

Hebrews 12:1-13

Enduring Faith

The Summit Church

MPT: Perseverance in adversity, and purpose in discipline.

MPS: Endurance comes from fixing your eyes on Jesus and seeing the purpose in discipline.

Introduction

Happy Thanksgiving weekend...my name is Curtis and I am the Creative Pastor here at the Summit. What exactly does that mean? Well that's the beauty of it; nobody knows, so there's no way to measure my job performance.

I imagine some of you are in town visiting friends/family and this might be your first time here, and whoever you came with has been telling you about this awesome church they attend...and you've been SO excited to hear Pastor J.D. speak, who they won't shut up about...welp, spoiler alert: I'm not him. BUT we do preach from the same book...and that book is inspired by God himself. So I'm just gonna stick to preaching God's Word today and not mine...and if you don't like that, you can take it up with the Author. So if you have your bibles you can go ahead and begin turning to Hebrews 12... AND I WANT TO ASK YOU THIS QUESTION:

- *Have you ever felt like God was using circumstances in your life – namely difficult circumstances – to get your attention?*
- *Have you ever felt like God was using circumstances you didn't understand to teach you some sort of lesson?*
- *Have you ever wondered, "Why am I going through this struggle? And does God have a purpose in it?"*

If we're being honest, it's really easy to wonder at times whether **God even cares about what's going in your life. Is he anywhere to be found?** Because sometimes when I look around at my circumstances, he seems to be completely AWOL.

- Oftentimes it's difficult circumstances that either leads us **to** faith, or **away** from it. Circumstances can either **solidify** our faith, or **break** it.

Andy Stanley says one of the main things that erodes faith faster than anything else is **unexplainable circumstances where God doesn't do what we think he ought to do.** It's what we'll call "**circumstantial faith.**"¹

- Circumstantial faith says, *"I believe in God based on my ability to see God in my circumstances."*
- Our belief becomes based on what we **see**, what we **experience**, and what people around us **do**. It's a faith that goes up or down depending on factors in your life.
 - Times are good (job is steady, friends, health, kids behaving) = *God is good...all the time...*
 - Times are bad (laid off, \$\$ low, husband leaves, gets cancer) = *God is mean...if he even exists at all!*

This kind of faith is incredibly fragile, because:

- a) **Life is inconsistent.**
 - a. Things don't always turn out like they should. Unexpected things happen.
- b) **We're bad at interpreting events.**
 - a. Something we think is the end of the world one day, might end up being the best thing that's ever happened to us the next. (*I think this is actually just called High School.*)
- c) **Our timeframe isn't long enough.**

¹ Andy Stanley, *Faith, Hope, and Luck: Better Odds*

- a. We pray about something on Monday and if God hasn't answered it by Tuesday we're like, "What the heck, God?"

What we're going to look at today is how the writer of Hebrews addresses this type of faith head on.

Context

Something that's interesting about the book of Hebrews is that no one is exactly sure who wrote it...**HE-BREWS**.

Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were **going all out for God**...and this was causing lots of **persecution** and **adversity** – they were being **attacked**. The culture they were in was very **violent** towards the gospel – so they were being put in **prison**, having their **stuff taken** from them, and were having the **right to buy and sell removed** from them.

- Because of this, some of them were thinking about reverting back to Judaism in order to avoid persecution as Christians.
- So this letter is written to encourage them, saying: *No matter how bad your situation is, **PERSEVERE...ENDURE!** Don't abandon your faith based on your circumstances!*

And so the writer presents us with the opposite of circumstantial faith, which is **enduring faith** that looks at Jesus alone...so let's read...

Walkthrough, **Hebrews 12:1-13 (NIV)**

¹Therefore, 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.**

- (Isn't there something comforting about Jesus being **seated at the right hand of God**? He's not **panicking**. He's not **anxious**. He's not **worried** about what might happen based on an election. He's not in a **tizzy** because he didn't get the Black Friday sale he wanted. No, no, no...**he's seated because he's sovereign and nothing can stir him into a panic.**)

³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

These were some of the first verses I ever memorized, actually. Even though I memorized it, I never really thought about what the first part meant: *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a **great cloud of witnesses**..."*

- When I became a Christian in 2008, one of the first things I was taught about Scripture was when you see the word "therefore," you always look to see *what it is **there for**...*
- So if we look back at chapter 11, we realize this "cloud of witnesses" refers to everyone in the "hall of faith." It mentions the faith of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Rahab...all the ppl we've learned about this year in going through The Whole Story series.
- So when you read about being *"surrounded by such a **great cloud of witnesses**,"* think of it like a stadium where the seats are filled with saints who **endured in faith** and act as examples for you to look at while you run the race. Pushing you. Saying, **"We've been there – through the ups and downs – and I promise you, it's all worth it!"**
 - The writer gives us an **admonition** to run, but first he gives us **examples** of those who already have!
- We're given these examples that remind us of what **true faith** looks like...not just in success, but also in the midst of **adversity**...

