

# Finishing Well

Lesson #16 Encouraged In The Race May 5, 2021

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ. The emphasis on cheap grace has disseminated a casualness toward our commitments to our Savior. We enjoy our get-out-of-hell-free-card with no real awareness of the coming events and how they will involve us after the Rapture. Most have little concern over the likelihood of intense disappointment when they do 'get to heaven.'"

Hebrews gives ample encouragement to believers, but there are 5 solemn warnings we must heed or suffer the sad spiritual consequences.

Heb. 2:1-4	Danger Of Drifting From The Word Leads to	Neglect
Heb. 3:7-4:13	Danger of Doubting The Word Leads to	Dullness
Heb. 5:11-6:20	Danger of Dullness Toward The Word Leads to	Sluggishness
Heb. 10:26-39	Danger of Despising The Word Leads to	Willfulness
Heb. 12:25-29	Danger of Defying The Word Leads to	Refusing To Hear

Hebrews 12 which follows the Hall of Faith is a discussion on running the race with patience. Included in this discussion is Warning #5 which is a command for Christians to listen and not refuse the Lord God Almighty's gracious offer of regal blessing beyond comprehension.

Phil. 3:12-15a Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend THAT for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

<sup>13</sup> Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

<sup>14</sup> I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> Let us therefore, as many as be perfect [mature], be thus minded

The author of Hebrews 12 combined and linked 2 themes:

1. Athletics                      The Race                      Heb. 12:1-13
2. Citizenship                    Heavenly City                    Heb. 12:14-29

Note: No one could take part in the official games unless he was a citizen of the nation.

Phil. 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

Atmosphere of Heb. 12: Footraces in an arena

- The runners lay aside their training weights and strive to run their race successfully.
- Some get weary and faint while others endure to the end and win the prize.

Key Theme: Endurance    Patience

The Jewish believers were becoming weary and wanted to give up. They are encouraged to keep moving forward in their Christian lives, like runners on a track. The author is trying to steel his readers to be faithful to Christ in the face of looming persecution.

## Be Encouraged:

1. By Looking Back At The Great Cloud Of Witnesses Heb. 12:1
2. By Looking Up To Jesus Heb. 12:2
3. Keep Everything in Perspective Heb. 12:4
4. Consider the Benefits of Chastening Heb. 12:9-11

Heb. 12:1a Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses,

- Be encouraged by the "great cloud [assembly] of witnesses who finished their race well.
  - ❖ They bear witness to us that God can also see us through.

Rom. 15:4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience [endurance] and comfort [encouragement] of the scriptures might have hope.

Heb. 11:32-40 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:

<sup>33</sup> Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions. <sup>34</sup> Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

<sup>35</sup> Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: <sup>36</sup> And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

<sup>37</sup> They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented:

<sup>38</sup> (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. <sup>39</sup> And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: <sup>40</sup> God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

II Cor. 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory:

Consider: They overcame and gained the victory, so there can be no excuse for us who have far more light [complete revelation of God's Word] and greater advantages [indwelling Spirit of Christ], to fail or fall by the way to "suffer loss," and be "saved so as by fire."

Despite all God has provided, the average Christian falls down, stumbles and wanders like a man lost in the dark. What is wrong with the Christian life as it is being lived at the present time? They get saved, give a testimony of their salvation, but they never maintain a serious study of the Word of God, which is essential to growth. They are like the little girl who fell out of bed one night. When the little girl began to cry, her mother rushed in and said, "Honey, how come you fell out of bed?" The little girl replied, "I think I stayed too close to the place where I got in." Problem of today's Christian: We stumble and falter and fail because we are staying too close to the place where we got in. We need to go on—we are in a race of faith.

Heb. 12:1b let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us,  
Athletes used to wear training weights to help prepare for the events. They would never wear the weights during the actual event because the weights would slow them down.

- Remove everything that hinders our progress. We can hinder our own growth:
  - Neglect spiritual things, fail to keep spiritually fit, set spiritual armor aside, wrong attitude about my trials, wrong response to God's sovereign events

Many Christians ask: "What's wrong with this movie, or listening to this music, or participating in this activity?" The right question is, "Does this help me to grow in godliness?"

