



Hebrews 12:12-29
Let Faith Transform You Pt 1

Summary: In Christ we have a better priest, covenant, form of worship and access to God, therefore, we must let faith transform and strengthen us.

For several weeks now we have seen that faith is the essential ingredient in our relationship with God. We have seen historic and heroic examples of people who heard from God, trusted God and followed God, even when life was hard. They pressed on [by faith](#), they put greater emphasis on God's calling, commands, and character than on their feelings or circumstances. Most of the time it ended well though, sometimes it did not. And the same is true today.

We've seen and acknowledged, that life is hard. We all face difficulties and trials. Yours may look and feel different than mine, but we all face temptations that want to ensnare us and circumstances that make life really, really hard.

But that's why we have Hebrews 11, it's here in Scripture as a gift to us from God. It's meant to encourage by letting us see: others endured hardship before us, and yet God watched over them, directed them, and ultimately, delivered them. *He knew what they were facing and He cared.*

So now, as we come to the end of the book, we're given practical instructions for a faith-based life – we see things that need to come into our lives, and things we need to watch out for it's going to be honest and raw this morning. Read with me, beginning in:

Hebrews 12:12 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, **13** and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

You notice we start with [Therefore](#), in light of all we've seen and discovered in our previous studies, here's what you should do: strengthen weary hands and weak knees and watch out for things that will make you trip.

Church, listen, I know many of you are struggling. I know many of you have been through difficult things, *are* going through difficult things. I know you're crying at night, or in the car. I know you're confused. I know you're disoriented and don't know exactly what's happening or when this will end or which way you should go. I know you're vacillating between depression and despair or anger and frustration. Sometimes you feel like laying down and disappearing and other times you feel like standing up and slugging it out.

I know that because I know some of your stories, but I also know that because I feel the same things in my soul. I've tried to be open and honest about the fact that even as a pastor

I face hard things, difficult things, challenges and trials. I have hard things happening in the lives of people I love. I have awkward moments with family. I have questions about the future and decisions that need to be made. I see suffering that I would like to end. And sometimes I feel like God is right here, right now, working in amazing ways, and sometimes I wonder Dad, where did you go?

So, I need you to see Scripture. I need you to see what is written in the book that God gave to us and that Christians through the ages have preserved and passed on to us, and I need you to see that it says one of the things Christians have always needed to do, since the founding of the church, is to [strengthen weary hands and weak knees](#).

This is so important for you to understand because it means God knows you're weak. It means He knows you're tired. It's understandable, think of everything you've endured, think of what you're facing. It's natural that you would be weary and worn out, BUT you can also be refreshed, renewed, improved, strengthened. There's no guarantee the trials and temptations will go away, but you can grow as you face them. There is hope, through faith.

Look at this: [13 make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed](#).

This says there is hope, there is [healing](#), available to those who follow Christ. And this is the goal. This is the intent. This is the plan. Yes, there will be trials. You will be wounded as you follow God on earth, but there is also the hope of [healing](#) and [strength](#), and joy in the middle of the pain and uncertainty and confusion and chaos.

So let's do two things: [strengthen what is weak](#), then [make straight paths](#) so we don't trip and fall. How does that happen? Individually, and in community. When we read this, we think automatically of ourselves, this is what I need to do for me, but in the original language the grammar is all plural. There is a communal aspect to this passage. So, my strength is my responsibility, but also your concern, and vice versa. Remember, God most often uses people to reach and help other people – we're called to love one another and helping someone in their moment of weakness or clearing obstacles out of their path is a profound and often deeply appreciated demonstration of love.

Now, I'm happy to report, that's happening here in this church, which encourages me. I've seen you ministering to each other. I've heard of you helping each other. I've watched you pray for and with each other. You watch each other's kids. You bring each other meals. You send each other cards and texts. You help each other with issues in your personal and professional lives. And sometimes it's nothing, it's just a little 'hey I was thinking of you' so I made you this, bought you this, whatever.

But sometimes it's really big things. Massive issues in life, careers hanging in the balance, life-changing, soul-shaking, issues and you show up for each other. You help each other. You offer your strength to a brother or sister whose hands are [hanging down](#) and whose [knees are weak](#). You help move things out of their [path](#) or help them find a way forward

and it's a blessing to me to see and to know – we're doing what God has called us to do for and with each other in difficult times.

