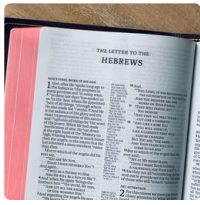


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Hebrews 12:1 - 12:17



Hebrews - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg explores Hebrews 12:1-17, where he emphasizes that faith is not a virtue that a person possesses, but it is instead something that comes from making a judgment of God favorably. Gregg also notes that we are watched by a great cloud of witnesses as we run our race and thus, we should strip off the sins and weights that hold us back. The speaker compares the discipline involved in parenting to the discipline that comes from following God, which leads to maturity.

Transcript

We're now going to go into chapter 12, but I just want to make one observation that I was unable to make about chapter 11 because time ran out too quickly. And that is that in addition to telling us the results of faith, which we looked at several results of faith that are brought out in the discourse on the subject in chapter 11 of Hebrews, there's also revealed to us there what causes faith. I mean, faith causes something.

Faith causes obedience. Faith causes you to know things and have vision of the unseen world. Faith causes things, but what causes faith? Where does faith come from? How do you get that? Is that just something some people have the gift and other people don't have the gift? Are you just lucky or not? Some people say, I wish I had your faith.

Well, don't pray for my faith. I mean, you can pray that I'll have more faith, but you can have your own faith. You don't have to envy somebody else's faith.

Just have faith. Jesus gave a command, have faith in God. What's that mean to have faith in God? It's really quite simple.

If you think of faith as some mystical substance that some people get some of it and other people don't, and some get different amounts of it as just something that resides inside of some people. No doubt there is some legitimacy to that kind of imagery because the Bible does talk about God granting to each one a measure of faith. I understand that to mean that each person, the amount of faith they have has a lot to do with the circumstances God has put them in, how much they've been exposed to God's word or God's dealings or whatever.

I mean, some people simply are, some people's temperament is, I mean, a rich person is not going to find it as easy to believe as a poor person, for example. It says in James, has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith? But in other words, there are circumstances that God has ordained for people. Some circumstances are more conducive than others to faith, but faith is still going to be a choice and anyone can choose to believe God just as much as they want to choose to believe God.

And there's two things that chapter 11 tells us about here that tell us where faith is, how it arises. One of those is in verse 11. Now this verse in the New King James and the King James is a verse about Sarah.

In the NIV, it actually is transformed into a verse about Abraham, and I don't remember how this is done, but in commentators they say it is somewhat ambiguous. Because although the wording of it sounds like it's about Sarah, there's something about the gender of the pronouns, I forget what it is, that makes some scholars think it's about Abraham. And instead of saying, as it says here, by faith Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed and she bore a child when she was past age.

It says something rather like, by faith Abraham, though Sarah was past age to conceive seed, you know, had child. In other words, it makes it seem like Abraham, not Sarah, but that's not the point I want to be concerned about here. Whether it's Abraham or Sarah's faith, it is faith of the type that the writer is talking about that he says this about.

And it says at the end of verse 11, because she, or it could be he if it's the other way around for Abraham, whoever it is that's having faith, because they judged him faithful who had promised. Now this is essentially what causes you to believe God. Do you judge God to be faithful? You basically believe anybody that you judge to be faithful.

If you meet somebody and your impression is they're an honest person, you believe what they say for the most part. Probably entirely until you find some reason to doubt them. I mean, even newspaper articles were cynical about journalists, but we typically believe what we read in the newspaper until we catch them exhibiting some prejudice or some bending of the truth in some way that makes us distrustful of them.

Then we judge them not to be reliable and we don't trust them. If you judge someone to be reliable, you naturally trust them. That's what faith actually is.

Faith is making a judgment of somebody else. Faith isn't a virtue that you have. It has to do with the person you have faith in, their virtue.

Are they faithful and do you see them as such? Then you believe them. Do you think they're liars? Then you don't believe them. You can't believe them and shouldn't believe them.

There's no virtue in believing a liar. Faith is not a virtue if it's not put in somebody who's

reliable. Of course, the writer of Hebrews is concerned about your faith in God.

God is reliable. A person who judges him faithful, which means reliable and honest, that when he says something, he means it and he's not lying to you. If you judge him to be faithful, then that's what faith is.

