

“HEBREWS”

Session #30—Hebrews 12:12-17

The basic thrust of Hebrews 12:12–17 is clearly exhortation. What is meant by the word, *exhortation*?

An exhortation is a communication intended to urge or persuade the recipients to take some action.

The words *strengthen*, *make straight*, *pursue*, and *see to it* are all terms of exhortation. The purpose here is not to teach truth only but to encourage living up to the truth.

Teaching and exhortation are inseparable. Teaching sound doctrine that is not applied is worthless, and exhortation that is not based on sound doctrine is misleading. God’s method for instruction is simple—explain the spiritual principles and then illustrate and encourage the application of them.¹

It is one thing...

- to believe in the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture; but then you must live under the authority of Scripture.
- to believe that Jesus Christ is Lord; but then you must surrender to His lordship over every area of your life.
- to believe God is omnipotent; but then you must trust Him when the going gets tough.

Hebrews 12 begins with an exhortation. After a foundation of doctrine was carefully laid and faith was carefully explained and defined and illustrated, the

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Hebrews](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 400.

writer exhorted the Jewish recipients of this letter to “*run the race that was set before them.*”

- **It is not enough to know the New Covenant is better; we must accept it for ourselves.**
- **It is not enough to know that Christ is the superior and perfect High Priest; we must trust in His atoning sacrifice for us.**
- **It is not enough to know how we should live; we must actually live what we know.²**

The writer is saying, “On the basis that you should run the race that is set before you and that your suffering may very well be an aspect of God’s loving discipline in your life, there are three exhortations you must implement in your life.”

1. ENDURANCE

Hebrews 12:12–13... 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.*

In this passage the author of Hebrews speaks about the Christian life with metaphorical language that makes use of universally understood gestures—drooping hands, weak knees, lame feet, etc. The author speaks as a coach seeking to fire up the members of his team. Although the race is not yet finished, the runners are tired. They need an encouraging word.³

He alludes to a Messianic passage in Isaiah. The faithful in Israel had been through a lot. They had many evil kings, some false prophets, stubborn fellow Israelites, powerful enemies who threatened them, and seemingly no prospect of ever living in their own land in peace. They were discouraged and despondent, ready to give up.

² John F. MacArthur Jr., [Hebrews](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 401.

³ Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, [Exposition of Hebrews](#), vol. 15, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 381.

So, *the prophet reminds them of the coming kingdom*, when “the wilderness and the desert will be glad” and “they will see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God” (Isa. 35:1–2). Then *he counsels them to encourage each other*: “Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. Say to those with anxious heart, ‘Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; the recompense of God will come, but He will save you’ ” (v. 3–4).

The word picture of “*feeble hands and weak knees*” is a familiar description of discouragement and despair.

Isaiah 35:1–3... The wilderness and the desert will be glad, And the Arabah will rejoice and blossom; Like the crocus **2** It will blossom profusely And rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, The majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the LORD, The majesty of our God. **3** Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble.

Job 4:3–4... “Behold you have admonished many, And you have strengthened weak hands. **4** “Your words have helped the tottering to stand, And you have strengthened feeble knees.”

In other words, “Don’t give up now. A better day is coming. Look forward to that in faith and you will have the encouragement and strength you need. Victory is ahead!”⁴

Dejection is one of the great strategies the *evil one* employs to defeat God’s people and to stall God’s kingdom progress.

When times are hard for us. We must not quit. We must keep on encouraging other believers (Hebrews 10:23-25). Encouragement breeds encouragement!

Look at verse 13—“***Make straight paths for your feet.***” The prevailing metaphor is that of a race. It’s like the author is exhorting the people to “stay in your lane so you won’t be disqualified.”

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Hebrews](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 402.

Proverbs 4:25–27... Let your eyes look directly ahead And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. 26 Watch the path of your feet And all your ways will be established. 27 Do not turn to the right nor to the left; Turn your foot from evil.

Avoid distractions. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-2). Don't get careless as you run your race and never lose your will to win! We must be sure that the way you live does not cause any unbeliever to reject the gospel or any immature believer to lose heart and to backslide.

2. PASSION

Hebrews 12:14... Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

Look at the word "pursue." The writer is not saying, "Why don't you give it a try?" The verb here was used for the straining of the muscles and sinews of a horse when he's running or a hound in pursuit of a fox.

We must pursue peace. Positionally, every believer has been blessed with perfect peace—*peace with God* and *the peace of God*. What we have positionally we must live out practically. When we think of peace with other people, we must realize that it is a two-way street.

Romans 12:18... If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

James 3:13–18... Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. 18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

We are only responsible for our side of the peace process, but we cannot use another person's hostility as an excuse for responding in kind.

We must pursue sanctification. Sanctification has to do with our loving God and desiring to be a vessel of honor set apart for His eternal glory. It is the ongoing supernatural work of God to rescue justified sinners from the disease of sin and to conform them to the image of his Son: holy, Christlike, and empowered to do good works.

Westcott wrote, "*Sanctification is preparation for the presence of God.*" If God is holy, then all those who fellowship with Him must be holy. If our spiritual quest is to glorify and enjoy God forever and that God is a holy God, then our character must be transformed to reflect His holiness.

3. VIGILANCE

Hebrews 12:15–17... 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; 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.

The author lists three things will wreck the spiritual life of a church or a family.

A failure to appropriate the grace of God. The Lord has made so many blessings available to us as believers. Here are a few examples—*the Word of God, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the privilege of worshiping together in the Body of Christ, the obedience associated with believer's baptism, the observance of the Lord's Supper.* The believer who neglects these wrecks his spiritual life, the spiritual life of his family, and the spiritual life of the church. This one, if he is a true believer, does not lose his salvation. He does lose his rewards.

A root of bitterness in the heart. Anyone who lives an unsanctified life has a bad influence on their family and on the church itself. Evil (moral or doctrinal or personal) spreads like gangrene and contaminates others who encounter him.

An immoral and godless person. He uses the illustration of Esau. An immoral and godless person like this can infect an entire church. He treated spiritual things (his birthright) as if it had no value to him. All he was concerned about was his appetite.

Later on he wanted the blessing but it was too late! He could have been the family priest. He could have inherited a double portion of his father's property, but it was too late! True repentance was out of reach for him.