

Finishing Well

Lesson #18

Falling Short Of The Grace Of God

Heb. 12:14-17 May 19, 2021

Context of Hebrews 12: Running The Race Of Faith: Run Strong > Finish Well

The 5 warnings in Hebrews admonish us to press on and obtain all God has promised to the faithful Overcomer. These warnings represent the very real possibility of the loss of privileges or rewards offered to the believer. These warnings concern the possible negative consequences for the unfaithful believer. The results will be revealed at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The author encourages the Hebrew Christians to run the race set before them with endurance.

- They have a great host of witnesses cheering them on. [Hall of faith]
- Self-discipline is necessary to run and finish the race.
- Fix your eyes on Jesus, who is the founder and finisher of the faith [12:1-3].
- Consider the endurance of Jesus in completing His mission by enduring the agony of the wrath of both God and men.
- They are exhorted to endure suffering and adversity as divine discipline, lovingly administered for their growth and sanctification [12:4-13]. Also: proof of your sonship
- Everything in your life is being done under the control of God to bring about your good > to conform you to the image of Jesus Christ.

You are to be exercised by them. When you see weights [hard trials] in your way, accept them. It will build spiritual muscle. Don't collapse. When you're running in the race and you see a hurdle, don't fall over. Hurdle it! It is meant to stretch you, to strengthen you, to exercise you.

Heb. 12:12-13 Wherefore strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble

¹³ And make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is impaired may not be dislocated, but let it rather be healed.

II Cor. 4:16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. [Believers have "the fountain of youth."]

Luis Palau: Even though people get old on the outside, sometimes the youngest people you meet are the oldest physically. They have experienced the most years of being renewed every day in the Holy Spirit.

John MacArthur: "There's no reason to run out of gas now; you're to be renewed every day. Lift up our hanging arms, pump those feeble knees. Get your second wind."

Isa. 40:31 But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their STRENGTH. They shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

[Adrian Rogers: While waiting: Live for Jesus, Love Jesus, Look To Jesus, Long for Jesus]

Under persecution, these poor Hebrew Christians had become tired and weary and listless.

Instead of hurdling the hurdles and building strength, they were falling apart when looking in the face of any kind of obstacle at all; they were collapsing.

The whole community of believers began to really suffer from it.

Heb. 10:23-25 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) ²⁴ And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: ²⁵ Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Isaiah sees a large group of discouraged children of Israel.

Isa. 35:3-4 Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees.

⁴ Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; He will come and save you.

- The exhortation is to encourage and strengthen fellow-Israelites.
- Know: God will bring His people back from captivity to enjoy His promised blessings in their land.
- God will pour out His wrath on those who have oppressed them.
- The people of God are to take courage! Encourage one another.

MacArthur: You're not only to lift your own hands up, but you're to go around finding other drooping, wobbly-kneed characters and help strengthen them."

John MacArthur: "Hey, perk up, everybody, the kingdom's coming; the desert will blossom like a rose, the glory of God will manifest itself; great days are coming, people. Victory is ahead."

Paul's words to the Corinthians who are suffering:

II Cor. 1:3-5 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ. As our loving Father, God makes us stronger through our afflictions, not only for our benefit, but for us to be a blessing to others. Having been strengthened by God's grace through our afflictions, we can now strengthen and encourage those who undergo similar adversity.

Heb. 12:13a And make straight paths for your feet

- Stay in your own lane. The Greek word = smooth, straight path

Prov. 4:25-27 Let thine eyes look right on and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.

²⁶ Ponder the path of thy feet and let all thy ways be established.

²⁷ Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.

- Paths = trochias in Greek = the track left by wheels.
 - We are running and leaving a track, a pattern for someone to follow.

Heb. 12:13 And make straight paths for your feet lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

- "Lame" = chōlon = halting or limping.
- You can cause a weaker, lame, limping Christian to fall all over you. If you are not running a straight path, you could be knocking over poor lame, limping, weaker brothers.

Turned out of the way = medical term = ektrape = put out of joint

- He is already lame. Don't permanently put him out of joint by failing to give him the testimony he needs to see.
- We should run so straight that the halting, lame and limping ones in the race can see a clear path or pattern and be encouraged to run their race well.
- If my arms are drooping, if I "peter out" in the middle of the race, if I get mad at God and ticked off because of my troubles, somebody who's watching is going to be affected. [John MacArthur]

Heb. 12:13b But let it rather be healed. Let the lame one be healed.