- ...which is why **Hebrews 11** also includes those who *“³⁶...faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.³⁷They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. . .*
- See God is not just the God of your earthly successes...he’s also the God of your struggles.
- The point is that no matter what obstacles come your way, run your race with **endurance** and **perseverance**. He’s reminding us what to believe, regardless of our situation, because *he has planned something better* than our circumstances *for us!*
 - So he’s telling us, “Looking to the saints of old, here’s how you have a faith that endures.”

Two Keys to an Enduring Faith:

1) Fix Your Focus on the Son (vv1-4)

(v1) *...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,² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.*

Now I. HATE. RUNNING.

- The only thing I’m thinking about when running...is stopping. If you’re ever driving and see me running alongside the ROAD, please call the cops, because someone is chasing me.
- But one thing I do know about running is that you want to wear as little as possible to have the least amount of resistance.
 - That’s why runners wear these super short shorts and aerodynamic sunglasses, with their shaved heads and clothes that weigh -2lbs; **they’re removing everything that hinders them from running as fast as possible.**

- For instance, if you see someone trying to win a race with a 45lb weight above their head, what’s your first thought? They’re either a **fool** or a **Crossfitter**...and is there really a difference? You’d scream, *“If you want to win, drop the weight!”*
- And this is exactly what the writer is telling us: **throw off anything and everything that hinders you from running as fast as you possibly can toward Christ.**

And this sounds perfectly logical, until you realize this is completely different than how we’re taught to think in the church. We’re taught to think that running after Jesus simply means avoiding sin. Right? In a sense, we’re taught that the holiest Christians aren’t the ones who do *great* things, but the holiest Christians are the ones who avoid *bad* things.

- But let me tell you what **the lowest question** in the Christian life is: *“Is this a sin?”* That’s not the question Scripture presents us with, though. What the question *should* be is: *“Does it help me run?”*
 - This would be like trying to win a bball game by *not fouling*. That’s not how you win! Sure, you can go stand in the corner to make sure you don’t foul, but *that’s not the way you compete.*
- Our attitude shouldn’t be, *“How many sins can I avoid?”* but rather, *“How many weights can I lay aside so I can run as fast as possible toward Jesus?”*

What this means is that **there are things in your life that “hinder” that aren’t necessarily sins**...yet you still need to get rid of them.

- The music you listen to might not be filled with expletives, but does it help you focus on Jesus?
- ~~The person you’re dating might not be steering you toward sexual immorality, but do they help you grow in Christlikeness?~~
- You may avoid watching shows with nudity and terrible language, but what does it say about your desire for Christ

when you spend more time in front of the TV than you do in your bible?

- It's not at all a sin to use the money God has blessed you with to buy a new house or car or boat. But is purchasing those things hindering your walk with God because it's making you desire things of this world more than you desire Christ?
- ~~Social media is a great thing, but how about when it's the sole place you're finding approval and satisfaction?~~
 - See, you may be carrying something that's not necessarily **bad**, but it's not *God's best*. And you need to throw it off. And once you do, you'll feel like you just put on some brand new Nikes as you begin **sprinting** toward Christ!
 - And as you run, **FIX YOUR FOCUS** on him.
 - "Can't hit what you can't see!"
 - There's ONE THING that can make all the difference in life...

ILLUSTRATION: Beard/no beard. Since I've been about 16 I've been able to grow a full man-beard. It's a blessing and a curse, because I hate shaving more than anything in the world. **STORY OF MEETING DOUGLAS FOR INTERNSHIP.** *World's best criminal* Seriously, I look like a different person w/o a beard.

