

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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THE RUNNER, THE FIGHTER, THE FATHER

Hebrews 12:1-13

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INTRODUCTION: The book of Hebrews was probably written to Jewish Christians who lived in Jerusalem as an encouragement for them to stay strong even if they were being persecuted. Hebrews is a fantastic book and covers many subjects.

Who wrote Hebrews is a mystery, although the most popular opinion, at least among pastors I know, is that Paul wrote it. However, in Paul's writings, he attributes the words to himself. Since he doesn't do that here, it leaves us with a bit of a puzzle to hash out.

Hebrews 11 has a list of great people and their faith. Hebrews 12 goes right into three metaphors that provide great illustration and application to the life of a Christian. They are the three points of today's message.

- The metaphor of the race.
- The metaphor of the fight.
- The metaphor of the human father.

1-THE METAPHOR OF THE RACE

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who

endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

APPLICATION: The picture here is that sin slows us down in this life. People who are athletes for speed work to refine their diets and exercise so they are as lean as possible. An extra pound of fat in speed sports helps in no way at all. Sin slows us down in several ways.

- It causes distraction, which takes us away from our focus of becoming Christlike. When we don't have focus, we lose sight of where we're headed.
 - This is a weight that slows us down.
- It blinds us so we do not see the truth. When we do not know the truth, we are prone to believe anything. Boy, don't we live in that world today!
 - Not seeing the truth is a weight that slows us down.
- It robs us of our present so we cannot see the future. I spoke with a person this past week who made a mistake. He had a hard time seeing the future.
 - This is also a weight that slows us down.

Let us cast away all this sin that entangles us so we can have focus, so we can have truth, so we can have a future.

2-THE METAPHOR OF THE FIGHT

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:4

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

EXPLANATION: The word struggle here means to resist, strive against, contend, to wrestle against.

We just read how Jesus endured the cross, but before he died on that cross, he agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane. He agonized in prayer to the point that he sweat drops of blood

No doubt Jesus' agony was incredible as he considered the crucifixion before him. And then on that cross, Jesus suffered that terrible death shedding his blood as he became the ransom from heaven, paying the price for our sins.

Jesus fought sin to the point that he bled.

So no matter how much a person may resist sin, no one has agonized over sin like Jesus. Listen to the Amplified translation: *You have not yet struggled and fought agonizingly against sin, nor have you yet resisted and withstood to the point of pouring out your [own] blood.*

ILLUSTRATION: Picture a boxer named Sin in a boxing ring with a person: The announcer says, **“In this corner, we have the all-time champ named Sin! He wins nearly every battle he fights until the end. Right now, he is the reigning heavy-weight champion of the world!”**

And then imagine Sin taking the mic and taunting his opponent. Listen as the crowd goes crazy.

- For some reason, this champ named Sin gets by with breaking all the rules.
- For some reason, he's never held accountable, probably because he is such a crowd-pleaser.
- He loves to taunt his opponent by dancing all around the ring, bouncing around, making fake jabs, laughing at his opponent, and doing all types of fancy movements before he goes in for the knockout punch. Not only is he the reigning champ, he is the knockout king. The crowd cheers his name: “Sin! Sin! Sin!”
- Remember how Muhammad Ali taunted his opponents and got the crowd in a tizzy before the fight even started? “I float like a butterfly. I sting like a bee.”

And then imagine with me as the announcer takes the mic and says, **“In this corner we have.....Weakling! Weakling has never won a fight.”** The announcer puts the mic down as things get ready for the bell to ring. Of course, Sin is predicted to be the winner and has been asked to go several rounds before the knockout punch because people paid a lot of money to see this fight. The advertisers all want it to go longer than one round.

The fight begins and it's clear who is stronger. Sin has a great heyday with Weakling. He taunts. He teases. He dances around. Weakling is just pitiful. He fights, but he's too cautious. He doesn't want to get bruised fighting Sin. He certainly doesn't want to shed any blood.

And then after a few rounds Sin has had enough. He knocks his opponent to the floor of the boxing ring and the official counts to ten and Sin wins again. The crowd goes crazy cheering Sin and booing Weakling because he didn't put up much of a fight.

APPLICATION: Folks, on our own terms we are Weakling! On our own terms, we will fail and Sin will beat us every time.

Which one of us has fought sin to the point that the fight resulted in bloodshed?

None of us ever agonized over our own sin to the point of sweating blood and none of us have paid for our own sin by shedding our own blood.