Not only run like Paul did, that you may obtain the prize, but run because somebody else is watching. How you run your race may be just that thing which encourages them to run their race or it may be the excuse they use to turn away and quit.

The Enablement of God's Grace: As we run the Christian race, what is our goal?

Hebrews 12:14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

- Follow = diōkō, means to continue to pursue
- The pursuit of peace and sanctification is not optional; it is mandatory.
- Holiness is not something we can set aside in order to pursue our own pleasures.
- Christ not only died to forgive our sins; He died to bring peace and to make us holy.

These two goals remind us of our Lord's high priestly ministry in Heb. 7:1-2.

- King of peace and King of righteousness

Heb. 12:11b ...nevertheless afterward it [chastening] yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

II Tim. 2:22 Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

II Pet. 3:13-14 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness. ¹⁴ Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

Consider: Apart from peace with all men - apart from holiness before God - NO MAN shall see the Lord in us. [Note: It doesn't say you won't see the Lord. No man watching you.]

Col. 1:27 "Christ in you, the hope of glory." If men are ever to see Christ, if they're ever to see the glory of God, where are they going to see Him? In you. Without peace, without holiness, no man can see the Lord in you; no man can see the Lord in me. You must reveal Christ.

Gal. 4:19 - "My little children of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you."

Heb. 12:15-17 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

¹⁶ Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. ¹⁷ For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

It requires diligence to run the race successfully. The 3 dangers before us are illustrated by Esau's decision which was irrevocable even though he regretted it later.

- Spiritual Failure is seldom an explosion. It is usually an erosion.

It is constant spiritual oversight by each one of us of our own lives. Be on guard!

The Route Of Any Failure Is A Progression Involving Three Stages.

1. Failing to Appropriate God's Grace

Appropriation does not necessarily mean to gain something new but to set aside for our practical possession something that already belongs to us.

Heb. 12:15a "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God."

- "Looking diligently" = searching out carefully or minutely

The Hebrew Christians were going through trials, testing and facing persecution BUT they had failed to appropriate God's grace so they could stand firm.

- Thus, they were living defeated lives. They had failed of the grace of God.

C.A. Coates: It is appropriation that tests us. How often we stop at admiration.

Consider: Know what I have in Christ > See my need of it > By faith receive it

- This brings us from childish meandering into a responsible, specific walk of faith.
- Takes me from a "help me" attitude to that of giving thanks; from a begging attitude to appropriation.

H.F. "We are plunged into new tests where only a fresh supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ will meet our need. As our need is met, as we prove the sufficiency of Christ to meet our inward need, so there can be a new showing forth of His glory through us."

Truth: Whatever God brings into our lives, He will give us grace to overcome it rather than to be overcome by it. We experience overcoming victory. Many promises for the overcomer.

II Cor. 12:9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Consider: If I fail to appropriate God's grace, I will react according to my sin nature.

God's grace does not fail, but we can fail to take advantage of His grace.

Gal. 5:16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

2. Bitterness In The Heart

Heb. 12:15b Looking diligently... lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you., and thereby many be defiled.

Bitterness in the heart leads to murmuring with the tongue. Murmuring is one of the most dangerous sins because it always affects others and leavens the whole camp.

When I fail to appropriate grace, there will be a root of bitterness in my heart against God who has allowed this "trouble" to come, and it will ultimately come out in my speech.

In Deut.29, Moses reviews the covenant between God and Israel. In this context, he says, 29:18 Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turns away this day from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations;

lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall [poisonous fruit] and wormwood;

- This particular "bitter poison" is idolatry in defiance of the covenant.
- In the OT, the Hebrew word translated "bitter poison" refers either to the unfaithful [Deut. 29:18; Amos 6:12] or to their punishment [Jer. 8:14; 9:15; 23:15].
- The "poisonous root" is the person who introduces others to idol worship.
- A root of bitterness doesn't exist unto itself; it's a corrupting factor.

New Testament: Another reference to the destructive power of bitterness.

While rebuking Simon the Sorcerer, Peter tells him to repent of his wickedness, with an added insight: "I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin" [Acts 8:23].

Simon's wickedness was his desire to buy the power of the Holy Spirit, essentially treating God as a commodity to enhance his own career as a magician.

So, the "bitter root" in Hebrews refers to a source of evil or wickedness within the church.

A root may be small and slow in its growth, but, if it carries poison, it is malignant; it is dangerous. Sin in the church must be diligently rooted out; the result of tolerating wickedness is that "many" will be defiled.

How God dealt with a "root of bitterness" in the early church - see the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. Obviously, God considers pulling up such "bitter roots" to be critically important to the health of His church.

