



“Winning”

Hebrews 12

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Hebrews 12:1-11

1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race

that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. 4 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. 5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." 7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. 11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

When it comes to God Word, we generally love certain aspects and parts of it all, but there are pieces—*practices, doctrines, and commandments*—that we frankly tend to just dislike. How we respond to that “dislike” will profoundly affect our future, our relationship with our God, and how we walk our faith out in this life God has given us.

We generally embrace the God who is gracious and loving, and we love the fact He sent His Son to take the heat for us, and has, by doing so, made us positionally right with Him. We love the fact that He's into restoration and hope, and we bask in things like His blessings and mercy. But the truth is, we usually go out of our way to avoid hearing about His other attributes...the ones that might be a little scarier or demanding of us. Many of us have therefore been, *either on purpose or by accident*, conditioned to view God incompletely. We now hold a mere one-sided view of who God is. Eventually our shunning of that “other God” and of course the absence of our interaction with Him, rears its ugly head and puts us in a very real danger of taking us out of the race. We have seen it in our own community over the years. We have all witnessed the losses, the crash-and-burn of those who eventually failed to make that leap to a grown-up faith.

The fact is, we tend to want God to do everything. We have embraced His gifts, and power, and all the blessings of our relationship with Him, but we flinch when He calls upon us, or seeks a response to Him and His actions. Some folks, *as we have already discussed*, have taken to a kind of Gnostic stance where we ignore all the elements of faith that we are supposed to be doing, and just put it all on Christ. He then is our Santa...our genie in a bottle...our rabbits foot. We then eventually become merely a lifeless drone, void of passions and personal response. Life becomes about not a relationship with Him but wherein He is looked upon instead as the supplier of our weekly allowance. To take such a stance forces a different Jesus to emerge, one that is not the scriptural and historical Jesus that we know to be truth. The Jesus that is therein adopted is one that asks nothing of us nor

requires a maturing or an in-kind relationship with Him. This Hollywood-Jesus allows us to forever remain spiritual children, a "Peter Pan" syndrome for Christians.

Ones "faith" is then based solely upon our receiving from Christ and never giving in return. Eventually God says no on some matter, we...in the fullest manifest of our childlike maturity, immediately reject that answer and go out and attempt to get it anyway on our own. And that is sure to bring us some painful discipline. One that can cost our family, our church and community, and maybe even our very lives. We have to understand that there really is very little about the Christian life that is static. Finding our place in a community where we can serve, give, love, respond and carry is crucial. How many have been ultimately lost because they were willing only to respond to Jesus as a child, only as a consumer? They wanted what they wanted and they wouldn't be denied.

Our chapter begins by reminding us what we have covered and how far we have come in this book of Hebrews by beginning with the word "therefore." After all the historical accounts, the explanations, and the challenges to our faith living...the question naturally is coming down now to "how do I do it? How do I apply all of this stuff? How do I win in this race?" "*Therefore*" means, *in light of all we have discussed*, what will now follow is to be our response. This is to be our answer to it all. That's all just fine, but then we immediately are hit with phrases such as, "let **us** lay aside", "let **us** run with endurance", "(you) look unto Jesus", "(you) consider Him..." All of these things are clearly actions which are **our** responsibility to do and are obviously expected of us and now are sought after in light of this new covenant that He has been speaking about. So the writer, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, calls upon us to actually do some things in response to what God has done in us. Not under our own power, for we have already dealt with that issue in this series...let's not rehash what we have already clearly covered. We are speaking of a responsive embrace of the power of the Spirit as new and living creatures with new desires, new passions, with new calling and new directions for our living.

Note a couple of things: **one**, we are directed to "put off the weights" as well as the sins. Not just the things that are obvious scriptural sin, but also even the weights that slow us down in the race. The idea is to move freer and faster and with less exhaustion in the service of King and kingdom. This is the point where many of us effectively put our fingers in our ears and start singing "La, La, La" really loud in attempt to drown out the pastor's voice. Because this call...for many of us...is deeply convicting. Truth be told, most of us will acknowledge the need to stay away from scriptural *sin*, but we often have still embraced the weights. I could start listing some examples, but I fear that whatever I would say would seem like a personal attack and those I fail to mention would see such as permission. Let me just ask you this: *what have you taken on over the past few years...what changes have occurred...what decisions have been made in your life that have honestly slowed you down in the Christian race if not knocked you out of it completely?* Be honest. At least with yourself. Are you going to have to leave that thing when you pass into eternity? It's a weight. Our tendency is to think too highly of ourselves...we think that we can keep piling more on our plates and such will not effect our living, our performance, or participation. Let's face it...many of us just simply want it all. We want God and his blessings, but we want everything the world and these temporal lives have to offer too.