If not, cast it off as dead weight.

Truth: If I walk in the flesh, my spiritual growth is stopped and stunted. Spiritual maturity is hindered until I consistently walk in the Spirit.

- Choose friends who are like-minded and committed to this race.
- Drop activities that hinder you from your spiritual growth.
- Christian life involves hard work. It requires us to give up whatever endangers our relationship with God, to run with endurance and to struggle against sin with the power of the Holy Spirit.

F.B. Meyer: "The athlete gladly foregoes much that other men value, and which is pleasant to himself, because his mind is intent on the prize; and he considers that he will be amply repaid for all the hardships of training if he be permitted to bear it away, though it be a belt he will never wear, or a cup he will never use. How much more gladly should we be prepared to relinquish all that hinders our attainment, not of the uncertain bauble of the athlete, but the certain reward, the incorruptible crown, the smile and "well-done" of our Lord!"

Spiritual Growth: Lifetime process of progressive sanctification whose ultimate goal is to be a fully grown, completely formed believer in Jesus Christ and prepared for Heaven.

Spiritual Maturity: Showing Christ-like characteristics in our earthly lives that match our position in Christ. Spirituality isn't measured by how high you jump in praise but how straight you walk in obedience.

Truth: The measure of spiritual maturity is Jesus.

Spirituality: A measure of a believer's spiritual health.

- Phil. 3:10 Spiritual fellowship with God
- Eph. 5:18 Filled with the Holy Spirit
- Gal. 5:16 Walking in the Spirit
- Gal. 5:22 Bearing the fruit of the Spirit

The sin that so easily beset or entangle us: Consider the sin of unbelief

- Unbelief kept Israel out of the Promised Land [Heb. 3:19]
- Unbelief hinders believers from entering their spiritual inheritance in Christ

Key: By faith is used 21 times in Hebrews 11 > It is faith in Christ that enables us to endure. Do not take God's Word lightly. Do not excuse any sin as all right for you but forbidden to others. Do not feel you can evade God's discipline or judgment.

Unbelief often looks trivial to us, but Moses was kept out of the Promised Land because he treated God's word lightly on one occasion. [Deut. 32:51, 52; Ps 106:33]

David apparently felt that his twin sins of adultery and murder could be overlooked because he was king, but God felt otherwise and sent Nathan the prophet to expose his wickedness and to announce his punishment.

Gal. 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a person sows, this he will also reap.

Heb. 12:1c let us run with patience [endurance] the race that is set before us,

Consider: God Sets The Course: God is the Sovereign One who sets the course for each of us, just as He set the course of the cross for Jesus. Jesus had "the joy set before Him."

The Christian life is a lifelong, grueling race that entails some long hills to climb and some swampy marshes to plod through.

- You can't make up your own course. If you stray from your course, you'll be disqualified.

II Tim. 2:5 And if someone likewise competes as an athlete, he is not crowned as victor unless he competes according to the rules.

You may not like parts of the course. You may be prone to grumble, "Why did the course have to go over this hill, or through this swamp?" The Sovereign God planned it this way."

- You cannot run by faith unless you submit your will to His will.

One key to running the whole distance is motivation.

- But where do you get the motivation to run the Christian marathon?

His Encouragement: 3 Divine Resources to Keep Running

Resource #1: Jesus Christ, the Son of God

Heb. 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of [our] faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Note: The pronoun "our" is not in the original before faith. The Greek text has the definite article, "the faith," meaning, the faith that is needed to endure. Jesus is the author or Captain of that kind of faith. He brings it to completion.

The name "Jesus" deliberately focuses on His humanity. Keep in mind that during His ministry on earth, He did not use His divine powers for His own personal needs.

- Satan tempted Him to do this [Matt. 4:1-4], but Jesus refused.

As a man, Jesus showed us exactly how to live by faith in God in this world.

- John 5:19 The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do:
- Luke 23:46 He trusted the Father in the Garden. He went to the cross entrusting His soul to the Father. His final words: "Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit."