So I want you know if you didn't already, it's OK to be weak here at City Gates. It's OK to be working through some things. It's OK to need help. *God says so.* And He says, one of the ways He's going to help us is through the body of Christ, through the Church. So, you need to be here, you need to be open about your issues, and you need to be open to receiving help, that's how things work.

If something is sapping your strength, or causing you to stumble, do whatever you can to get rid of it, and invite God and others in to help – we're here for each other. And then, when you're healed, or better yet, as you're healing, you can reach out and be a source of encouragement and strength to others.

God wants us to connect with other people, even when it's hard. Read with me:

14 Pursue peace with all people,

Now think about this – if you have felt weak and weary, what about other people? Maybe they've felt the same way. And maybe, they've been hard to get along with as a result. Well, you might not like this, but I've got to point out what it says: as a Christian, it's up to you to take responsibility for **pursuing peace** with that hard to love person, to strive for it, to make every effort toward it, to work at it. This is your goal. And, it's up to you to initiate. In other words, you should always be the first to reach out to other people, even when they offend you. Here's why:

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

In other words, while we were still in rebellion to God, while we were still ignoring or resisting Him, while we were doing whatever we wanted to do with our lives, that's when He launched a rescue mission for us. Some of you were in the middle of your sin when God showed up with a deep sense of conviction that what you were doing was wrong, you needed a way out. You didn't come to God, He came to you, and saved you.

Friends, that's normal. That's what God does for us, and it's what He wants us to do for others. To love them even when they're not being lovely.

Which means, when your spouse, or child, sibling or friend, is in a bad mood - when they're sulking or moody or touchy and angry, you don't withdraw, you reach out. You **pursue peace**. When your boss says and does things that irritate you, or just shows a lack of concern or awareness, you swallow your pride, you absorb the blow, and you **seek peace**.

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.

Now look, this is not natural behavior. This is not normal behavior. It's neither easy, nor automatic. But it's what God expects us to do, because it's what He has already done for us. You receive and then reflect. You receive peace from God, then you reflect that peace to others.

You initiate. You reach out. Even if they're the one that took things wrong. Even if they're the one that started it. Even if they're the one that needs to apologize and say they're sorry. You don't burn bridges. You don't hold grudges. You don't withhold intimacy or affection. You [pursue peace, with ALL people](#). Even when it's hard, even when you don't want to, you remember what God has done for you, and you ask Him for help doing it for others.

And, one more thing, before we move on – notice it says we're to [pursue peace with all people](#). Which means, the people making all the noise and doing all the things you don't like. Whether they come down on the right, or the left, politically. Whether they wear a mask or burn them. Whether they're vaccinated and double boosted or not. [Pursue peace with all people. All people](#). You don't have to agree with them. You don't have to think they're right. But you do you have to

[14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:](#)

Notice, there is active, intentional effort on your part – *pursue* peace and holiness. This is God's desire for your life.

To be [holy](#) means to be set apart for God. The [holiness](#) in your life is a reflection of His presence in your life. And Christian, that means you're going to be different than other people. Listen, if holiness is a thing, *then unholiness is too*. And so, you have to decide, how much can your life look like just like the life of everyone else around you?

I get that there is a pressure to conform, to look like others, to act like others, to dress like others, to do what others do. But is the greatest problem in your life the gap between you and other people or the gap between you and God? And, which gap are you most concerned with closing?

Here's the funny thing, people want to keep a gap between you and them. This is why fads burn out. This is why new trends are started. Facebook started with college kids, but when their parents and grandparents got on it, they all got off and went to Instagram and then Tik-Tok. People want to be different; they want their own space. If everyone starts wearing the cool new thing, then people will dump it and go find something else that is cool and new. If your parents start using the same slang you use you tell them to stop it. Why? Because people want to be different, they want a gap, they want separation, they want to stand out.

But God says come, be like Me, be with Me, be near Me. [Pursue holiness](#). So, again, who are you chasing? Which gap are you trying to close? Do you want to see the Lord, or do you want to see people who may or may not want to see you?

14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord
15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

There's an athletic metaphor running through this whole passage (you see what I did there)? We're told here in Hebrews 12 that the Christian life is like running a long race, so we need to shed the weight of things that would slow us down, we need to watch out for the sin that would snare us, snag us, cause us to stumble, and we need to pursue, or chase down, run after, [peace with all people and holiness](#), constantly watching where we're going lest we fall.