The first thing that the writer of Hebrews tells us about where faith comes from, it comes from making a judgment of God favorably. You can decide that God is faithful or that he's not. That will determine whether you believe or not.

Over in 1 John, there's a similar kind of a point made in 1 John 5. In verse 10, I think it is. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself. He who does not believe God has made him a liar.

In other words, if you don't believe God, you're essentially calling him a liar. You judge that he's not honest. You judge he's a liar, and therefore you don't believe him.

If you didn't think he was a liar, you would believe him. It's that simple. Believing or not believing God is a matter of judging him.

Now you can see another reason why God thinks faith is so important. Because if you don't believe God, it means you're calling him a liar. That would insult anybody, especially any honest person who's given no reason to be doubted.

But because Sarah or Abraham judged God to be faithful, the one who promised, they believed. Obviously, that's where faith comes from. From a judgment, a favorable judgment of God's character, of his reliability, of his faithfulness.

The other verse that I'd draw your attention to is in Hebrews 11, 19. This is talking about when Abraham offered up Isaac. It says, of Isaac, of whom it was said, In Isaac your seed shall be called.

In verse 19 it says that Abraham was accounting or considering, or we could say even judging, that God was able to raise him up. He believed because he believed God was able to do what had to be done in order to fulfill the promises. That is that God who makes promises does not overshoot his abilities.

He doesn't say, I'm going to do this thing. Oh, rats, I forgot I can't do that. If you believe that God can do it, you believe him.

There's another very similar passage about Abraham's faith in Romans chapter 4, where the very same point is made. In Romans 4, it says of Abraham in verses 19 through 21, Not being weak in faith, Abraham did not consider his own body, already dead, since he was about 100 years old, on the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and

being fully convinced that what he had promised he was also able to perform.

So, faith is really judging God in two ways. One, he's able to do what he said. Two, he's trustworthy to do what he said.

If you believe God is able and trustworthy, you'll believe him. If you don't believe him, you're doubting one of those two things. Either God can't do it, or maybe just God won't do it, even though he said he would.

Unfaithful. Unreliable. So, it's really not magical at all.

Having faith is not a magical thing. You just make a judgment of God. What do you think about God? Is he faithful? Is he able to do whatever he said? Enough.

That's enough. To believe whatever he said. And to just live as if that's true.

Live with that vision. So, I wanted to make that point. We ran out of time last time.

Let's look at chapter 12. It begins with, therefore, which means, of course, because of what was just said. Because of chapter 11, therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.

Now, this cloud of witnesses is referring to the people here. That were, who bear testimony to us. By their life of faith.

Now, I'm assuming that witnesses here means, like witnesses in a court of law. Someone who testifies to something. These people's lives testify of the rightness of this way of trusting God.

That this is the way God wants things done. This is the way God blesses. This is the way righteous people live, by faith.

That's their testimony. And we are surrounded by witnesses declaring that to us. Testifying to that.

Witnessing. Bearing witness to it. But, of course, the other possibility is the word witnesses means something like spectators.

And because there is a reference in this verse to running a race. Many have felt that chapter 1 of, excuse me, verse 1 of chapter 12. Is suggesting that those of the Old Testament that we've just read about.

Are like spectators in the grandstands. As we are running in an Olympic-like competition. We're running a race.

Our life is our race. They have already run their race. And having passed the finish line themselves.

They've seated themselves in the stands to see how we're going to do. And so we're surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. That is watching us.

Witnessing our behavior. This is, I think, maybe the most common way that people have taken this. At least most preachers.

But I'm not sure it's what is intended. Partly because I don't know of anything else in the Bible that suggests that people who've died. Are watching what's going on on earth.

We'd like to think so sometimes if we've lost loved ones. Anyone who's had a loved one die. Would like to think that they can look down and be happy with the way you're remembering them or whatever.

But the Bible really doesn't teach anywhere else that people in heaven can watch people on earth. And if that's so. Then it would not be likely that the writer of Hebrews would assume that his readers would have that image in mind.

And since testimony, which is the same thing as witness. Is a word that occurs several times in chapter 11. These people received a good testimony.

