

GM // name // hello to all listening online...

Today's passage is Hebrews 12:1-17.

If you have a Bible in hand or on your phone, turn there with me.

In some church traditions before they read the sermon passage they begin with ... "The Holy Spirit says ..."

It reminds us that what we are reading here is not just any book.

This is God's written word, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore the truths are eternal, wise, and life-giving.

So lean in and read along or listen to each word as I read this passage...

"The Holy Spirit says ..."

Hebrews 12:1-17

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. 4 In your struggle against sin you have

not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.

6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

12 Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. 14 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; 16 that no one is sexually immoral or

unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. 17 For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

When I was in High School a friend of mine decided to run the mile at a track meet.

He was a pretty decent long distance runner.

At least he jogged a lot, so it all seemed like a pretty good idea.

When the race begin he leapt out front very quickly ...

& by the end of the second lap he was a half-lap ahead of everyone else.

That's when it all fell apart.

Very quickly he slowed to the pace of a Geriatric walking club.

His face strained with pain and sweat.

Then he couldn't take one more step.

He fell face down ... humiliated.

He never finished his race.

Of course, as his empathetic friends, we mocked him for it the rest of high school.

These verses liken following Jesus to running and finishing an endurance race.

Passages of scripture like this can be tough to embrace, especially if you've come out of a legalistic/moralistic background.

But I want to remind us that grace isn't against effort; It's against earning.

And this call to action comes on the heels of 10 chapters of looking at what Jesus has DONE.

It's important to remember that.

But out of Jesus' finished work we ARE called to persevere in the faith to the end like a runner finishing a marathon.

And that's what we are called to do ... Finish ...

We Run To Finish The Race Not To Be The Best

Some of the best truths are the most obvious and simple...
and let this one sink deep into your heart:

Following Jesus is not a competition.

There is only one Gold medalist on the podium in Heaven ...
that's Jesus.

He ran faster, further, harder ... and he did it first.

We are racing along the path He paved.

This is part of the good news of the Gospel ...

Getting into heaven isn't being better than other people.

That is the problem with the idea of "I don't have to believe
in Jesus, just be a good person."

Well, that ideology puts you in a race where you are
competing with everyone else.

I've have conversations with sincere people that believe
getting into heaven requires living a good life.

But what is the measure for "good enough"?

What's the baseline? & Who doesn't get in?

At some point their measure of "good enough" comes down
to a moral comparison with someone else.

"Don't be Hitler, or Charles Manson."

And I suppose if you were standing next to them at judgment time you might like your chances ...

But what if you were standing next to Mother Theresa?

The problem with comparison is that we can always find someone we are better than, BUT we will always find someone better than us.

And if your ticket into heaven rests on an arbitrary measure of comparison to someone else ... you are constantly going to be working hard to pad your resume.

But the good news of the Gospel is that you don't have to do that.

By faith you get signed on to Jesus' resume ... which is the best one to have.

No one is going to beat that.

Yet, we shouldn't take Jesus' finished work as meaning we don't have a race to run.

That's not the good news of the Gospel.

The good news is that we don't have to run to beat out anyone else.

I remember hearing a Christian give their testimony, and along the way he made a statement that was prescient to his leaving the faith years later ...

He said, “Lord when I get to heaven, I want to hear you say to me, ‘You outshined them all.’”

If you’re a Christian, this thinking is deadly.

That isn’t the race we are running.

We aren’t running to impress or be better than.

We are running to finish...

Which means ...

We Run With Each Other Not Against Each Other

That is the beauty of Christian community.

We are running the same race. [‘Let us run’ it says.]

That’s why disciples join a local church...

That’s where you run with people.

I don’t know about you, but working out with someone is better than working out alone.

A few years ago, Hayley and I joined a Body Pump class. I didn't realize how out of shape I was until 5 minutes in and I realized we were still "warming up."

But the class wasn't a competition of who was the best... it was about finishing together.

You had people in there of all shapes, sizes, fitness levels.

We were all in it for the hour together.

At the end we high-fived, because we finished something difficult together.

That is the beauty of Christian community ...

We are in this together.

There is a diversity of spiritual fitness, but we need each other.

And all of us in that class needed an instructor too.

We needed someone with experience ...

Who had wisdom ...

Who had gone before us in every way to show us what to do and what not to do.

And to admonish us not to give up.

The Bible word for that is discipline.

Discipline is a necessary part to being a disciple of Jesus.

But you and I have to be humble enough to receive it.

Finishing The Race Requires A Humble And Submissive Heart

In the verses I'm about to read ... don't think of a coach or drill instructor yelling at someone to do "one more rep" or "to push through the runners wall".

Rather think of a caring Father teaching, encouraging, and correcting a child.

Hebrews 12:5-11

5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as **sons?**

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.

6

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

God's discipline isn't about performing better.

It's about obedience.

That's why it says in V7 "It is for discipline that you have to endure."

He said something similar about Jesus...

Hebrews 5:8

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

God doesn't discipline us in order to make us His children; It's because we ARE His children.

But before you and I will submit to God the Father and His discipline we have to believe ...

- He knows best
- He is good and loves me
- He is making me more like him

When this becomes a revelation it changes your willingness to trust and obey the Father, regardless of the circumstance!

And this produces faithful obedience to the Father...

Which in turn yields fruitfulness over time.

But on the way He will teach us, stretch us, and correct us.

**When I was 19 I was in the best shape of my life.
[peaked early; things not going so well these days].**

But I owed it all to a trainer from Guam named Rob Mesa who befriended me at the gym ...