- So here's me with a full beard [PIC #1]
- Now, get ready for it [PIC #2] and here's 15 y/o me.
 - Last time I shaved, my daughter stopped saying "Daddy!" and started saying "Ohhh nooo."
- There's ONE THING that makes the difference in whether you **take me seriously** or whether you **won't even let me buy cigarettes.**

There's ONE THING that can make all the difference in the world, and in the Christian life, **it's where your eyes are focused.**

Know what the best part about this whole thing is? That *it's not about how fast you run; it's only about where you fix your focus!*

- **There's a type of faith** focuses on the circumstances – on the distance, on the obstacles, on other runners, on the heat, on the fatigue; on the job loss, on the bad health, on the wayward child...
- **Focused and enduring faith** fixates on Jesus – the one who went the distance for us. The one who conquered every obstacle. The one who died for every runner. The one who endured **fatigue** and **thirst** and **exhaustion** and **beatings** and **crucifixion**... He's the redeemer of all that is ruined...the Savior of all things tainted by sin...and the Lord of all of life.
 - **So fixing your focus on him** and what he has done will guarantee that you will NOT fall, but that you RUN with **endurance** and **perseverance** the race marked out for you, **no matter what your circumstances, because he's already won the race for us!** ... and he's seated at the right hand of God! He's already won, showered, changed clothes, and is sitting down – saying, "Join my team 'cuz I've already won!"

...which is why it goes on to say that we should (v3) "**Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**"

To "**consider him...**" is another way of saying "set your mind" – **this is exactly what it means to fix your focus:**

- Rom 8:6, "**The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.**"
- Col 3:2, "**Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.**"
- Phil 4:8, "**Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.**"
 - What is **always** true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, & worthy of praise? **JESUS IS!**

ELISABETH ELLIOT: “The secret [to enduring] is Christ in me, not me in a different set of circumstances.”

- Some of you think if your circumstances would change it'd be a lot easier to praise God...

We can endure the race because Jesus endured the cross...so we FIX OUR FOCUS on him!

Let's pick back up in verse 5...

⁵ 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,

⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”

Hebrews tells us that the second key to enduring faith is to...

2) Appreciate Discipline from the Father (vv5-13)

“See Your Pain Differently”

Discipline is heavy, weighty, and it is GOD.

Before we go any further, we need to understand the difference b/t Punishment and discipline:

- Yes, God does **discipline** his children, but they never suffer punishment...because Jesus was punished fully in our place, so all that is left for us is mercy. So even when God is disciplining you, he's molding your character **in love**, not

punishing you in judgment.² That's why the text says, “*The Lord **disciplines** the one he loves!*”

ILLUSTRATION: COACH MAXWELL. Coach, stop riding me!-“*If I ever stop picking on you, it means I've given up on you.*”

- He was picking on me because he saw my potential. And God does the same thing as we run in the Christian life.
- So if you feel like you're being picked on, know that it's because God sees your potential!
- God's discipline is proof he hasn't given up on you!

Do you understand how significant this is? This means that going through such discipline actually *proves* you are a child of God.

- This means that God has a purpose for your pain.
- This means that God cares enough about you to correct you and keep his hand on you.

Two different people could stab you – one could be doing it to murder you, another could be a surgeon that's doing it to ultimately save your life. Both hurt...both are painful...but one of them is doing it out of love and compassion.

- When God cuts, he cuts like a surgeon who wants to save your life!
- What Satan will try to do is convince you that your trials are proof that God doesn't love you. God's Word says the exact opposite: your trials and sufferings are the best proof that God **DOES** love you! Because while God may let others alone in their sins, he will **always** correct sin in his own children.³

We ought to **see** discipline from the Father, **appreciate** it, **submit** to it, and **grow** from it.

- The more God cares, the more he corrects!

² Per usual, J.D. is in green, 'cuz he's \$\$

³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2404.

- The only way to appreciate it is by seeing and understanding discipline for what it is, NOT for how it feels.

⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; **God is treating you as his children.** For what children are not **disciplined** by their father?

Now I want to be sensitive here, because I know some of you have had *terrible* earthly fathers, and you were not disciplined out of love, but out of anger...that's if he was even around at all. And I am so incredibly sorry that is your experience.

I would love to introduce you to **God as Father**, who steps in where your earthly father may have failed you; who can be the Father you've always wanted and needed.

- **God is not abusive.**
 - He does not discipline out of anger, but out of love.
 - God is not cruel; he's compassionate.
 - God is not trying to beat you down, but to grow you up.
- For some of you it wasn't what your dad *did*, but rather what he *didn't* do. **God is not negligent or absentee.**
 - He has promised to never leave you nor forsake you.
 - He is never late. He never breaks his commitments.
 - God is not like some of the dads in society today who are male enough to have a child, but aren't man enough to raise them.
- **Not overprotective.**
 - Allows us to go through hard things in order to learn and grow.
 - **Dad hitting me with first pitch.** He wasn't trying to **hurt** me, he was trying to **help** me!
 - You can often tell how much a Father loves his child not by how much he protects them *from*, but by what

he allows them to *go through* and then uses it for a good purpose in their life.⁴

LISTEN: God is the perfect father. And everything he does or allows in your life is because he loves you so much.

