

Hebrews 12:3-17 - “strive for holiness”

Intro: Many pulpits are directly addressing the pandemic, Covid 19.

- Instead of addressing this crisis directly –
- I want to allow the *exposition* from **Hebrews 12** to lead us to what God wants us to hear.
- God speaking through his sacred Word will not let us down! **He never fails**.

[Theme] Our Heavenly Father is the ultimate parent.

- Christians experience the ultimate Parent to Child relationship.
 - My **chief concern** is for my children to be right with God.
 - **Reconciled**.
- **John** said it this way about his spiritual children he had pastored:

^{ESV} **3 John 1:4** I have no greater joy than to hear that ^amy children are walking in the truth. (3Jo 1:4 ESV)

[KEY] I know I feel this deep concern as a parent. I also have this concern for fellow believers.

- We all want our children to grow throughout their lifetime.
 - This sincere concern flows from a source greater than us.
 - This chief concern is our Lord’s chief concern.

[KEY] Hebrews 12 makes spiritual growth synonymous with personal holiness!

- A believer’s holiness is *synonymous* with “walking in the truth” or “running the Christian race.”
 - Your personal holiness is not an end in and of itself but actually a means to an end!
 - We are holy in this life because we have Christ and those who have Christ are holy.
 - We have a *new nature* that love’s Christ who is holy.
- This new disposition desires holiness but not as an end. Christ is our end!

[KEY] Another way to say this is Christ in heaven is our goal! Not just heaven.

Hebrews 12:14 summarizes this:

^{ESV} **Hebrews 12:14** ^aStrive for peace with everyone, and for the ^bholiness ^cwithout which no one will see the Lord. (Heb 12:14 ESV)

- This verse reflects the words of Jesus in his sermon on the mount.

^{ESV} **Matthew 5:8** "Blessed are ^athe pure in heart, for ^bthey shall see God. (Mat 5:8 ESV)

- Again, as it is with parenting, we do not desire our children's holiness as an end in of it itself.
 - We want our children to be going somewhere in life.
 - To live holy, lead God glorifying lives, and have the assurance of heaven.

[Point] Hebrews 12 teaches that our Heavenly Father's parental concern is this same concern for all Christians.

[TRANS] Verse 3 is a pivot point between a "marathon runner" word-picture to a "family/parenting" word-picture.

- A word-picture of a father who disciplines his sons for the purpose of holiness.
- Holy children on their journey to heaven (cf. v. 10 "...he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness").

[TRANS] Hebrews 12 reminds us that God is sovereign over your holiness! Holiness is a theme throughout.

- Verse 4 "struggle against sin"
- Verse 4 "struggle against sin"
- Verse 10 "sharing in holiness"
- Verse 11 "peaceful fruit of righteousness"
- Verse 14 "strive for...holiness"
- Verse 16 "...that no one is...unholy"

[Principle] Practically speaking, God's chief concern that you will be holy in this life and the life to come means two things:

- Throughout your life, you will always be fighting "a particular sin."
- Throughout your life, you will always be enduring "a particular hardship."

1. You will always be *fighting* a particular sin (vv. 3-4)

Verse 3 continues the picture Christians running their marathon.

- The temptation to give up in the race.
- The warnings of Hebrews to not fall away.

^{ESV} **Hebrews 2:1** Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. (Heb 2:1 ESV)

^{ESV} **Hebrews 5:11** About this we have much to say, and it is ^ahard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (Heb 5:11 ESV)

^{ESV} **Hebrews 6:4-6** For it is impossible, in the case of those ^awho have once been enlightened, who have tasted ^bthe heavenly gift, and ^chave shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and ^ahave tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and ^athen have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since ^bthey are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. (Heb 6:4-6 ESV)

[Point] The believer's "**consideration**" of **Christ's race is our motivation** to not drift and to keep running.

- We have the heroes, "**so great a cloud of witnesses**" who ran their race.
- More importantly we have Christ's race he ran to stoke us to finishing!

[Note] "Grow weary" is literally "weary of soul" and "fainthearted."

- **Aristotle** used these **same words of an athlete who flings himself on the ground to the point of collapsing after surging past the winning post of a race [Barclay]**.
- The point is **to not give up** until you **collapse over the finish line**.

[Key] Believers are **called to think deeply** about the "hostility" "from sinners" that was "against" Christ!

- **Christ** never battled personal, **inside of him sin**.
- For **Christ**, sin was always external, **outside of him sin!**
- **Christ could not sin.**
 - Christ is impeccable.
 - He would not give into sin's pressures.
 - He endured sins against him to the uttermost!
- **He endured crushing levels; *outlasting* what we would ever endure.**

"No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good...Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down.

A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness — they have lived a sheltered life by always giving in.

We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means — the only complete realist.” [Lewis]

[TRANS] Verse 4, takes this application a level deeper.

- The clear assumption is that throughout life you will “struggle against sin” – literally “the sin” (v. 4).
- This ties back to 12:1 “the sin which clings so closely” (v. 1).