If any of you have gone jogging with ankle weights, you know what it's like to carry a weight while trying to move quickly and what that can do to your performance and longevity, especially over a distance! So this naturally requires us to do some self-evaluation. Because the fact is, something that might be a weight to me may not be to you and vice versa. This requires you to be a thinking and honest individual and to know yourself and what things slow you down in what is clearly seen as a race by the writer of this passage. And if we don't get it ourselves, it calls upon us to hear those around us when they try to speak into our lives. It is a race that He has "set before us." It is a race we must run or we will sit out and never see the finish line. But the world, and

all of its gray innocuous aspects ...*we want those things*. And they are not prohibited as sins scripturally, so we feel they are fair game. However, I ask again: *Have you slowed down?*

We do this at least in part because we are "surrounded by witnesses." Witnesses of the like mentioned in the last chapter. Both the champions of faith, as well as all those you share this community with today. What does this mean? Do we do it for them and not for God? No. We do so *in light of them*, ...meaning that they sacrificed and gave not only for their *own* relationship with God but for *your relationship* with God also! This is a fact of history and a fact of a loving church community. If you can't see that truth, you are apt to tell your brothers and sisters here to take a flying leap when they fail to support you in something you want to do real bad or when they correct you for some aspect of your faith. If we don't recognize the lateral relationship of our faith, then we are quick to disregard these folks when we don't want to be told no. This fact has been a people killer around here! How many have been lost because they wanted to run away and hide to keep people from telling them that the life they were leading was broken and the things they wanted to pursue were not good idea. Again, it is a child who loves you until you tell them something that they don't want to hear or fail to support some hare-brained idea they have.

There was a married couple that attended here years ago, that latched onto a crazy idea to go out to Vegas and minister to the prostitutes out there. They didn't know the first thing about Vegas (...never even been there), or prostitution. It's not exactly a huge social issue here in Dunn County. They had no financial planning to live in such an expensive city, nor did they have any history of serving well and consistently where God had already placed them, which was here. The fact was, it just sounded all so romantic and exciting to them, and they weren't dealing in the realm of reality and facts. So when the community wouldn't get behind them on this, they left angry. They eventually moved away, but not to Vegas, but to sunny Arizona, and never did anything substantial for the kingdom of God.

Others have done the same because they could not elicit support for taking a certain job in another city, having a certain other-sex relationship with someone, or the church wouldn't get behind them by sending them out to start a church. Those are the times that they suddenly adopt an, "I'm just listening to God and not to all of you" stance, when in the last situation that arose with someone else, they WERE part of the "you." I have yet to see such a venture play out well. I say that not out of arrogance with the idea that we are the "holy hand of God." But to deny horizontal accountability is arrogant at best, and, at worst, ignorant of God's historical methodology and design.

Part of growing up in Christ is coming to the faithful acknowledgement of what our personal "weights" are and moving to actually reject them as part of our living. Some of you can have a beer and be just fine, but some of you know, *or you need to know*, that you can't! One beer and you are off on a bender for a month. Same with smoking a cigarette, or eating ice cream or watching an R-rated movie. God has the audacity to actually ask some you to "put off" those things. And these weights can come in the form of a much deeper personal issue and lifestyle choices. Come now...shouldn't it make sense to seek to walk as close to the Master as we possibly can and reject those things that push us to the edge of His grace? Because the second issue here to see is the mention that some of these things factually and historically have caused us to fall! They have and will so "easily ensnare us." Let me ask you frankly now, what things are you dancing up close to that you know will and have historically ensnared you? It is such a helpless feeling to watch someone who has had a problem in a certain area move ahead like a bull in china shop instead of running away from that danger. It has been one of my greatest pains as a pastor to see such folks ultimately give themselves over to that issue and claim grace and play the "God card" (God told me) and run headlong into the moving truck, all the while rejecting counsel and their own history and track record, usually exiting the church on their way.

We are called to run a race that explicitly calls for endurance on our part. That does not sound like “Easy Street” or a child-like approach to God's grace and patience. Our faith must grow beyond the "Jesus has a cookie for you" lifestyle that sees Him as an endless supply of things we want in the flesh, comforts, or pleasures. God IS good! And He seems forever to be blessing us materialistically and comfort-wise beyond what we deserve or have earned. He loves us! We're His kids, and, as scripture says, "He loves to give good gifts to His kids." (Matt 7:11) But that parental relationship righteously and naturally includes His watchful protection and thus is going to include some "no's" along the way too! If only we were to honestly answer the question...and maybe pose it to our friends also to chime in... *“can I do this thing or have this thing and it not slow me down or potentially knock me out of the race...out of the service of God?”*