And Noah by building our testified against his generation. Before Enoch was called up he had this testimony. That he pleased God.

This frequent reference to testimony. With reference to these people makes me think that witness here. Refers to someone who bears a testimony rather than someone who's a spectator.

And that's what I'm presuming here. Although many people would take the other view. Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.

Let us lay aside every weight. And the sin which so easily ensnares us. And let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Now we're running a race. This is a metaphor. Paul said he runs a race at the end of his life in 2nd Timothy.

He said I have run the good race. Paul sometimes like in 1st Corinthians 9. Talks about the Christian life as if it's an athletic competition. And do you not know that all running a race do not win.

So run that you might win he says. Similar metaphor. It's like an athletic competition.

And many parallels to it have been brought out in people's sermons. To running a race. Like you don't look back when you're running a race.

You don't look to see how the other runners are doing. You keep looking at the goal.

That's one of the metaphors.

One of them is that you don't want to run with excessive weight on your body. This is especially true of bicycle racers. They get the most lightweight frames they can get.

And they remove everything. The straps on the pedals are too much weight for them. Certainly don't want something like a rack on the bike.

Anything unnecessary. A mirror. Too heavy.

Strip it down to the lightest weight possible. Because any ounce that's unnecessary is going to hinder you. In the competition against others.

Who are also stripped down to as light as they can go on their bikes. You'd know you wouldn't want to run a race with bricks attached to your legs. Some people who are in training might put ankle weights on when they're running.

Or run in sand. Which is even more difficult. So that when they actually run the real race, it's easier.

But you don't want to run in sand for the real race. You don't want extra weight. If you want to win.

You don't want that. He says you need to lay aside every weight and sin. Interesting that he would make a distinction between weight and sin.

Certainly sin is going to hinder you in your race. If it's a race of holiness and faith and so forth. Sin is absolutely antithetical to it.

You can't be having sin besetting you. You can't be carrying along sins unnecessarily if you're going to run this race. But what is a weight then if it's not the same thing as sin? A weight then must refer to something that isn't necessarily sin.

But it's an unnecessary burden for running a race. I remember William Law used to say, You know, if you were obliged to walk on a tightrope across Niagara Falls. There'd be no sin in wearing glass slippers.

But you might choose not to do so. Because it would not encourage your chances of winning. It would not enhance your likelihood of making it across safely.

You could wear golden slippers if you want to. But it's not going to be very useful to you. And there are things in life that are not forbidden.

But they're just not profitable. Remember Paul said, All things are lawful to me, but not all things are profitable. And he was talking in that case about eating meat sacrificed to idols.

Which was not something forbidden by God. But in some cases might hinder one's spiritual witness. And there may be many things in a Christian's life that are actually permitted.

Whether it's, you know, Christians call me on the air about things like, Is it wrong to dance? Is it wrong to listen to secular music? Is it wrong to watch television? Well, wrong. It might be wrong for you. But it's not forbidden anywhere.

The Bible doesn't forbid it. It's not a sin. But if it's something that is, Paul said, All things are lawful for me.

I will not be brought into bondage to anything. You don't want to run with chains on your ankles. You want to release yourself from any unnecessary weight or bondage.

Sometimes a relationship you're in. Sometimes possessions that you're holding on to. Sometimes some ambition that you have.

Some goal for your life that you're pursuing. But it's not God's goal. I mean, something that there's nothing intrinsically evil or wrong or sinful about.

It's just holding that thing is keeping you from able to run in such a way as to win. Now, you know, the old story about how they catch monkeys in some of the Pacific islands. They cut a little hole in a coconut.

They put a little rock in there. And a monkey comes around and starts batting around. Here's something rattling.

And there's all curious. The hole's big enough to get his hand in. But when he grabs the rock, it's too small to get his fist out of.

And this is a famous preaching illustration. I'm sure you've all heard it before. But it's a good one.

The monkey then can't climb a tree with the coconut on his hand. But he's so attached to his curiosity. He wants to find out what that is in there.

He won't let it go. And so the hunter could just come up and club the thing and take him home and eat him. Because he can't go anywhere with that coconut on.

He can't climb a tree and get away. He is weighing himself down to his own detriment. Because he's so attached to this trinket.