One of the things that can trip us up as we pursue strength, peace, and holiness, is [bitterness](#). And church, I think this is something we need to consider and where necessary, repent. I think we've been exposed to things over the past two years that have pushed us toward [bitterness](#).

I'll say it like this. Spring is coming, grass is growing again, it's getting greener by the day, you can actually see it. I went out last week and was fertilizing my lawn and when I walked through my vibrant, growing, green grass do you know what else I noticed? Chickweed. Wild Violets. Clover. Weeds are growing too.

I think the same thing is happening in our souls. I think [bitterness](#) has crept in over the spiritual winter we've all been through. I think the events of the past two years have brought invasive species that are growing right alongside all the good stuff in our lives. Those weeds are defiling my lawn and the weeds of [bitterness](#) are defiling my soul. Church, I'm [bitter](#) toward the government and its mandates and how people respond. I'm [bitter](#) toward the media and the things it chooses to focus on and the agenda behind all the coverage. I'm [bitter](#) toward groups that say and do things I disagree with. I'm [bitter](#) about the economy and the war in Ukraine.

And you know what all of the bitterness is doing? It's [springing up](#) and [causing me trouble](#). It makes me less like Christ. I need to fight it. And I am, I'm trying to fight it. I'm confessing it to you now, but I think the winds of this world have blown the same seeds of [bitterness](#) into the lawn of your soul, I think we have community spread, and I think we all need to see it, repent, and ask God for forgiveness, healing, help, and hope.

But that's not the only ditch we can fall into as we run the race of life, there's the ditch of sharp bitterness on one side and soft indulgence on the other:

16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

Abraham had Isaac. Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob, or Israel. As the first born, Esau should have inherited everything from his father. But he came home hungry after being out hunting one day, and he sold his birthright to his younger brother for a bowl of soup. And later, when he tried to take it back, his brother said no – we had a deal. You got your bowl of soup, you got what you wanted in the moment, and I get the inheritance. It was a dirty deal, but it was done openly and honestly, so there was no going back. No saying I didn't mean it - you knew exactly what you were doing, exactly what you were giving up, and exactly what you were getting in exchange.

The point is: we can all make stupid choices when we live in the passions and desires of the moment.

The term **fornication** is often used in Scripture to describe sexual intimacy outside of marriage, and you often think of **profane** as profanity, or bad words. But the idea is really just someone who lives according to their desires, by what feels good or seems important in the moment. Living this kind of life will put you in the ditch, it has consequences.

Notice the contrast between the person marked by the pursuit of **holiness** in vs 14 and the person marked by their pursuit of immediate gratification through fornication and what is profane. Each person is putting time, energy, and thought into getting something, but what they want leads in opposite directions and one of them leads to regret.

Some of us have done things, said things in a moment of emotion or passion, that we later wish we could take back, but like dropping a handmade piece of pottery on a concrete floor – no matter how sorry you are and how much glue you have, some things can never be completely restored and renewed. Esau couldn't find a way to undo what he had done, to clean up the mess he made, **though he sought it diligently with tears.**

Now some of you want to ask, what does that mean about forgiveness and sin? Well, we've spoken about that before, the only truly unforgiveable sin is the one of refusing to repent, to turn away from your sins and come to Christ, but there is definitely meant to be a sobering aspect to what is said here - we're meant to feel the heaviness of it all. There's a pattern of that throughout the book – a constant call to take spiritual matters seriously, to be holy, especially in light of all that God has done for us.

In order to make that point we go back and contrast the old system of Jewish worship with what we have in Christ:

18 For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, 19 and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. 20 (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." 21 And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.")

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

25 See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, 26 whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." 27 Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

I know that's a lot of words, here's what it's saying: Calvary is better than Sinai. There was a time, not long after the Exodus, that God called the people of Israel together to speak to them, to make a covenant with them, to be near them. And they were freaked out by it, they couldn't stand the power of His presence, so they told Moses you meet with Him for us. And they accepted a system of rules, robes, and rituals. But that system is done, it's shut down, because Jesus came as the final sacrifice – he didn't just offer it in person by coming to worship, He didn't just make it as a priest working at the Temple, He became the sacrifice Himself. He offered up His pure life and holy blood as the payment for our sins.

