We All Need help To Run!

**Hebrews 12:12-17**

*Pastor Paul Anthes*

**Introduction:** After months or even years of training there comes a time when the training ends and the doing begins. The runner finally takes his place on the track for the race. A good coach has taught him how to run but he knows that he cannot run the race for him. Nevertheless his purpose is not over. On the day of the competition the coach does not go on vacation. He does not stay home and cut the lawn. He goes over to that stadium and he gets as close to his athlete as the rules allow. He rises early to meet his runner, hopefully to pray with him and for him, as I have often seen done. He goes over the training once again and expresses his confidence that he will finish well in the race.

In a long race the coach will stand near the finish line after each lap so that his runner can see him. He is now the encourager seeking to infuse confidence and mental strength into the athlete on the track. I have known several long distance runners in my life. When asked what their ambitions were for the race they all said, “to run well and to finish.” Our lives are a race like that. In life, believers know that ….

**We are not competing with one another in this race.**

**We are competing with the race itself.**

We already know that imperfect men and women like you, have finished their race by trusting God. God makes a point to reveal their shortcomings. Abraham lied about his wife, saying she was his sister. Sarah laughed when God promised her a son. Moses struck the rock out of anger when God told him only to speak. David sinned with Bathsheba. Jacob connived to gain the birthright. But, God was pleased with their faith. They trusted God alone for their salvation and help. All these testify that broken sinners can and will finish the race by trusting God alone.

We also know that Jesus ran this race perfectly. He had no sin and never faltered in any way in His faith. Jesus was the originator of faith and the perfecter of it as well.

**1 Peter 2:21-23**  21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;

Nevertheless, Jesus suffered and struggled in this life. This is the human life of fallen men. The struggle of this life are not “payback” from God. The life of Jesus is the proof of that. Jesus committed no sin and yet He too struggled.

So we have the witness of sinful men that God is absolutely trustworthy and we can trust Him to save us and preserve us to the end of our life. Such trust (faith) pleases God.

We also have the example of our sinless Savior Himself that God is absolutely trustworthy and we can always believe Him. Suffering and struggle are the human condition and God will perfect our trust in Him through it.

**Stronger faith does not mean that God will have more confidence in you.**

**It means that you will have more confidence in Him**

“Sinners” have run this race as well as Our Sinless Savior.” They both testify that it can be run by trusting in God alone. Like the coach on race day, God’s Word gives us useful instructions for how to run.

**Hebrews 12:12-17**  12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. 14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; 16 that *there be* no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a *single* meal. 17 For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

There are four :

.

* Strengthen one another in the Race [12]
* Stay Focused on the finish [13]
* Seek peace with men and holiness with God [14]
* Shun all human works and trust God’s Grace alone [15-17]

**Strengthen one another in the Race [12]**

**Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble [12]:**  What a textbook description of physical exhaustion. The legs can hardly hold you and the arms are hanging at the side. God uses a perfect metaphor for spiritual exhaustion. It happens when we lose all hope of success and become exhausted by trying.

We do not need to look far to find the spiritually exhausted. Any believer trying to please God by performing well will do. But…the word “strengthen” is a command and pure logic proves that God is not just telling you to be strong. How can any man strengthen himself when he is in a race that cannot be paused? He simply cannot help himself. When someone says, “you just need to be strong” that is like telling a person they just need more money when they are destitute.

The command is addressed to fellow runners. It is a plural and it goes like this, “all of you strengthen the arms that are hanging and the knees that are buckling.” God is speaking to the church….The other runners on the track. We are family and we not only love Christ but we love one another.

Ginny and I are very seldom “spiritually exhausted” at the same time so we can usually help one another in our weakness. When the circle includes a body of believers who are running the same race with the same goal with the same faith fixed on Christ, the power to strengthen each other becomes even stronger. There will always be those among us who are exhausted from loss of hope or daily performance of duty. The command is for all of us to strengthen each other all the time.

I have seen this evil repeatedly in my life: Professing Christians, who cannot admit their own struggle and who stand on the sideline berating those who are discouraged and exhausted. The command is for us to get out there on the track and help them go on.

