

Intro: To state the obvious, we are livestreaming this morning. This mode of communication is in light of our current world pandemic and to in a spirit of submission and wisdom to communicate truth through modern technology. Though I know you clicked on to join this way, similarly to our radio broadcast, I view this as open-air preaching. During the 1700's the first Awakening is attributed to open air preaching by George Whitfield or John Wesley. Both were banned from the church of England for not being licensed. They became circuit or itinerant preachers traveling by horseback, town to town stopping at strategic locations, setting up their makeshift pulpits, and preaching. Whitfield addressed crowds up to 20,000 and 30,000 people. He preached in acoustically favorable settings where sound reverberated off the water or walls. This was the technology of the day. When the preaching began, those working in the fields would pause, drop their farming tools, mount horses and arrive to the moment. People always looking for hope. Whitfield and Wesley's approach first in England preaching to gravel town workers and then to American Colonists was a soft rebellion to the organized Church of England which frowned upon this claiming it as untraditional. For Whitfield and Wesley, their passion was to communicate Truth and Gospel hope and to this end, the Lord blessed.

Today symbolizes, how our country still benefits from our freedom of speech. Obviously, livestream preaching is not rebellion but an opportunity! We are blessed to hear the Word of Truth in times of crisis!

Covid 19 is on the minds of most everyone in the world. How quickly our world and our country and Anchorage community has changed. For most, during Christmas we would never have guessed things would be on shutdown. Our economy is on lockdown.

"What does this mean for your spiritual life?" Or, "How are you doing in your Christian race?" Not a stretch to say the longer we stay in this season the more there is a temptation to give up. I do not mean give up on life. On survival. On providing for yourself or family. What I mean is practically giving up on God.

In the case of Hebrews 12, give up on pursuing and trusting God. If you are aggressive, you can easily shift into panic mode, trying to achieve personal tranquility in your flesh. If you tend toward passivity, you shift into a reclusive mode. Either mode equally gives up on God, ultimately taking you away from your source of hope.

These days, it is very important to understand God's purposes in allowing difficult trials in the lives of Christians. Otherwise, temptations to sin will fill your empty heart like a vacuum. Has God left us to our suffering? Are we being unjustly punished? Does God still love us?

Hebrews 12 in the natural flow of our exposition addresses these temptations head on. Early in this chapter, the end of verse 3, warns believers to "not grow weary or fainthearted" (v. 3). To collapse too soon running your marathon. Last week, I walked through how this section makes clear that throughout your lifetime, you will always be fighting a particular sin (vv. 3-4) and you will always be surviving a particular circumstance (vv. 5-11).

I want to pick up speed beginning in Hebrews 12:10-11. These verses finish where we left off last time under last week's theme: You will always be surviving a particular circumstance. We are always under something hard for our good. Parents "disciplined us for a short time" (v. 10) meaning our childhood. Though imperfectly, they did the best they could. By comparison, everything God is doing in your life is "for your good" (v. 10). Literally [sumphepov] "to bring together." This word reflects "all things working together for your good" (Rom. 8:28). Circumstances that propel us down the path to "share" or literally

“receive” God’s “holiness” (v. 10). Receiving “the holiness” is in terms of entering heaven! Hardship grows us into Christ-likeness on the path toward the finish line which is heaven. Remember, “holiness is not an end in and of itself.” Holiness is not merely obedience, it is the process of being set-apart from your sin. This process is synonymous to perseverance.

Verse 11 builds on this truth. The author is a realist regarding temporal “pain” of life which acknowledging that hard circumstances are allowed by God for our good. The “peaceful fruit of righteousness” reflects the benefit of “peace” from being holy. If you are willing to be “trained by it” your hard circumstance God uses in your life, then this “yields...peaceful fruit” (v. 11).

Verses 10 and 11 answer why God’s discipline or training exists. God is disciplining you for holiness! Hard circumstances bubble to the surface areas we need to repent of or grown out of. This is God taking an interest in you. Loving you not ignoring you. Holiness, for you means God is taking somewhere. To himself. To heaven. Our pursuit of holiness is synonymous with perseverance.

[TRANS] The following verses apply this reality! Being holy is the decision to keep running to not collapse (cf. v. 3). False believers will fall down and in life and stay down. Genuine believers likewise fall down but recover, continue to press on.

