiar progressive sanctification. It's this idea where we are cooperating. So, not just an act of God. But, we work with the Holy Spirit.

To become more like Christ. In our actual lives. Right now. It's the work of Christ. In our lives. So, in this sense. It's the outworking of the new life.

We're given. In regeneration. Okay. So, it involves gradual progressive work. Of putting indwelling sin to death. And, putting on the likeness of Christ.

Just write down Colossians 3. 5-10. That's a good way to look at that. So, listen though. The reality that we are being sanctified progressively. In this life.

Evidences that God has sanctified us definitively. All right. So, you can't separate. You can't say. I'm saved. I'm born again. I'm justified. And, then not be sanctified.

[22 : 03] Arthur Pink said this. Whom God saves legally. He also experimentally saves. He. Whom he justifies.

He also sanctifies. Where the righteousness of Christ. Is imputed to an individual. Holiness is imparted to him. The former can only be ascertained by the latter.

The only place you have to turn today. Is 1st Peter really quick. And, hold your hand in Hebrews.

But, 1st Peter chapter 1. 1st Peter chapter 1 verse 14.

1st Peter chapter 1 verse 14. Okay. All right. And, Peter says for. Well, excuse me.

Yeah. Verse 14. As obedient children. Do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance. As unbelievers. Right. But, as he who called you is holy.

[23 : 08] You also be holy in your conduct. Since it is written. You shall be holy. For I am holy. And, if you call on him as father.

Who judges impartially. According to each one's deeds. Conduct yourselves with fear. Throughout the time of your exile. On earth. Knowing that you were ransomed.

From your futile ways. Inherited from your forefathers. Not with perishable things. Such as gold. Or silver. Or gold. But with the precious blood of Christ.

Like that of a lamb. Without blemish or spot. So, God commands us to be holy. Because he is holy. If we're going to have fellowship with God.

We have to be holy. Peter explains this though. Follow this. Just look at the text here. He tells us this. Not as an arbitrary command. Something that's impossible.

[24 : 03] But as a family trait. As obedient children. Be holy in your conduct. So, holiness is the very spiritual DNA of God.

So, if we are his legitimate children. We also will walk in holiness. He's made us his by the precious blood of his son. So, you can go back to Hebrews now.

The writer is saying. Strive after. Aggressively chase. The holiness. Or the progressive sanctification. Because if you lack this.

It may reveal. That you have not been definitively sanctified by God. We can't say again. That we're saved. And have no regard for holiness.

It's the only evidence that we actually are in Christ. Is that we have a holy life. And growing in holiness. It's not a condition of our salvation.

[25 : 04] But it is a part of our salvation. And even think about this. The Holy Spirit is the one who sanctifies us. Don't miss that. The Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of holiness. Is the one at work in us. Making us holy. Holy. And just as an encouragement though. Just flip back to Hebrews 10.

Just a chapter earlier. And there's this amazing verse. That we've studied before. But look at chapter 10. Verse 14. It says. For by a single offering.

Christ. Has perfected for all time. Those being sanctified. And what I want you to. To see in this verse.

Is that. We can have. In the same verse. It says that. Christ has perfected us. And that we are. Being perfected. We are being sanctified.

[26 : 03] And. So. The confidence. Or assurance. We need to have in. Is not our experienced. Perfection. But in our experience. Progress.

We see. Growing. Of holiness. In us. And as one writer said. The fact. That we are on our way. The evidence. That we are on our way.

Is proof. That we have already arrived. That's like how I explain that verse. It's deep. It's good. So if we're on our way. It's evidence. That we have already arrived. We will be. Perfected.

And. So. We can't say. We love Christ. We belong to Christ. And have no desire. For holiness. And just live free. And happy.

In sin. In a habitual. Lifestyle. Kevin DeYoung. Wrote a book called. What's the hole in your holiness. It's pretty good. But he said.