This guy was built like a Sherman tank.

He also had a degree in Kinesiology; which basically means he was on his way to training Olympic athletes...

But on the way who took up this charity case.

My fitness was going nowhere fast, and I had just thrown out my back.

But under Rob's tutelage I added a little over 20lbs of muscle in 6 months & learned how not to injure myself.

But I couldn't do that on my own.

I needed his wisdom, his experience, his guidance.

And I had to submit to the fact that he knew best and had good intentions for me.

He put me through intense workouts ... I had to trust that he wasn't trying to kill me.

It's funny now that I think about it ...

But in submitting to his wisdom and not running out of those painful workout sessions ...

I ended up looking more like him.

That is our Father's goal in His discipline...

He wants His children to become more like Him.

But the Father's discipline isn't just transformation through suffering.

It involves correction as well.

That was one of the important things my friend did during our workouts.

He taught me the correct form for each movement ...

If I started getting sloppy, he addressed it.

In following Jesus, we call that Holy Spirit conviction and correction from God's Word.

It's not punishment ... it's corrective.

If you are doing something wrong ... He will point it out.

Not because he's mean ... because he knows you'll get injured.

Are we humble and teachable enough to receive the Father's corrections?

Are we submitted to the authority of the Bible over our lives?

Here is one of the clearest messages the Bible constantly gives us...

Repent and turn from sin.

Because ...

Sin Weighs You Down And Trips You Up

It says it very explicitly in Hebrews 12:1, "let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely."

I've never run a marathon, and have no desire to.

I'd rather have a root canal with no medication.

The only thing that would be worse than running a marathon is trying to do it with a 50 pound backpack and my feet chained together.

That's the imagery we get here of trying to run this race with our sin.

Running with all that weight with your legs tied is going to wear you out.

You'll develop what Hebrews 12:12 refers to as drooping hands and weak knees.

That's why God brings that correction and discipline ...

To lead us to repentance.

Repentance is His gift of grace that sets you free from sin that weighs you down.

And the Holy Spirit names two biggies that we all struggle with... & I think define our cultural moment pretty well

- Bitterness
- Sexual immorality. [pornos ... disordered sexual desire]

What is at the root of these sins?

It is a broken & distorted version of love.

We love ourselves more than God and others.

And when we indulge in that we start to mistreat people...

I don't get bitter toward trees. I get bitter toward people.

If I'm bitter toward someone it will come out either aggressively through...

- gossip, slander, lying
- envy, coveting, stealing
- anger ... even murder

Or it will come out passively ...

- standing at a distance and judging
- building walls around hearts, detaching emotionally

A bitter person doesn't have love for their neighbor.

They care too much for themselves and their needs.

Which is also what drives sexual immorality.

God designed us for intimacy ... & sex is a sacred expression of that desire.

But intimacy is a fragile place ... it's a place where you are significantly vulnerable: emotionally, physically, spiritually.

So the greatest expression of intimacy (sex) was placed within the safest environment: a lifelong committed relationship of love.

In our modern era sexual fulfillment is self-serving.

But in marriage, sex is about giving yourself away and serving your spouse.

When we give in to bitterness and sexual temptations something happens to us.

They grow into heavy burdens that make running really hard.

And so we have to fight ...

We fight with repentance which is a Grace from God.

As we repent those burdens of bitterness & shame & guilt roll off our back.

And instead of running under the heavy yolk of sin ...

We run under the light and easy yolk of Jesus.

That's an important way in which we "strengthens weak knees and drooping hands."

But married to that, and I would argue comes first just as it does in this chapter, is this:

Never Stop Looking To Jesus

Hebrews 12:2-3

- 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**
- 3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.**

The more you desire God ... the less you will desire sin.

The more captivated you are with Jesus ... the less you'll be captivated by sin.

Are you spending time regularly looking to Jesus?

This is the command here.

Not to glance ...

It says, "Look ... Consider ..."

When we stop doing this it's the first big step toward feeling weary in the faith.

There is room for rest in the race.

There is room for changes of pace.

The Holy Spirit is our pace-setter.

Many years ago a young pastor asked Dallas Willard the question, “What must I do to stay spiritually healthy?”

After a long pause he said this:

“Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”

If the Holy Spirit said through this passage, “Look to Jesus... consider Him”...

If the great enemy of this is a hurried life ...

How then shall we run this race?

Give ourselves time to look to Jesus ... to take him in...

As the old song goes, “Fix your eyes upon Jesus ... Look full in his wonderful face; and the things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and Grace.”

AS THE BAND COMES UP

If you aren’t yet a Christian ...

Look to Jesus.

Look to the cross that he died on for your sins.

Consider the weight of the sins you are burdened with and carrying.

Come to Jesus, repent and believe.

If you are a Christian ...

I want to ask you:

What is the correction that the Holy Spirit is calling you to?

Is it letting go of being the best?

Is it giving up running alone?

Is it ruthlessly eliminating hurry from your life so you have time to look and consider Jesus?

We are going to take a minute to allow time for you to respond where you are at.

Let's close our eyes and pray.

PRAY

COMMUNION

We are going to look and consider Jesus right now by taking communion.

This is a time for us as Christians to remember our Savior won our victory by shedding his blood.

For the joy set before him he endured the cross, and thus was deserving to sit on God's throne in heaven.

His victory is ours because He is full of grace to us.

[Body broken / Blood shed]