And now, instead of calling us to a tabernacle or temple full of religious activity where only one person can come near to God, once each year, we're called into a new covenant, with direct and personal access to God, **by faith**. And He is the one calling us to strength, peace, and holiness, He's the one telling us to avoid both bitterness and self-indulgence.

God, as king, is adopting us as children, giving us a royal, eternal, inheritance:

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire.

Now, again, I know the chapter ends with a lot of complex words and ideas, but pay attention to the argument, because it's important. Here it is: since God is doing all of this for us, let us respond to Him, **by faith**. In light of all that God has done, is doing, and will do for you, is it not reasonable for us to serve Him **with reverence and fear**?

- To change our actions, attitudes and response?
- To reach out to Him and let go of our sin?
- To **strengthen our hands and knees** and get rid of things that are in the way. To do that for ourselves and others.
- To actively, intentionally, **pursue peace with all people**, even the ones that are hard to love.
- To aggressively **pursue holiness**, even if it makes us different because we understand there is no way it could not – God is calling us closer to Himself and that

is naturally going to increase the distance between us and the things and people of this world.

- To turn away from [bitterness](#) and let God purge it all out of our souls.
- To live intentionally and deliberately for Him and not for the passing desires of our flesh. To seek control over our desires instead of allowing them to drive us. To serve God acceptably with reverence and fear. [For our God is a consuming fire.](#)

Friends, God offers us salvation in Jesus Christ because *we need to be saved*. None of us live this way naturally. Most people approach life on their own terms, you make your own decisions, you do what you think is right, you form your own ideas about what is OK and what is not, what God is like or if there even is one. There is. And He is holy. He is righteous. He has expectations and demands, and you can't meet them on your own.

He knows that. And so, He sent His Son to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. To make a sacrifice, to become a sacrifice, for all the bad things you've ever done, and all the times when you tried really hard but couldn't do enough good, even when you wanted to.

The question is: have you received it? Have you ever said, God, I often do things my own way, and I know it's wrong. I know there's no way I could ever make it up to You, but I know that You have reached out to me, and so, I want to surrender. I'm asking to be forgiven through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. And I'm asking that You would teach me, and help me, to live for You from this day forward.

That's how you surrender to Him who speaks, whose voice is calling. You don't have to use those exact words, He looks straight into the depths of your heart, mind, and soul anyway, He knows what's there. Your role is to invite Him in and allow Him to transform your life, [by faith](#).

We're going to celebrate communion now and remember that sacrifice Jesus made. If you've never surrendered to Him before, it's a great time for you to do that, and then come forward and receive a symbolic reminder of his broken body and spilled blood.

If you have surrendered to God, it's a good time to say thank You once again for what He has done and to respond to anything that the Holy Spirit may have been speaking to you during our time together this morning. Either way, take a moment, speak with God, and then come forward, receive the elements and then we'll all take them together in a moment.

Let's pray.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

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Summary: In Christ we have a better priest, covenant, form of worship and access to God, therefore, we must let faith transform and strengthen us.

- How have you been strengthened spiritually? How have you strengthened yourself and how have you been strengthened by others? Have you been able to strengthen anyone?
 - Consider the following verses to see how God also strengthens us: Ps 27:14; Ps 31:24; Ps 119:28; Isaiah 41:10; 1 Peter 5:10
- Where are you feeling particularly weak lately? What has been heavy and hard? Where do you need encouragement and strength?
- Where is it a challenge for you to live in peace with all people?
 - What do you do when you try to live in peace with someone else and they keep resisting? How is similar to God reaching out to people who constantly resist Him?
 - How does knowing God initiates with us help you initiate peace with others?
- How have you experienced a call toward holiness in your life? Is there anything God has called you to give up, or to begin, in order to come closer to Him?
- Where do you see bitterness having an effect on people? How have you seen bitterness grow and what happens when it does?
 - Read the following verses, what do you learn about bitterness? Eph 4:31; Col 3:19; James 3:13-18
- Read Genesis 25:19-34 to learn the story of Esau. How did he view his birthright?
 - How do you reconcile the fact that there was no going back, no pathway to repentance for Esau with the fact that we can be forgiven of all our sins? Are there consequences on earth for sins that have already been forgiven in heaven?
 - Where have you seen or experienced long-term consequences for a bad decision?
- How is the call of God at Calvary better than the call of God at Sinai? What does it mean for God to be a consuming fire?