[26 : 58] In this. I'll finish with this. But. On this point. Not only is holiness. The goal of your redemption. It is necessary. For your redemption. Now before.

Before you sound. The legalist alarm. And tie me up. By my moral bootstraps. And feed my carcass. To the Galatians. Like that. That's so him. We should see.

What scripture says. Has to say. It is the consistent. And frequent teaching. Of the Bible. That those whose lives. Are habitually. Marked. So characterized by.

Ungodliness. Will not. Go to heaven. First Corinthians 6. 9 and 10. Galatians 5. 20 through 21. To find acquittal from God. On the last day. There must be evidence.

Flowing out of us. That his grace. Has flown into us. To run hard. After holiness. In another way. Saying run hard. After God. And so.

[27 : 53] What about you? Do you have a growing. Desire. To love God. We see this. Not like in minutes. Or days. But like months. Years. Do you see a growing.

Desire. For holiness. The sin. That you once. Enjoyed. And lived free in. Do you now. Despise. And want to be freed. From it. Do you.

Long. To have the effects. Of sin. Gone. And to be with God. Then. Be encouraged. Holiness. Is growing. In you. That's how we take confidence.

In us. The growth. And the second question. That I have. Nine minutes for. Or eight minutes for. Number two. What must. We guard.

Against. Defend us. The race. Well. So. There's things. That we're to run after. But there's also things. You're supposed to guard against. We see this. In Hebrews. Twelve. Fifteen. Through seventeen.

[28 : 50] But we see this idea. Of gracelessness. Guard against. Gracelessness. Strive after holiness. Guard against. Gracelessness. Look out for one another.

So. This isn't saying. That you can obtain grace. Or you can earn. The grace of God. Romans eleven. If it by grace. Is no longer. On the basis. Of works.

Otherwise. Grace would not. Be grace. God's grace. Is his attitude. Of love. And benevolence. That he gives his children. As Ross said earlier. Grace is lavished.

Poured out. In immense. Measure. James 4. 6. God gives. More. Grace. Literally. Great. Grace. So. The writer. Is warning. Us here. That failing. To obtain. The grace. Of God. Doesn't mean. Earn. Grace. But as the language. Says.

[29 : 43] Fall short. Of. The grace. Of God. Means. Falling. Behind. Not keeping. Pace. With. The grace. Of God. At work. In our lives. So remember.

The writer. Of Hebrews. Knows. That he's writing. To a lot. Of believers. Writing. To the church. But he also. Understands. There are some people. In the church. That are kind of. On the fence. That are tempted.

To kind of. Jump back. Away from Christ. And. He's saying. Look. You hearing. The gospel. You having. The scripture. You being.

Around. The church. Those are God's. Grace to you. Don't. Fail. To lay hold. Of that. God. So he's telling that. To the people. That are tempted. To possibly.

Fall away. And go back. To their old lifestyle. So. The Christian community. Hearing the gospel. The word of God. All of that. Is grace. And God has put it there.

[30 : 38] Many people. Don't even have that. So failing. To respond. In genuine faith. To. The grace of God. Expressed. In those things. Is. Scary.

Second Corinthians. Six. One and two. Paul says. We appeal to you. Not to receive. The grace of God. In vain. For he says. In a favorable time.

I listened to you. In a day of salvation. I helped you. Behold. Now. Now. Is the day. Of salvation. I'd quit putting it off. Quit saying.

I'll think about it later. Like. This is. Important. Don't fail. To obtain. The grace. Of God. And. Secondly. Guard against. Bitterness.

All right. We see that. In our text. By alluding. To Deuteronomy. 29. 18. There. To leave. God. And the real God. And to pursue. Idols. So the writer. Desires. That no root.

[31 : 32] Of bitterness. Or resentment. Springs up. And causes trouble. And. Many of us. Who have been. In the church. For a while. Like we know. That like a bitter. Angry. Resentful person.