ESV **Proverbs 24:16** ^afor the righteous falls ^bseven times and rises again, but ^cthe wicked stumble in times of calamity. (Pro 24:16 ESV)

[Question] “Why do we keep getting up?” Christians possess a goal or prize that is greater than ourselves! Like a mother who pushes at all cost to provide for your young! An officer or soldier who lays down his life to save someone else. Our new heart tells us to pursue our all-sufficient Christ!

ESV **Philippians 3:13-14** Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: ^aforgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for ^athe prize of the upward ^bcall of God in Christ Jesus. (Phi 3:13-14 ESV)

ESV **Hebrews 11:26** ^aHe considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to ^bthe reward. (Heb 11:26 ESV)

[Point] You strive for holiness because you want Christ! Hebrews 12-17 serve as another warning. This is the warning not to give up! Giving up on God is simply walking away from the most significant relationship you have. You leave and God ultimately lets you go! This is the path of reprobation. Apostasy. For Christians this is the call to make a U-Turn. And, Christians always ultimately will!

[TRANS] This in view, verse 12ff moves us into applications primarily “what not to do!” The main concern is to run without giving up! To “not grow weary or fainthearted” (v. 3).

[Principle] Giving up is defined as moral compromise.

Prop: Running from compromise

1. Run again (vv. 12-13)

Verse 12 picks up the race metaphor. The author issues a straightforward command! What we need to hear in days like today. “Lift” and “Strengthen” or literally “rebuild” your “drooping hands” (v. 12). You who do not want to push back up off the ground. “Get up!” You who are suffering “weak knees” or “paralyzed knees!” (v. 12). “Get up!” When everything in your flesh says, “No, I want to stop.” Don’t! Verse 13 continues this picture, telling you to get back on track! Staying down is not an option. It is times to push forward on the straight path. Verse 13 warns what staying down will mean. Giving up is like

having a bone out of joint that will grow back warped! In this case, movement realigns your joints to functionality! In his book *Spiritual Depression* Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones tells his spiritual patients, paralyzed in depression, to "Take hold of yourself!"

Once you are running again, the healed conscience is incomparably better! Life is clear!

2. Reconcile sins (v. 14)

It has been said, "Keep short sin accounts." To "strive for peace with everyone" pictures a Christian's clear pursuit. When life is heavy there is no better time than to seek people out whom you need to reconcile. We have established that it is impossible to target the precise motivations God has for allowing trials to befall us. We do not know whether our trial is a one for one cause and effect for a sin we have committed. At the same time, David's testimony from Psalm 32 was a heaviness that David retrospectively knew was based on his sin.

^{ESV} **Psalm 32:3-5** For when I kept silent, my ^abones wasted away through my ^bgroaning all day long.
⁴ For day and night your ^ahand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up¹ as by the heat of summer.
Selah

⁵ I ^aacknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I ^bwill confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah (Psa 32:3-5 ESV)

Relief came when David repented. Not before but only after. "Striving for peace with everyone" means just that. Reconciling with everyone where possible!

^{ESV} **Romans 12:18** If possible, so far as it depends on you, ^alive peaceably with all. (Rom 12:18 ESV)

Every scenario will not work out but we are commanded to try.

This is "the holiness" or "the sanctification" that I attribute to running your Christian life!

[Question] "What is at stake when we refuse to reconcile with others?"

^{ESV} **Matthew 6:14-15** ^aFor if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,
¹⁵ ^abut if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.
(Mat 6:14-15 ESV)

The context for this is The Lord's Prayer. Christians are expected to "forgive" and non-Christians are not. This conditional phrase unearths the underlying condition of someone's heart.

[Point] Without this condition of personal "holiness" you will not "see the Lord" (v. 14).

3. Regard others (v. 15)

The idea that someone you know and love is sliding toward moral compromise. Someone is a runner unwilling to get up and run again. In the case of the last point, unwilling to reconcile. This is someone who should not be left to themselves. Someone who is hardening their heart under the weight of God's discipline needs a personal assist! This is one of the key thrusts of Hebrews.

^{ESV} **Hebrews 3:13** But ^aexhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by ^bthe deceitfulness of sin. (Heb 3:13 ESV)

^{ESV} **Hebrews 10:24** And ^alet us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,
(Heb 10:24 ESV)

The words, "See to it" is episkopovtes where we get word "bishop." This is "to oversee" or to watch out for or take care of! We are supposed to help people out who appear to be lacking grace! [Note] a "root of bitterness" is actually less about the root and more about the fruit! We "oversee" our friends at church so they will not "cause trouble" or "defile" others.