[Question] “What is the besetting sin that tangles up your feet when you try to run?”

- Running this race requires unburdening yourself from your sin habits!
 - “The sin” might be synonymous with “drifting off” or “giving up.”
 - Instead, “the sin” is whatever you are facing, what you need to let go of!
 - “The sin” discouraging you to the point of quitting!
- The most discouraging thing about your life is this “sin.”

[Appl] This temptation says, “The race is too hard, so give up, make a detour and run to this sin for relief!”

[Note] Verse 4 meets this temptation saying, “resist” (v. 4). Keep going!

- You have not “resisted to the point of shedding blood” (v. 4).
- **Heroes** died for their faith. **Jesus died!** Do not give in to your sin.
 - **Do not quit running. Why?**
 - Because you might give your life!

[Question] “How is this encouraging?” “Do you remember Stephen’s martyrdom?”

^{ESV} **Acts 7:54** Now when they heard these things ^athey were enraged, and they ^bground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ **But he, ^afull of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw ^bthe glory of God, and Jesus standing ^cat the right hand of God.**

⁵⁶ And he said, “**Behold, I see ^athe heavens opened, and ^bthe Son of Man standing ^zat the right hand of God.**”

⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together¹ at him.

⁵⁸ Then ^athey cast him out of the city and ^bstoned him. And ^cthe witnesses laid down their garments ^dat the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, ^ahe called out, “Lord Jesus, ^breceive my spirit.”

⁶⁰ **And ^afalling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, ^b“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, ^che fell asleep. (Act 7:54-60 ESV)**

- God gives grace in death.
- Knowing you did not flinch in your faith.

- “There are worse things than dying!” “Being a coward!”

[Appl] The commitment is to fight your sin to the death. We know we will have to mortify our sin until we are home. Knowing this keeps you from “growing weary” literally “fainting in our souls.”

[Key] Paul fought this same temptation to despair over personal sin!

^{ESV} **Romans 7:24** Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from ^athis body of death?
(Rom 7:24 ESV)

[Appl] Wake up every morning and beg God to give you a passion for Jesus Christ!
Wake up resolved to run to Christ and to fight off your sin!
Your sin is waiting for you bedside, when you wake up but so is Christ!

2. You will always be *surviving* a particular circumstance (vv. 5-11)

[TRANS] Verse 5 *pivots* to the second word-picture of a family.

- A father disciplining his son.
- Emphasis is on the sovereignty of God.
- God’s sovereign work to make you holy!

[Principle] Holiness is not an end in and of itself. ‘

- Yes, called to be holy as God is holy (cff. Lev. 19:2ff; Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:16-17).
- Still, holiness is heaven’s attribute.
- Holiness is Christ’s attribute (cf. Is. 6)

[POINT] So, being refined in holiness as you march toward heaven God’s aim for our lives.

- Prosperity for the Christian is not promised but heaven is!
- This is a “little different” than the prosperity Gospel.
- Hardship promised you because you are a Christian.

[Question] “How do you know whether or not your hard circumstance are punitive?”

- A punishment or corrective?

[Note] paideias is not only punitive and especially in this context should include “training.”

^{ESV} **Ephesians 6:4** Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, ^abut bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Eph 6:4 ESV)

[Key] Training a child or an athlete always includes both punitive measures as well as training.

[Question] “How will you know when hard circumstances are God’s discipline because of your sin?” “When is discipline a God ordered trial for you to grow from?”

- When are you **Job**?
- When are you **David**?
 - Enduring outside “hostility from sinners” (cf. v. 3).
 - Or, “struggling to repent against your own sin” (cf. v. 4).
- **Tying a hard circumstance directly to your sin is futile!**

[Illus] People have labeled the sins of our culture to natural catastrophes.

The same with tying terrorism attacks to the sins of our country.

Even pandemic diseases, but the point of the book of Job is that Job was not party to heaven’s counsel.

He did not know why God allowed his extreme difficulties. Neither did Job’s counselors. However, the point is that Job still knew Who was behind them!

[Appl] We may never know why God allows extreme trials to come into our lives but we will always know Who is ultimately behind them!

[Note] Verses 5 and 6 taken directly from Proverbs 3:11-12 puts this in the immediate context of a father training his son.

- When you are undergoing the difficult strain of what you do not understand, it is important to **remember your sonship**.
 - You are being addressed as “sons” (v. 5).
 - The temptation to give up comes up again – “weary” (v. 5).
- The temptation to “regard lightly” God’s discipline is one response.
 - **The Lord will use a corrective punishment to get your eyes back on him.**
 - **Lighter pressures are also meant to draw us back into dependence.**
- Taking God’s discipline lightly can cause greater pressure.

[Appl] I remember in the course of ministry, when circumstances would get seemingly insurmountable, being told to stick in and not leave. The point was made that God will use whatever anvil he needs to bang out what he needs to in your life. No matter

the ministry post, God is going to pick right up where he left off with what he plans to refine.