We forget, or perhaps we have never acknowledged, the Jesus that "endured." He did more than just run that race. He "endured the cross, despising the shame..." We are told He did so “for the joy of it.” Doesn't that just make you stop and take pause? He endured all that stuff, ... some seriously uncomfortable stuff, and He did it with joy! Now you might flinch at that and respond with, "But He was God in flesh." Yes indeed! But that, my friends, ...*if you are a born again child of God, ...*is the Jesus that is supposedly living now inside you ...and through you ...the Spirit of God which consumes you. We have the right stuff. His name is Jesus, and we are called now to run in it, to run in Him. To live life out in faithful trust of His Spirit and His body in community. If we fail to "consider" this fact, if we fail to embrace this truth, then we are sure to become *"weary and discouraged in our souls."*

You see, when we fail to personally run this race, and to do so with a focus to win, or to do so without his indwelling power, we are bound to get tired and discouraged. It comes because without that focus we lose our way in this race and find ourselves off course...off the path. We fail to move forward in the faith we have been given and see faith instead as a tool to get something we want. It all really comes down to the desire of your heart: is it for Him ...or is it for you and this world? Is it for someone or something in this life? What are you living for this morning? How many of you are in truth fighting against God with your worldly dreams and aspirations that may not be what God wants for you or what you were created for? How many of you consistently see your future and your path as always "over there" and never here before you?

When we don't get what we want we feel like we're dying, but this passage says, "You have not bled over this issue yet, have you?" The writer is trying to bring us to some grounded perspective here. Jesus was beaten and crucified for His faith. How about you? That's where the writer is trying to take us. He tells us that a relationship such as this IS a loving Father-Son relationship, whether we want to acknowledge it or not. If you have a funky relationship with your earthly father—one where he ignores you or fails to express His joy in you or if you have the other side where daddy gives or gave you everything you wanted—both fail to reflect well when it comes to that which we walk in with Christ.

The fact is, a loving father sometimes says no. A loving father sometimes spans his children. Now we can embrace this truth or we can run away and try to hide from Daddy and escape his chastening. My father was raised almost solely by his mother because his dad died when he was 12. There were like 9 or 10 kids. Now grandma was a big woman and definitely the woman in charge. So one time my dad's friends told him that if he did something wrong and his mom came for him with the razor strap, to climb a tree and wait her out. Well, the day came and up the tree went my dad, and up the tree after him went my grandma and whooped him with the razor strap all the way down. So apparently you can't hide from God our Father, and you can't hide from my grandma either!

Our passage tells us, *"For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."* This is at the heart of the faith aspects we don't like, and many of us actually think we can reject that handling

and/or run from that chastening. We think we can climb a tree and wait Him out. We often will just run away from God and the community of believers and attempt to hide.

This is not to say that you are not honestly going through a tough time. We all walk this road of humanity, and in this fallen world, we are going to sometimes suffer. And jumping on the Jesus train isn't going to make that go away. I'm sorry if you have been led to believe that Jesus was a magic elixir or an amulet that would ward off life's difficulties, because it's just not true. If faith IS such a thing, then apparently Jesus didn't get it because He experienced both the highs and the very lows of God's providence. And, my friends, *so do we*. Hebrews 11 spoke concerning those that were sawn in two or tortured and stoned and suffered unspeakable horrors. What can we bring to the table to compare to that?

The fact is, I've never heard of a church growth book or a church growth conference where anyone said, "Preach Hebrews 12 faithfully." Because these things are hard to swallow. But we need to realize that the chastening, the discipline that is spoken of here, is not just about punishment and correction. It's also about training. It's heavenly child-rearing. Indeed it can be a hard thing to accept sometimes ...that God really is in control... that He's not just "winging" this thing. He's not just rolling with stuff as it comes down the pike. He sees it "way out there." The fact is, He has *always* seen it. And yet the fact remains that sometimes He lets it come full force upon us. We must then choose: run up the tree and hope the trouble leaves, or stand in the storm and trust the Master. It's not easy, is it?

This passage gets worse before it gets better. Because onward in this passage we see that even in disciplining, in the spanking, He does it because He loves us. We don't like it; just as I didn't like it when my dad took his belt to me as a kid. But the fact is, that is a great part of *who* I am and *why* I am today. If we were never disciplined when we were young, we grow up badly. I know many folks are just going to reject that premise...one that is clearly biblical, and will eventually reap the consequences. And if we run and reject God's discipline now, we will grow up badly or we won't grow up at all. And the most extreme throw down in this passage is verse 8, where we are told, "*if you are without chastening, then you are illegitimate and not sons.*" Hmmmm, here is one of those qualifying verses concerning whether we are truly a child of God or not. So let's take the deep breath and ask ourselves: *do we know and understand this passage in personal application?* Because, gang, some of us will do anything other than accept God's chastening! We will burn down our world around us to avoid it. Our pride rejects the very premise! We will run away and hide from our brothers and sisters. But know this today... this journey with Jesus is not always sweet cotton candy. Sometimes it is just honestly hard. And because it is, it drives us to our knees in utter dependence and humility before Him and His church, or we will run away. Our reaction here says who we truthfully are.