Can just spread. Dissension. In the body. Like a plague. Like a. It's a personified. Bitter. Root. Who's mad with God. Mad at the church. Mad with everyone around them. No evidence. Of saving faith. That. They may be professing. Believer. In the congregation. But they're going to poison. The whole body. Through their bitterness. So he's saying. Look out for bitterness. Among you. Don't allow that. To take root. In your. Bodies. So. And then lastly. Guard against. Fleshly appetites. So that's the last thing we see. And this is 16 through 17. And they use Esau. As an example. So we have. We have to guard against. [32 : 29] Fleshly. Unhinged. Sinful appetites. See to it. That no one. Is sexually immoral. Unholy. Or godless.

Like Esau. Who insanely. Sold. His birthright. For a single meal. So we know the story. In Genesis 25. He came in hungry. And he sold his birthright. To his younger brother. Because he was just hungry. Stupid. Insane thing to do. So the writer is saying. That later on. Esau. Sought to. Regain that title. Of his inheritance. But he's rejected. He found no opportunity. For repentance. And so what does that mean? It's not that Esau. Longed for true repentance. From God. Otherwise. God would not have refused it. If it was true repentance. All who truly repent. Like Peter. Right? Are forgiven. But it says that Esau. [33 : 24] Sought it with tears. So what's the it there? The it. It. I believe. Refers to the blessing. Or the inheritance. But not true repentance. Toward God. He just wanted. What he had lost.

Back. He didn't really. Desire God. So he failed to obtain. Isaac's blessing. And couldn't repair. What had been done. And. It also calls him. Sexually immoral. Which we get our word. Pornography from. Which agrees. With some extra biblical. Ancient accounts. Of Esau. How he was a. Sexually unrestrained guy. But the point is. Why he's saying this. Is. Is this. Don't be completely. Earthbound. Don't. Throw away. Something eternal. Divine. And sacred. Over stupid. Fleshly appetites. Don't be controlled. By your. Gut. As Esau. Threw away. His inheritance. Over a stupid. [34 : 21] Bowl of soup. Because he was hungry. Don't. Throw away. The. Heavenly. Inheritance. Offered to you. In Christ. Is. Crazy. Is. Is. Is. Is. Is.

saying, don't allow those things to overtake you and to lose this. So guard against the fleshly appetites that can lead you to sin. Just completely the goal of your life is to eat, drink, sleep, feel good, comfort, have sex. And that's the goal of your life. Whatever you've got to get to attain those things, don't let that be the goal of your life. Don't trade the salvation you can have in Christ. So look back up to Hebrews 12, one through two. I just want to end with some encouragement.

We see in one and two, therefore, since we are surrounded by great cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and every sin that clings so closely and run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, so William Tyndale, one of the earliest guys to translate the Bible into English, he loved that word author and finisher, that phrase right there, the archegos of our faith.

He wrote it this way in his translation, rune, R-U-N-E, so there's the old, old English for us, with patience, the battle that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. So we use the word founder and perfecter, same idea, but Tyndale was afraid that if he translated that word wrongly and he used the word beginner, it could imply that, it could imply to a reader that our faith may have an end too. And he was saying, our faith doesn't have an end. So how do I pick a word, an English word that encapsulate this? And so he said, the author and the finisher of our faith, the archegos of our faith. And the picture is of, like, just follow my analogy, like an elite military group on a mission, and they come across this big ravine and they don't have time to go around it. It's too urgent. So the leader of that group, at risk to himself, throws a line across, gets it secure, crosses first by himself, secures it for his team to follow him. That's what Christ has done for us. He's gone before us.

He stared down the cross and now he is before us and he's, he's cleared the way for us to follow the author and finisher of our faith. We are sure that he who began the good work will complete it. God doesn't start what he doesn't finish. It just doesn't work that way.

[37 : 21] So be encouraged that we can run with endurance the races before us, looking to Christ, the author and perfect our faith. Join me in prayer.■■■■