**Galatians 6:2**  2 Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

**Stay Focused on the finish [13]**

**Make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed [13]:** This too is addressed to the entire church. We are to make a nice straight line to the finish for ourselves and one another. God has already told us where that line leads. If you are a runner on a track you must stay in your lane. Beside that being the rule, it is also totally practical. Have you ever seen a sprinter or a hurdler zigzagging down the course? Of course not. Have you ever seen one looking over his shoulder or up at stands as he raced? Never! So what is the command here:

**Keep the main thing the main thing**. The Christian life is about Christ it is not about us. God saved us to make Himself Glorious. Your redeemed life is giving glory to Christ. Let me explain:

* Before we were ever born, God set His affection on us and made it our destiny to be His children. He did this so that all creation would recognize His grace and praise Him for it.

**Ephesians 1:4-6**  4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace

* While we were stone cold spiritually dead in our sin, Christ made us alive…So that we could not congratulate ourselves but would give Him the praise He deserves.

**Ephesians 2:4-5**  4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

The redeeming and sustaining love of Christ for you IS THE MAIN THING! Paul and countless faithful pastors have prayed this prayer for their people…

**Ephesians 3:14-21**  14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

How then do we fail to “make straight paths for our feet?” By running a race other than the one marked out for us. The race is not to see who can do the most witnessing, or attend the most meetings. It is not to see who does the most things in church or who keeps the Sabbath or who eats or does not eat. This is zigzagging on the track. The path we are to make is a **straight path**, leading to the person and Glory of Jesus Christ. “Fixing our eyes on Him and considering Him,” we run in our lane toward that goal.

**“You are not running toward the end of your life. It is not death that awaits you…it is not even heaven…It is your Savior who said, ‘that where I am you may also be.’ “**

**“So that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed:”** The Scripture here is not talking about that rare Christian who is lame. It is saying that those running are lame. “Lame” is a word that means, “deprived of a foot.” God speaks of footless runners and says that if they run toward Christ they are healed. Running, however sincerely, outside the straight lane to Christ will only cripple us further.

May God strengthen us not to give one another platitudes and rules when we can give them our sincere love and encouragement in the race they must run.

**Seek peace with men and holiness with God [14]**

**Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord [14]:** Pursue means to chase it. Be the one who tries to create peace. We know that peace is given by Christ and not available anywhere else.

**John 14:27**  27 "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.

**Peace with men:** Is not always possible. There are those who do not want to live in peace with you…but…if they do and you refuse to live in peace with them you are refusing to love them. When we refuse to love others we are defying our dear Lord Jesus.

**John 13:34-35**  34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

We are to love men and love God. This is how we run with our eyes fixed on Christ. We love men by pursuing peace with them and we love God by pursuing our Holy Jesus.

**Pursue Sanctification:** Chase after Christ who is the source of all Sanctification.

**1 Corinthians 1:30** But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and **sanctification**, and redemption,

Sanctification describes making something normal into something unique and holy for God. It is a work of God and cannot be done by men. These two pursuits sum up the “Greatest Commandment.”

**Mark 12:30-31**  30 AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' 31 "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

You **can** pursue something you already possess. If you are really an excellent baseball player you can pursue greatness. If you are married you can still pursue your wife’s love. Paul even told Timothy to:

**2 Timothy 1:6** “kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you…

**“Without which no one will see the Lord:”** Sanctification is included with and inseparable from our salvation. No one will see God without it. YES! It is THAT important! Now that you possess it…pursue it. Seek to be more like the Savior and less like yourself. You are pursuing Christ Himself. Go Hard After Him!!

**Shun all human works and religion and trust God’s Grace alone [15-17]**

**See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled [15]:** The church, “The body of believers” is to “watch itself.” “See to it” is a word that means “to oversee.” It does not mean just “watch.” We are not just to be busy bodies and nagging nit pickers. Watch over means to lovingly care for. It is how your Pastors and Elders care for you.

**Acts 20:28** "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

The fatal error for any church is to misunderstand, forget or just plain reject grace. The church is to watch out for this one thing above all other things. It does not mean to imagine we know one another’s thoughts or motives! Resist doing that at all costs! God says that we cannot know one another’s motives or thoughts.

**1 Corinthians 2:11**  11 For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?

The Biblical way is to orient your life toward knowing Christ and trusting Him for your earthly and eternal life needs. Then proclaim Him as the only solution to the sins, obstacles and struggles of this life.