That may be worth nothing to him, actually, in reality. But it's his death because of his holding on to it. There are certainly things that are probably analogous to that in the Christian life.

It's something that's not in itself an evil thing. But it's not what God wants you to be holding on to. And if you're holding on to it, you're not going to run the race well.

You're going to be burdened. It's like running with a backpack full of bricks. Only God could tell what those things are in anyone's individual life.

But there are things that aren't even sin. There are weights and there are sins. You want to get rid of both if you can.

Because you want to run the race to win. Verse 2 says, This is because when you run a race, you look to the goal. Jesus is the goal.

We're keeping our eyes on Jesus because that's who we want to be like. We want to imitate him. We will be like him.

And that is our hope. So our eye remains on Jesus. Who is the author and finisher of our faith.

He started Christianity. He started our Christian walk for us. We began, in other words, with him as the center.

And with him coming into our lives. He's also going to finish it. We need to keep our eyes on him though.

He who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross. Despising the shame. And has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Now the fact that Jesus has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God is mentioned in the opening verses of Hebrews. He comes back to it as something that we well know. He brought it up again, of course, in chapter 10.

That Jesus is at the right hand of God. Indicates that he has finished his race. That he is resting now.

And there's a sense in which our race involves simply resting in him. But there's such a struggle to do so because of the inward tendency to rely on our own nervous, energetic activities to get things done that need to be done. Like Martha, trouble about many things.

Mary resting at the feet of Jesus was actually doing more what was the will of God for her. And sometimes our nervously doing a lot of works may not be the thing that defines running the race. But resting in Christ does.

He is resting. He's at the end of his race. He endured the cross.

It says he despised the shame. Now despising doesn't mean he hated it. Although one

would expect he would.

Anyone would. But that's not what it means. The word despise in the Bible means to hold in contempt in the sense that you don't regard it highly.

You disregard it. He endured the cross disregarding the shame that was involved with it. Most men would regard that and would avoid it.

He put that out of his mind. I don't care how shameful it is. I'm going to do it anyway.

That's basically what I think it means. And it says in verse 3, For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed striving against sin and you've forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons.

My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord. This is from Proverbs 3, verses 11 and 12. Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by him.

For whom the Lord loves, he chastens and scourges every son whom he receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons. For what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate.

Of course, the King James says it more bluntly. He says you're bastards and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us and we paid them respect.

Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they, our fathers on earth, indeed, for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them. But he does it for our profit that we may be partakers of his holiness. Now, no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous, in fact.

Nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Now, I read the whole section because it needs to be read. It's talking about enduring the race.

When you're running in a race, and I say this as a person who's done very little of that, but I've done a little enough to know that I don't want to do much of it because it's difficult until you're trained for it. I guess once you're trained, it's a lot easier. But even experienced runners who run marathons say that they reach a point where they just feel totally exhausted.

They hit the wall, as they say, and you just got to keep running even though you just feel like you can't, you know, you just don't want to take another step. I've done that in hiking. I haven't done that in running.

They've been in hikes, I didn't take enough snacks or food along with me, and the hikes

were many, many miles uphill, and I'm not in shape, and I'm not, you know, an experienced hiker, and I was with others, but they were just cruising on up, and I got places where I was so exhausted, I literally, I didn't know a man could be so exhausted. I thought, can I move this leg forward one more time? Literally, I thought, I don't think I can, but I have to. You know, I literally say, okay, move that leg.

There's one. Can I drag the other one that far? You know, I mean, literally, you get so tired that you don't think you can take another step. I'm sure that runners get that way too, but when you hit that wall, you got to just keep going.

You can't stop, and therefore, when you hit difficulty in the Christian life, you just got to keep going. You can't stop, and so he's giving us incentive to keep going when you're hitting that wall here. He says, for consider him.

That's consider Jesus. Let him be your role model in this. Now, by the way, he's not the only role model the Bible recommends in this.

In James chapter 5, James is also talking to Christians facing hardship and difficulty in the Christian life, and James said this in verse 10 of 5. My brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord as example of suffering and of patience. Indeed, we count them blessed to endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and have seen the end intended by the Lord that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

So he's saying, there's some people who've run this race before you, the prophets who've suffered in the name of Job. You've heard of him. Think about these people as examples of suffering, but the writer of Hebrews goes one better.

