

Jesus: Our Great High Priest Forever
(Week 25)
Hebrews 12:12-17
“Stay In Your Lane”

Introduction

“Therefore, strengthen your tired hands and weakened knees, and make straight the paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but healed instead.”
Hebrews 12:12-13

Immediately after explaining how God disciplines His children, the writer of *Hebrews* returns to his metaphor of “running the race”. You see, if we respond accordingly to God’s discipline, as our “training” that makes us better, then we will be more proficient in running our race of faith. As we keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus, we “run” in such a way that others will see Jesus in us. It is by so doing that we become witnesses for Christ in everything that we say and do. Just as a runner in the Olympics must discipline himself in order to be competitive, believers must be disciplined, so they may run and finish the race well.

The phrase “strengthen your tired hands and weakened knees”, would be better translated “strengthen **the** tired hands and weakened knees”. For it is not only the responsibility of the child of God to see to the strengthening of themselves, but to help and strengthen and encourage others as well. As those of you who have ever done any long distance running know well, the first signs of fatigue are the dropping of the hands which is followed by wobbly knees. Just like long distance runners, Christians sometimes begin to grow weary and burned out in their race of faith. Can I get a witness? It is the duty of each of us to encourage one another to “keep running” as it were. We are to be constantly reminding each other of the great prize that awaits us at the end of this race. We must be encouragers, and not stumbling blocks, to those who are running alongside us! Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul:

“Let us not get tired of doing good: for if we do not give up, the time will come when we will reap the harvest.”
Galatians 6:9

So we need to constantly be reminding ourselves, as well as one another, to keep running the race of faith.

Another way that we are to be the most effective in our race is to remember to stay in our lane. An olympic athlete who competes for a gold medal will never stray out of his clearly marked lane on the running track. To do otherwise would be to add length to his race and cause him to collide with the other runners. Listen to what the writer of *Hebrews* says about this.

“..make straight the paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but healed instead.”

Staying in ones’ lane (making straight paths for your feet), simply means to keep your focus on the race and not get distracted by the things of this world. When we are “pulled off course” by worldly desire, it not only causes us to stumble, but others around us as well. When a church-member strays off course, it can cause significant damage to everyone else around him, who are also striving to run a good race of faith. “No man is an island”, when it comes to sinful behavior. Our sin affects not only our lives, but the lives of those around us. This is why it is imperative to keep our focus upon Christ and to stay in our lane.

The writer of *Hebrews* reminds us of just what we are pursuing in our race of faith. We are in pursuit of Peace and Purity:

“Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness—without it no one will see The LORD.”
Hebrews 12:14

Peace and Purity (Holiness) represent the perfection that we are striving for in this, our “race of faith”.

Pursue Peace (Love Like Jesus Loved)**“Pursue peace with everyone...”**

Have you ever really stopped to think about the people that Jesus didn't get along with. He couldn't get along with the Pharisees. And who were they? Well, they were a group of religious leaders who thought that they were too good to associate with anyone else, that's who. Jesus was a friend to sinners. Lost people were actually drawn to Him. He healed the sick and taught those who would listen. He offered them a better way. He called them to follow Him. He pursued them and longed to save them. If we, His Church, are to keep our eyes focused upon Him, my friends, then we will do likewise. We are commanded to pursue peace with everyone. That means that we will make it our life's purpose to become “peacemakers” (**Matthew 5:9**). For we were all once estranged from God, but thanks to Christ, we now have peace with God. Jesus did that for us, and He has commanded us to love others as He has loved us.

Now, I don't know about you, but I have known a lot of “Pharisee Christians” in the Church. They consider themselves to be so spiritual that they won't have anything to do with those they consider to be sinful wretches. When we behave in this way, we are nothing like Christ. In fact, it is proof that we have “strayed out of our lane” in the race. If we were focused upon Jesus, then we would desperately long to seek and save that which is lost. I know that you have heard me say this before, but lost people **act** like lost people! If we keep ourselves from any association with those who are sinners, then how can we ever hope to reach them? We are to pursue PEACE with ALL men. This means even those who aren't “nice” to us! Remember what Jesus said about our enemies?

“You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in Heaven. For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don't even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” **Matthew 5:43-48**

There's that “perfect” word again. It means complete. In order for us to finish the race, we must strive for the finish line, and the finish line is to be like Jesus. The finish line is for others to see Him in us. At the finish line stands a group of believers, who are more concerned about being peacemakers, reconciling the lost and dying to a loving God full of grace and mercy. The finish line is not a place where a group of elites congratulate one another on how much better off they are than those who lost the race. In competitive racing, only one can be crowned the winner, but in the race of faith, we are striving to see to it that everyone finishes ahead of us! We are in pursuit... of peace!

Pursue Purity (Live Like Jesus Lived)**“...and holiness—without it no one will see The LORD.”**

As believers, we have been set apart to **love** like Jesus loved and to **live** like Jesus lived. It's called holiness. It means “to be set apart for a purpose”. We have been set apart to live in a way that brings glory to God. This means that we are to turn away from sin and pursue a life of purity. Now when some people read this verse, they think that it means that if we do not live in purity then we will not see the Lord. This would imply that it is by our good works and pure living that we find salvation. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is impossible for any of us to live up to God's standard of perfection, in and of our own power. This is the reason that The Old Covenant didn't work and the New Covenant was necessary! However, now, thanks to Calvary, The Spirit of God lives within us, and we do indeed have the power to live in holiness. And we are to pursue this holy living, just as we are to pursue peace.