With our sin, we must all come to that point where we realize that going into the ring over and over accomplishes nothing. We've got to let Jesus fight for us. His Spirit gives us the resistance we need.

2-THE METAPHOR OF THE HUMAN FATHER

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:5-11

And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."

⁷Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and

we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

ILLUSTRATION: My parents were both different as disciplinarians. My mom used my dad as the higher threat. “Am I going to have to tell your dad about this?” That built in me a healthy fear of my dad’s discipline. I always wanted my mom to settle a matter before dad got home. She even added things such as, “Your dad’s been working all day, and the last thing he wants is to come home and deal with this.” I didn’t care how she disciplined me. She could do anything she wanted -- I just didn’t want him to find out. The times she did tell him. Oh no. By the time my dad disciplined me, my mom had me so worked up that I absolutely dreaded it. When Dad got involved, he never put it off. He took care of business right then.

The way that model evolved for me was this: I feared my mom’s discipline but I respected by dad’s discipline. Their team effort paid off, and now I really do see how they did it because they loved me.

After years of discipline, I got to the point where I realized if I was obedient and respectful, I wouldn’t have to suffer through the discipline. I’ve since realized some people never get that.

There came that day when I packed my little Honda Civic and left home to go out into this world on my own. It had been a long time since I’d been disciplined. I’d been my best to be an obedient son... and now I was free, or so it seemed. The truth is that God continues to discipline me.

EXPLANATION: Look at verse 10: *Our fathers disciplined (done, past tense!) us for a little while as they thought best, But God disciplines (ongoing!) us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.*

In the original language, the meaning is this: “He does it for our benefitting.” This word translated “benefitting,” in its original form means *properly, combine[d] in a*

way that brings a profit (gain), especially by a "concurrence of circumstances" that results in benefit or advancement. [Strong's Greek 4851, sympheron, συμφέρον, "benefitting"]

The result of God's discipline-benefit, according to verse 11, is a harvest of righteousness and peace.

The result of God's discipline also leads to action!

ILLUSTRATION: One of the most defining moments of discipline for me came when I was six years old. In fact, it is so clear I remember it like it was yesterday. I wanted to learn to ride a bike.

My neighbor gave me a used bike, and I stood in the yard ready to go. I crashed. I pitched a fit like an angry dictator of a small country. It was really bad! And it was in full view of the neighbors. I don't remember the discipline itself – my mind draws a blank, thank the good Lord – but I do remember hearing the words, "You. Are. Going. To. Ride. That. Bike."

By now, my dad was involved. I remember crying as I got back on that bike and took off down the road. And then, it happened. The neighbors cheered and I went from crying to laughing in one breath. I laughed as the tears of despair were still on my cheeks. Before long, I saw Evel Knievel on TV and began jumping creeks and trashcans.

What if my parents had let me give up? What if they had coddled me when I pitched a fit? What if they had said, "Oh poor baby. You don't ever have to ride that awful bicycle again. And any time you want to throw a tantrum, we'll be there to support you." I deserved the discipline which led to my benefit and my action.

God disciplines us because he loves us and wants us to grow into mature believers. His discipline is for our benefit, and it leads to action.

So the writer of Hebrews ends this section by telling us what discipline does.

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:12-13

Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. 13 “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

EXPLANATION: To win a physical struggle, you need strong arms. To win a race you need strong knees. You build your arms and knees through what? Discipline.

Discipline prepares us for the race. Discipline prepares us for the fight.

You know, scripture has a lot to say about sin. It's not a popular topic on religious TV programming. A book about sin is likely to sell little to no copies. Sermons about sin aren't likely to get a lot of Facebook or YouTube likes. We don't like to be reminded of our sin because, well, that's negative news. In fact, we hope no one says anything about it because we don't want it pointed out.

Did you know there is good news about your sin? What? How is there any good news about any sin? The good news is that your sin can be forgiven. You don't have to live in the guilt and condemnation of your sin, and you don't have to die in the guilt and condemnation of your sin.

INVITATION: You may think you can make up for sins by outweighing them with good works. Not so. The only way we can be forgiven for our sin is to repent of it and to trust Jesus as Lord.

I John 2 verse 2 tell us: *“He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”*

Jesus' death on the cross paid the price for our sins. Listen to Hebrews 9 verse 12, *“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”*

You can have peace with God through Jesus Christ today. Don't worry about what you don't understand, focus on what you do understand - that you are a sinner, that Jesus came to save you, and that he gave his life to pay the penalty for your sin. That is **GOOD NEWS FOR ALL WHO BELIEVE**.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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