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 29:18** Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you ^aa root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, (Deu 29:18 ESV)

This is less about being hardened like an unmovable root and more about the influence someone has who is not walking by grace! Being hardhearted or graceless left alone will begin to seep in and poison others. Unbelievers and wayward Christians are both guilty of this kind of influence.

^{ESV} **Galatians 5:9** ^aA little leaven leavens the whole lump. (Gal 5:9 ESV)

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 12:25-26** that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, ^aall rejoice together. (1Co 12:25-26 ESV)

[TRANS] The final category is where everything comes to a head to moral compromise.

4. Resist compromise (vv. 16-17)

These verses make clear that giving up of God is a moral choice. Verse 16 makes this point up front making the "sexually immoral" categorically equal to Esau's "unholy" compromise! Verse 16 and 17 document Esau selling out his "birthright" for his flesh. Two episodes tie together this cause and effect consequence!

^{ESV} **Genesis 25:29-34** Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted.

³⁰ And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.¹)

³¹ Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright now."

³² Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?"

³³ Jacob said, "Swear to me now." So he swore to him and ^asold his birthright to Jacob.

³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. (Gen 25:29-34 ESV)

^{ESV} **Genesis 27:32-38** His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau."

³³ Then Isaac trembled very violently and said, "Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed."

³⁴ As soon as Esau heard the words of his father, ^ahe cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!"

³⁵ But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing."

³⁶ Esau said, ^a"Is he not rightly named Jacob?"¹ For he has cheated me these two times. ^bHe took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." Then he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"

³⁷ Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Behold, ^aI have made him lord over you, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and ^bwith grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?"

³⁸ Esau said to his father, "Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." And ^aEsau lifted up his voice and wept. (Gen 27:32-38 ESV)

The point of these episodes is to make the point that the sin of compromise when there is no repentance yields a hardhearted state that can leave someone heaven-less. Just like the sin of "sexual immorality" when left to itself, when left alone without repentance, you might find yourself standing before God without advocacy!

[Illus] Perhaps the one of the most memorable moments of athletic compromise was the 1988 Olympic 100 meter sprint between Carl Lewis and Ben Johnson, in Seoul Korea. Carl Lewis, confident, loquacious, 6 foot 2, I think 30 years old, certainly beloved by Americans. Ben Johnson, quieter, shorter, and stronger, the Canadian favorite. Johnson, who had perfected a jumpstart technique off the blocks. The race was pure speed. The first to the finish line is a winner takes all. In this case, it was Johnson! Undisputedly, winning while breaking a world record. Soon after all this would be reversed as Johnson was found out to have used metabolic strength enhancing illegal steroids. Johnson was disqualified. He had appeared to have won but moral compromised caused him forfeiture of his prize. An article written 30 years later by CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation):

"The greatest rivalry North America has seen in the last two generations played out over 10 seconds in 1988. Ben Johnson, Canadian, raced the 100-metre final against Carl Lewis, American, at the Seoul Olympics. We are still getting over it. Most middle-aged Canadians can still remember the aftermath, but very few can recall how it was that we all got so deeply invested in that one race. The details of the Lewis-Johnson rivalry, the skullduggery that stoked our fascination that is what seems to have slipped our collective memories. You can never tell what your mind is going to retain when you are in the midst of a car wreck, natural disaster, or national trauma.

The race was all of that, for Canadians. And all the more nauseating because it began so beautifully. Johnson's win was the best sporting moment we could imagine. Our modest guy lined up, with all the world holding its breath and watching, and he just destroyed a showboating American at his own game. It was so, so great. Johnson made something happen that I only saw once in my life.

Johnson was the final witness in the Dubin inquiry. On June 12, 1989 he told the inquiry:

"I lied. I lied and I was ashamed for my family, my friends, other Canadian athletes. I was just in a mess."

Johnson cheated. He took...loads of steroids. He admits that fully. But, Johnson still has an issue with the whole process. Five of the other seven runners in 1988 were eventually caught cheating too. It still hurts Johnson deeply that he is the only one singled out for public shaming.

Conclusion: The thought of God's reprobation or the Lord leaving us to our sin, is appropriately terrifying. At the same time, the way to run from compromise is clear. God's Word lays out this clear path to take. The opposite way is the way of digression. Make the choice to get back up. Strengthen your resolve in the Gospel. Reconcile your sin accounts, maintaining a soft disposition. Show regard for your fellow Christians. Care about people who are falling down, falling short. And finally, at all cost, resist compromise! Pleading to God after it is too late is pitiable. By God's grace we have another path! Praise God!