As I mentioned earlier, if the Church strives for these two things empowered by The Spirit, then others will see Christ in us. If the Church fails to live by these standards, then the world will not see Christ in us, therefore, “without holiness, no one will see The LORD”. Makes perfect sense, when you put it in context doesn’t it? Stay in your lane, pursue peace and purity, and others will see Jesus. Stray out of your lane, and live like the rest of the world, and no one will see Jesus in you. The choice, my friends, is up to you. Choose this day, whom you will serve (**Joshua 24:15**).

“Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God, and that no root of bitterness springs up, causing trouble and defiling many.” **Hebrews 12:15**

Wow! Has this verse been misunderstood over the years. The King James Translation even complicates it further by saying “**Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God...**” For years, well meaning interpreters have thought that this was teaching that a believer might “fail of grace” and thereby lose their salvation. This is absolutely **not** what this verse is saying. What the writer is warning us about is... if we do not strive for peace and purity within the Church, then no one will see The Lord, and if they do not see that the Church is real, then they will miss out or fall short of God’s grace and forgiveness. There is so much at stake when Christians don’t live what they profess to believe! If you truly want to see lost people come to know Christ, then stay in your lane, **live out your faith!**

It is also important to note that the word translated here as “make sure” or “looking diligently” is “*episkopeo*” in the Greek meaning to “take oversight”. It is very closely related to the same Greek word that is used for Elders or Pastors in *The New Testament* “*episkopos*” or “overseer”. As Christians, we are to be looking diligently, not only to our own holy living, but to also be looking diligently as overseers of those around us, in order to keep them from falling. Once again, we should long for everyone to finish this race ahead of us!

The writer also admonishes us to see to it that no “root of bitterness” springs up within the church, as it may lead to trouble and defilement within the body. This is a reference to false doctrine and sin being tolerated within the church. The preacher is once again using an *Old Testament* scripture to enforce a *New Testament* teaching. He is borrowing a term from *Deuteronomy*, where the children of Israel are warned not to allow idolators in their midst:

“Indeed, you know how we lived in the land of Egypt and passed through the nations where you traveled. You saw their abhorrent images and idols made of wood, stone, silver, and gold, which were among them. Be sure there is no man, woman, clan, or tribe among you today whose heart turned away from The LORD our God to go worship the gods of those nations. Be sure there is no root among you bearing poisonous and bitter fruit.” **Deuteronomy 29:16-18**

So, you see, when we stray from our lane, when we begin to allow “the world” to creep into our fellowship, it will defile and poison the church. So, once more we are reminded of the absolute necessity of pursuing purity among the flock. When we tolerate sin within the body, we allow a toxic root to take hold. And if it is not dealt with immediately, then corruption will follow. There is no room for sin and false doctrine in the Church of Jesus Christ.

The writer uses Esau as just such an example, of someone who was willing to forgo the blessings of God for a meager bowl of stew! Esau was entitled to receive the blessings of the firstborn, but willingly traded their eternal benefit to temporarily fill his stomach. Therefore, he demonstrated that he was more concerned with satisfying his flesh, than providing for his eternal spirit. When we choose worldliness over purity, we do much the same thing. We put our flesh above the things The Spirit desires for us. We trade holiness for “a full belly”, as it were. This type of reasoning proved that Esau was “Godless”, and the church that will sacrifice its holiness to satisfy the cravings of the flesh is, in fact, no different.

We must diligently “oversee” those within the body to prevent the Esau’s of this world from poisoning the fellowship. We must stay in our lane and pursue the holiness that God desires. All Christians sin from time to time, but the true believer will be convicted and disciplined for those sins and will come to repentance. Those who claim to be born again, and yet, want to cling to their sins habitually, **are not**, and have **never been**, truly saved by the grace of God. They are imposters, and if not brought to repentance, not only will they not be able to stand in judgment, but they will cause many serious problems within the body. After all:

“Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.” 1 Corinthians 15:33

While we are commanded to reach out to the lost and dying sinners of this world, we are actually commanded to stay away from “sinners who **claim** to be Believers” (**1 Corinthians 5:9-11**). In Christ, we have been given such grace and freedom. We have been shown a better way and a better covenant. We shouldn’t take these blessings lightly. Unlike Esau, we must never exchange the grace of God for the mundane. We are to pursue peace with all men, showing them the love of God, so that they will come to Him to find salvation. We must live out what we believe, so that no one can say that our religion is vain. Our lives must never be seen as an opportunity for the enemies of God to blaspheme His holy name. The Church must be set apart for The Glory of Christ and His cross. We must, therefore, “police” ourselves to ensure that we are a spotless bride.

If we are to be effective as standard bearers for the gospel, carrying the “baton of truth” in order to hand it off to the next runner in this relay race for God, then we must run the race well. We must keep our eyes upon Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith. We must strengthen those who are weary so they may continue to run well, and we must stay in our lane, so people will see Christ in us. With so very much at stake, I just have one question to ask this morning. How are you running? As for me, I want to finish strong. I want to win. Who is with me?

And ALL of God’s people said... Truth!!!