[Note] The temptation to not grow “weary” or to “grow faint” (cf. v. 3) is repeated.

[TRANS] In verse 3, the motivation to not give up was based on “considering” Christ. Now, verse 5 exhorts you to not give up because you are a son that “the Lord...loves” (v. 6).

[Point] Why is God concerned to “train” you? He “loves” you (v. 6).

- **The God of the universe makes your life hard because he cares about how you are trending.**
 - You say, “Based on my circumstance, God must love me an awful lot!”
 - Loving “discipline” at the end of verse 6 is specifically described as “chastening” (v. 6).
 - **Discipline is not only this but it is sometimes this.**

[Note] “Chastises” is literally to be “scourged” “whipped” (cf. Matt. 10:17) or “punished” (v. 6).

- The **picture is punishment.**

[Appl] You all know where children who go unpunished are unruly and impossible to bear. Do not lose the context of love. Loving “discipline” is always at play.

[Key] You are a “son whom he receives” (v. 6).

- **Show me a parent, not bringing consequences to bear on a child’s sin and I will show you a self-consumed parent.**
 - Biblical discipline based in love is always **selflessness!**
 - As a parent of many, I know the personal discipline it takes to be consistent and to be loving!
- It is easy to simply react to your child’s sin.
- Your child’s sin, left unchecked brings ruin and shame to parents.
- The entire family feels the effects of an unruly child.
- Abusive discipline only hardens the heart.
- Softhearted parenting, bringing meaningful, thoughtful, and age-appropriate consequences that reach the heart brings about transformative results.

[Key] **No matter how much your child will try to get out of being punished, deep down your child knows discipline is best!**

ESV **Proverbs 22:6** ^aTrain up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. (Pro 22:6 ESV)

[TRANS] Verse 7 circles back to our key principle.

- **Your holiness is not an end in and of itself.**
 - **Perfectionism** has always been a cultish religion.
 - **Pharisaic control**, legalism coupled with the **second blessing theology** is errant.
 - What plays into temptations toward **self-absorption and a false-sense of security! No!**

[Note] The “**discipline**” God instills in your life is what makes for “**endurance**” (v. 7).

- Remember “**endurance**” [**upamovn**] is the ability to bear up under.
 - **You should be able to bear more and more pressure throughout your lifetime.**
 - Being able to bear more is based on levels you have born in the past.
- Taking lightly what God is doing in your life **short circuits God’s work in your life.**

[Point] **The goal has less to do with changing your circumstances and more to do with gearing your heart towards acceptance!**

[TRANS] Verse 7 leading in to **verse 8** brings us back to our sonship.

- **Verse 7** says it is only natural that God is treating you this way because you are legitimately God’s child.
- **Verse 8** says being “**left without discipline**” means you “**are illegitimate children and not sons**” (v. 8).
- Every Christian “**participates**” in “**discipline**” (v. 8).
- All of the **Hebrews 11 heroes** and all of you! Assumed!

[Quote] Early church father, **Jerome**, said, “**The greatest anger of all is when God is no longer angry with us.**”

[Appl] **You see this behavior reflected in children who are neglected. They act out in rebellion, to get their parent’s attention.**

Parents might not even have a conscious thought they are doing this but they are!

People rebel in society, pushing against, generational norms! Denying truth! Identity politics that even 10 years ago would be ludicrous to most.

All, to try the patience of our Lord.

God disciplines us so we will persevere in holiness on the road to heaven. Holy to be holy with Christ.

[TRANS] I am going to *end this morning* with **verse 9** on the note of “respect” (v. 9).

- **Respect for fathers** in our culture is **a dying notion**.
- Lost in the **ocean of passivity!**

[Point] The example of “**earthly fathers who disciplined...**” leads to the only appropriate response we should have toward God.

- The response is simple.
- We are called to “**subject**” ourselves to the Lord.
- The title here, “**the Father of spirits**” (v. 9).
 - This unusual title could mean “**the Father of angels**” (v. 9).
 - Here this title points to **God being Father over sons who will live eternally.**

[Point] Our response is being “**subject**” to literally “**rank yourself under**” the command of God!

- Submission to the difficult circumstance, the discipline God has allowed.
- Submission to God’s refinement! **Why? To “live” (v. 9).**

[Question] “What does this mean?” This is living eternally!

- **Our holy lives vindicate our sonship.**
- **Holiness now is what assures we will be holy forever!**
- **If you have no desire for holiness now, you have no assurance for heaven!**

Conclusion: It is apparent with our national state of emergency that we need the comfort of knowing God our heavenly Father.

He cares that we respond in faith.

That we are subject to Him and His will.

We trust Him, He confirms we are legitimate children of God.

Our longing is for heaven and is because we want Him!

Do you know where this longing began? In God’s loving heart.

^{ESV} 1 John 4:19 ^aWe love because he first loved us. (1Jo 4:19 ESV)