It is His completion of His mission that should both enable and inspire us to complete the race set before us. His suffering is the grounds for our striving with endurance.

- "Looking unto Jesus" describes an attitude of faith and not just a single act.
- Jesus had to trust His Father in heaven as He lived day by day.
- He endured and finished the work the Father gave Him to do [John 17:4].

What enabled our Lord to endure the cross?

- He kept the eye of faith on "the joy that was set before him."
- He endured all things. To win > it meant the way of the cross

Psalm 16:8-10 He knew He would come out of the tomb alive.

- Peter referred to this messianic psalm in his sermon at Pentecost, Acts 2:24-33

Psalm 110:1, 4 Jesus knew He would be exalted to heaven in glory.

- Peter quoted this Psalm in Acts 2:34-36.

So "The Joy That Was Set Before Him" would include:

- Jesus' completing the Father's will. He glorified the Father by completing His work.
- His resurrection and exaltation, and
- His joy in presenting believers to the Father in glory [Jude 24].

Jesus Shows Us The Final Reward Of Faith.

- He "has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

While Jesus is unique, His exaltation to the right hand of the throne of God shows us a glimpse of His glory that we will share throughout eternity, if by faith we run with endurance.

Rev. 3:21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

The heroes of faith in Heb. 11 lived by faith for the future. This enabled them to endure.

- Heb. 11:10, 14-16, 24-27

- Like Peter, when we get our eyes of faith off the Savior, we start to sink.

Since Christ is the "author and finisher of THE faith," trusting Him releases His power in our lives. Christ is both the exemplar and the enabler! As we see Him in the Word and yield to His Spirit, He increases our faith and enables us to run the race.

Barclay: The wonder of the Christian life is that we press on surrounded by the saints, oblivious to everything but the glory of the goal and forever in the company of him who has already made the journey and reached the goal, and who waits to welcome us when we reach the end.

The Hebrew Christians are already suffering, but they need to keep everything in perspective. Contrast their suffering with that of their Savior.

Heb. 12:3-4 For consider him that endured such contradiction [rebellion, hostility] of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

- Consider [Only here in the N.T.] means to calculate. But we calculate that the joy of knowing and obeying Jesus is greater than all of the rejection, anger, ridicule, or anything worse that we might have to bear for His sake.

He endured the cross which involved shame, suffering, the "contradiction [opposition]" of sinners, and even temporary rejection by the Father.

- To leave heaven and take on the form of a servant and be obedient to His death on the cross as the substitute for our sins, is unmatched in human history.

Lest you be wearied and faint in your minds: The literal rendering is, "that you not fail through weariness, fainting in your souls." Spiritual failure happens gradually from continuous weakening [B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans], p. 398].

Osborne: spiritual failure is seldom an explosion; it is usually an erosion.

Just as a runner who is not in excellent condition gradually slows down and finally collapses, so the believer who does not keep looking with faith to Jesus will eventually collapse. "burn out" It seems that there are many who are weary in their souls in the Christian marathon. The remedy is to fix our eyes on Jesus.

Heb. 12:4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

- None of them was yet a martyr. In Jesus' battle against sin, He shed His own blood.

His Encouragement: 3 Divine Resources to Keep Running

Resource #1: Jesus Christ, the Son of God

Resource #2: Assurance of the Love Of God

Consider: When we are suffering, it is easy to think that God does not love us.

3 proofs: Chastening Comes From The Father's Heart Of Love.

### 1. The Scriptures

Heb. 12:5-6

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

<sup>6</sup> For whom the Lord loveth he chastens and scourges every son whom he receives.

- Quotation from Prov. 3:11-12; they KNEW this but had forgotten

<sup>11</sup> My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction;

<sup>12</sup> For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son *in whom* he delights.

- Sad consequence of being "dull" toward the Word [Heb. 5:11-12 > Warning #3]

They had forgotten: Asaph's suffering drew him nearer to God, while the prosperity of the wicked only made them more arrogant in their sins [Psalm 73].

They did not remember: Job's afflictions brought him to a better understanding of God, and of himself. Thus he matured greatly in his faith.