The author now turns to Esau, a descendant of Abraham, who lived in close proximity to those whom God would favor with the blessings promised Abraham and his descendants. But in the end, living in close proximity to God's blessings is not the same as entering into them.

3. Open Contempt Of What Is Our Responsibility Or Our Privilege

The sole place in the NT where the loss of the "birthright" is mentioned specifically is in Heb. 12:16. Esau's story is brought forth as a warning to believers of the possible loss of the birthright. The writer encouraged his readers to depend on the grace of God by urging them to look BY FAITH in 3 directions.

1. Look Back To Esau Heb. 12:16-17 Looking diligently...lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.
 - Profane = a common person, one who lives for the world and not God

Gen.25:29-34 And Jacob cooked a stew: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint:

³⁰ And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red stew; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. ³¹ And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.

³² And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? ³³ And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him:

and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.

Note: When Esau was willing to give up his birthright for a mess of beans, he was faint or weary. What was the author's exhortation in Heb. 12?

Heb. 12:4 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. [Spiritual failure is a gradual erosion.]

The birthright and its significance to Esau can only be understood as one understands that this was not merely being heir of flocks and herds, and Esau rejected this. This is not the issue. God's covenant with Abraham stated: the covenant promise would be fulfilled through Isaac's heirs. Esau, being the firstborn of Isaac, would have received the honored privileges of the firstborn's inheritance.

- Firstborn son assumed the father's authority and responsibilities - leadership role
The blessing of the firstborn placed him in a special covenant relationship with the LORD.
- Firstborn son inherited a double portion of the father's estate
- Firstborn son had priestly duties in the family.

Waiting is one of the most difficult disciplines of life.

Heb. 6:12 That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Esau had neither faith nor patient endurance. He was cut off by one act from the place of blessing.

By the time of Jacob and Esau, none of these promises had been realized. They were not even on the horizon. Esau's attitude was, "Hey, I'm hungry. What good is some vague future blessing if I starve to death?" He wasn't interested in the future promises of God.

He lived for the here and now. So he sold his birthright for a bowl of stew, wiped his mouth, and went his way without a thought of regret at the time [Gen. 25:34].

- Esau despised his birthright = LXX = paltry; a mere trifle; thought it was of NO value
- Preferred gratification of the flesh rather than the blessing of God
- Gave up all his spiritual privileges for a temporary gratification of the body.
- Surrendered for himself and his descendants the covenant promises of God for one meal.

Gen. 27:30-40 Jacob also receives the 1st born blessing of the father.

³⁴And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father. ³⁵ And he said, Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing. [Esau lived as though his firstborn birthright meant nothing. NOW he comes before the father for the blessing.]

³⁶ And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?

³⁸And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also,

Heb. 12:17 For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

The man who despised his birthright and married two pagan women now wept and cried out for his father to bless him. No place of repentance: The father could not change his mind. No amount of tears and remorse could alter the father's decision though he sought the blessing diligently with tears. It was too late. Esau lost the inheritance that would have been his as the firstborn. He realized the value of his inheritance...too late.

Am I Guilty Of Selling My Birthright?

- Living to the passing pleasures of sin
- Lusting after the things of the world
- Walking after the flesh, rather than the Spirit.

Heb. 11:24-26 By faith, when he grew up, Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be ill-treated with the people of God than to enjoy sin's fleeting pleasure. He regarded abuse suffered for Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for his eyes were fixed on the reward.

I John 2:15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

We are not immune to failure.

- We fail to appropriate God's grace for the situation or trial.
- This leads us to have bitterness in our hearts to God for allowing this hardship or difficulty to come upon us.
- What is in our hearts ultimately comes out and it defiles others.
- We settle for the temporal rather than the eternal; for the here-and-now rather than the hereafter; and for the material rather than the spiritual.

The author of Hebrews warned the readers: Do Not Yield to transitory pressures and forfeit their inheritances. You would ultimately regret the foolish step and might find their inheritance privileges irrevocably lost as were Esau's.

Hold On To Your Birthright Inheritance

- Heb. 12:14 Pursue peace and holiness
- Heb. 12:15 Do not fall short of God's grace
- Heb. 12:15 Deal with roots of bitterness
- Heb. 12:16-17 Value your inheritance and birthright
- I Tim. 4:6-8 Exercise discipline and godliness

God's grace does not fail, but we can fail to depend on God's grace. We fail to patiently endure.

Heb. 10:36 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

Heb. 6:12 That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.