Men tend toward self-justification. Even people who believe Christ died for their sins still tend toward doing works as a way of sanctification. If we just do better at the Christian life we will be “better Christians.” Men are always tempted to imagine that some good work will put them in better standing with God. The truth is we are already in proper standing with God when we give our lives to Christ. All righteous things in your life come from knowing Christ…from His being in you and changing you! Make sure that you do not miss this. Otherwise you will be falling short of the Grace of God.

**Ephesians 2:10**  10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

**“No root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled” [15]:** The second vital thing the church is to be vigilant about is a “root of bitterness.” It first appeared in Israel when Moses urged watchfulness….

**Deuteronomy 29:18**  18 …. so that there will not be among you a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations; that there will not be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood.

Believers are to shun the “gods of this age.” They tell their own stories about how the world began. They print their own “owner’s manual for the human mind.” They offer prosperity in the place of Christlike living and pop psychology in the place of surrendering your life and thoughts to Jesus Christ who said, “come to me and I will give you rest.”

The church is not supposed to “make nice” with the idols of our age because they defile Christ’s children. He told the church to protect His children until He comes back for them. This is exactly what God had in mind when He told Elders to “watch over” you.

**That *there be* no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a *single* meal [16]:** Esau is a study in “knowing the truth and choosing the lie.” He was next in line to receive the headship of the family through whom God would bring the Messiah. But, he cared nothing for the promises and blessings of God. He preferred worldly, temporal and passing pleasures. What God wanted to do in the world through his family was worth one single bowl of mush to him.

It was not the actual “things” Esau did that were so bad. Hunting and living in the outdoors is certainly no sin. It is that he regarded God so lightly. In his mind God did not even move the scale of value in his life. It was the here and now that he cherished and he literally sold his future for what he could gain in 5 minutes. What a pathetic and godless man.

**For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears [17]:** Some people never realize what joy and fulfillment they have carelessly cast aside in this life. Esau did realize it but it was too late. Don’t we believe that it is never too late to repent? Yes we do, but Esau did not repent. He was grief stricken that he threw away his inheritance and place in the family and he wanted it back. John MacArthur observed that…

“Just because he sought for it with tears does not indicate sincerity or true remorse. He found no place for repentance. He bitterly regretted, but he did not repent. He selfishly wanted God’s blessing but he did not want God. He had fully apostatized and was forever outside the pale of God’s grace. He went on …..

**Hebrews 10:26**  26 ….. sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.” ***John MacArthur Jr.***

Dear friends, brothers and sisters. Do not consider the things of this world of greater value than Christ. Trade nothing for Christ. He is of greater value than all else. He is Eternal and He can and will fulfill the deepest longings of your heart.

**CONCLUSION:** God has called us together to **strengthen one another in the race**…which is the struggle we call life. Please…do not call out from the sideline that your brother is weak or broken or even a sinner. Instead look for ways to strengthen him to keep trusting Christ. They will do the same for you when you tire.

**Hebrews 10:24-25**  24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

**Do not run on crooked paths**. Run in a straight line and remind one another that we are running toward Jesus. The world and Satan call you off the track. They want you sidelined because the race is how God perfects you and makes Himself glorious in the process. Satan is opposed to the glory of God and opposes you because you are God’s Child, God’s Image bearer and His trophy of Grace. When we walk on the straight path toward the Savior, our weakness is healed. Christ is the healing force in our lives.

**Pursue peace with men and the holiness of God**. Both of these will keep your eyes fixed upon the Savior. You cannot love men without loving Christ first. And you cannot love Christ without pursuing the love for other believers.

**Never, ever believe that God is more pleased when you work more**. He is pleased when you believe and trust Him. Do not miss the grace of God and trade it for something you have done to gain His favor. Never love or trust anything in the place of Christ and never value anything higher than your love, worship and knowledge of Him.

The testimony of the saints of old is that weak, humans can run this race successfully. Jesus became the author and perfecter of our faith by choosing to run it just like us. He is the one we look at, the one we trust and the one who will help us. Paul knew believers were God’s dear children when he prayed for a church full of weak, broken saints…

**1 Corinthians 1:4-9**  4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you (secure you) to the end, blameless (unable to be accused) in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.