Result: Because they forgot the Word, they lost their encouragement and ready to give up.

Key Words: son, children and sons > used 6 times in Heb. 12:5-8 > refer to ADULT sons

Consider: A parent who would repeatedly chasten an infant child would be considered a monster.

- God deals with us as ADULT sons because we have been adopted and given an adult standing in His family. [Rom. 8:14-18; Gal. 4:1-7]

Key Word: Chastening = "child training, instruction, discipline."

Divine Chastening is preventive and corrective.

- To develop a sensitive heart and a teachable spirit.

Lawson: Trials & tribulations are not an elective class in the Christian life, but a required class.

- The trials of the Christian life = spiritual discipline to help a believer mature.

Instead of trying to escape the difficulties of life, we should be "exercised" by them so that we might grow [Heb. 12:11].

### 3 proofs: Chastening Comes From The Father's Heart Of Love.

1. The Scriptures

2. Personal experience      Heb. 12:7-10

<sup>7</sup>Endure your suffering as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline?

Chastening = #3809 = *instruction that trains someone to reach full development (maturity).*

<sup>8</sup>But if ye be without chastisement [discipline], whereof all are partakers, then are ye illegitimate, and not sons. <sup>9</sup> Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? <sup>10</sup> For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

I Thess. 4:3a For this is the will of God, your sanctification...

➤ Purpose of my sufferings = prove my sonship: to profit & mature me

Key: Whatever our experience, we can be SURE God's chastening hand is controlled by His loving heart. When you can't trace His hand, you can trust His heart.

### 3 proofs: Chastening Comes From The Father's Heart Of Love.

1. The Scriptures

2. Personal Experience

3. The Blessed Results

Heb. 12:11-13

<sup>11</sup> For the moment, all discipline seems not to be pleasant, but painful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

➤ Instead of continuing to sin, the child strives to do what is right. Rebellion has ceased

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble

<sup>13</sup> and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is impaired may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

#### Key truths about suffering:

Suffering comes ultimately from the hand of God, for our good.

Suffering in the life of the Christian should thus be viewed as divine discipline.

Suffering should be patiently endured as something that is designed to produce righteousness.

Suffering, because it is divine discipline, should be viewed as an indication of God's love, and that we are a part of His family.

Key: "Suffering is the training ground for Christian maturity.

It develops our patience and makes the final victory sweet."

I Tim. 4:8 For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

Key: How God's child responds to His chastening

- Heb. 12:5            Despise it or faint under it = wrong response
- Heb. 12:9            Show reverence to the Father by submitting to His will
- Heb. 12:11            Use the experience to exercise himself spiritually [I Tim. 4:7-8]
- Heb. 12:12-13        Lift up your hands! Strengthen your knees. Get your lazy feet on the Track. [Prov. 4:26] On your mark, get set, GO

I Cor. 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. <sup>25</sup>And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. <sup>26</sup>Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

- Discipline = striveth = agonizomai = English word agonize is derived.

<sup>26</sup>I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

- the single-minded focus, specific aim, desire for every action to count

<sup>27</sup> But I keep under my body [buffet it] and bring it into subjection: [make it my slave]

- literally = hit under the eye and figuratively knock out the bodily impulses to keep them from preventing you to stay focused
- Spirit empowered self-denial - are you a "slave" to your body?

<sup>27</sup>lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

- castaway = Greek: adokimos = disapproved or disqualified
  - to test something or someone and find they do not pass the test.

The contestant who fails in the race of the faith will also "suffer loss" at this time [I Cor. 3:15].

Winning a race requires purpose and discipline. The Christian life takes hard work, self-denial and grueling preparation. We are running toward our heavenly reward. Don't merely observe from the grandstand. Don't just turn out to jog a couple of laps each morning.

Train diligently because your spiritual progress depends on it.

Self-discipline requires an honest look at your strengths and weaknesses with emphasis on the weaknesses. It means building the will to say NO when a powerful appetite inside you screams yes. Self-discipline is a long, steady course in learning attitudes that do not come naturally and channeling natural appetites toward God's purposes.

Remember: We each will not be judged by how we start but by how we finish.