⁸ If you are not **disciplined**—and everyone undergoes **discipline**—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹ Moreover, 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! ¹⁰ They **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.

One of the greatest, yet hardest to grasp truths in the world is that **God is more concerned about your good than you are.** He's always thinking long-term.

- "God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness."
- There's something that occurs in **suffering** and **discipline** that brings about the **fullness of holiness.** There's something about suffering that detaches our love from the things of this world and makes us more and more like Jesus.⁵
- Sharing in God's holiness only comes by sharing in Christ's sufferings.

¹¹ No **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.

Again, "discipline" is not punishment; it's training. There's a play on words here... In Greek it's "*gymnazo*," from which we get our word "gymnasium." **It means to exercise vigorously.**

⁴ Furtick, *When God Counts to 3*

⁵ Chandler, *Tough Love*

- There is a sense in which God is working in your life like a coach or a trainer.
 - The way a muscle grows is by breaking it down. Then after you break it down, your body rebuilds is stronger.
- In the same way, God knows what you need to build up your faith in righteousness and peace, and often it comes in the form of discipline.

ILLUSTRATION: Working out

- Many different forms of working out...I like to lift weights.
- You measure your strength by how much weight your muscles can endure.
 - *Guy that tries to lift too much...
- The weight is the **opposition** that that puts you in the perfect **position** to accomplish your **purpose** in working out...

In the same way, what you see as **opposition** (*weight...the persecution...the discipline...the divorce...the diagnosis*), God sees as having you in the perfect **position** to accomplish his **purpose** in your life in growing you in righteousness and peace!

- While you are running, God is building your strength!
- Some of y'all don't like the thought of God being your personal trainer. He knows what you **need**. He knows what's **best** for you. He knows what to **feed** you. // He knows when to **make you cry**. He knows when to **encourage** you. He knows when to **shout** at you. He knows when you need a **hug**. He knows when to make it **tough**. He knows when to give you a **break**. // **He knows how to push you to your limits so that your faith will be strengthened.**
 - There's times you're going to be **sore**...times you'll feel **injured**...there will be **bad days**...you won't always follow his plan perfectly...
 - ...The path of the believer is rarely without trials and tribulations – don't mistake your *rocky path* with being in the *wrong position*.
- **If you are not a little sore, you are not getting any stronger!**

- Enduring in discipline during your race is God's way of growing you in righteousness and peace.

So even when you feel like all of the world is against you and you can't go on any further, think about the cloud of witnesses...fix your focus on Jesus who went before you...and know that in Christ, when you run, **you never lose**, you are more than a conqueror...Christ has already won the race!

(VAMP)

¹²Therefore (as you run with endurance by looking to Jesus and understanding discipline), **strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.** ¹³"Make level paths for your feet," (He's reiterating *how* to run) **so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.**

- HCSB: "...so that what is lame may not be **dislocated** but **healed** instead." // **And this is the gospel at its core:**

You and I are lame. We are spiritually disabled. We are broken because of our sin. We don't have the strength to pick our dead selves up, much less get up and run! But God, who is a loving Father stepped in. God – who, yes, disciplines – but steps in to **heal** us. And so he sent us Jesus.

- He sent Jesus as our example of how to endure.
- He sent Jesus as the Christ who conquers all of our circumstances and sin.
- He sent Jesus for us to fix our focus on when all of life is failing.
- He reminds us that he is our loving Daddy even in discipline.

Conclusion

The question is simple: does your faith change – does your view of God change – based on your circumstances?

As a believer, there's only **one way** to endure the race marked out for you: to fix your focus on Jesus and to endure discipline from a loving Father.

- We can endure the race because Jesus endured the cross.

COMMUNION

God uses all things in your life not to pay you back, but to bring you back. The gospel is that God paid Jesus back 100% for our sin. If you are a Christian, every ounce of punishment for sin was put upon Jesus. And for God to give you even one drop of that punishment for sin would be unjust, because God would be demanding two punishments for the same sin.

Jesus has already paid for your sin. He paid for it on the cross when his body was broken and his blood was shed for you and for me. And the way remember that is by taking communion together...**FENCE TABLE**

So our teams are going to come – and as they do let's worship, reflect, and thank God for his provision in Christ.