Think about Jesus. I mean, it's true. We have many role models.

Jesus is one, and people who are like Jesus are sometimes the way we see him better. When you read the stories of modern Christian martyrs or people who've been imprisoned and tortured and so forth for their faith, you're seeing somebody who's kind of living out before your eyes the way Jesus did it. You're still looking to Jesus, but here's an example of a Jesus-like person showing you what Jesus did and what Jesus does if you follow his steps.

And yet, of course, the writer of Hebrews doesn't even talk about the prophets or Job or anything. He just says, Jesus, consider him who endured, this is Hebrews 12, 3, who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You think you've got it bad? You'll get discouraged if you don't remember that Jesus went through this.

Now, a lot of people think that Jesus went through it so we won't have to. This is, of course, the healing and the atonement and prosperity and all that stuff gospel. Jesus went through it, so I don't have to.

He went through the hard stuff, so I can have a gravy train. That's essentially how many people think. Peter, however, who may have anticipated this mistake, in 1 Peter 2, in verse 21, 1 Peter 2, 21, Peter said, to this end you were called, that is to suffer patiently in the context, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow his steps.

He doesn't say Jesus suffered for us so that we don't have to suffer. He suffered so that we could follow his example in suffering. So we'd follow his steps in suffering.

Christ's suffering becomes the encouragement and the model for us of how to behave in suffering. He says in verse 4 here, Hebrews 12, 4, you have not yet resisted to bloodshed striving against sin, implying that Jesus did, and you haven't done that yet. I mentioned earlier in the series that he may be referring to bloodshed in terms of Jesus' death.

You haven't yet been martyred for your sins, but it may come to that. You've got to be prepared for that possibility. Or he could be referring to the time Jesus sweat, as it were, great drops of blood in resisting sin.

That is, he was tempted in the Garden of Gethsemane to go the wrong way. In his resistance to that temptation, the fight he put up against it was so strenuous that it's as if he shed blood from his pores. And the author may be saying that you give up much too easy against temptation.

When you're striving against sin, you've never gotten a place for your sweat and drops of blood. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed in striving against sin. Once you get there, then you've got something to complain about.

No, then you're just like Jesus. He did that. You've got to go further than that to complain, because he didn't complain that much.

Now, in saying that you haven't gone, haven't suffered as much as Jesus has, that's basically to shame you if you're whining. Realize that Jesus, who deserved it less than you do, went through that, so you shouldn't be complaining if you have to go through it. But then there's a second aspect, and that's the chastening of the Lord.

You've forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons. And he quotes that passage in Proverbs 3 where Solomon exhorts his son to put up with necessary chastening. Now, chastening we understand usually to mean spanking, I think.

Maybe in our modern speech we may think chastening means disciplining a disobedient child. And, of course, chastening does mean that, but it doesn't only mean that. The Greek word for chastening means to bring up a child.

Now, bringing up a child involves discipline, but it also just involves, even when the child's not disobedient, it involves putting the child through the courses that leads them

to maturity. Lessons in school, physical chores, increasing the weight that they have to bear in the family, and so forth. This is just part of bringing a child to maturity.

You're not doing it because they're bad. You're just doing it because it has to be done. This has to be done for them to grow up.

The word chastening means to bring up a child, and therefore it's not strictly speaking about when you're disobedient. Now, there is such a thing as that kind of chastening, when you disobey God and some bad consequences come on you that God brings to teach you not to do that anymore, just like when you do spank a disobedient child. But even the child who's obedient has to go to school and may not like it.

I didn't like it. I was a good enough kid. I didn't get spanked very much when I was a kid, but I still had to go to school.

I didn't like going to school. I didn't like my teachers. I didn't like the lessons.

I wasn't interested. It was a discipline that I was subjected to by my parents and by the state that they thought was necessary for me to grow up. That's part of raising a child, putting a load on the child more than he wants so he can become stronger to bear that load so he can put a heavier one on.

That way, if you're training an athlete or if you're raising a child, whatever, there's weight that must be borne. There are inconveniences to the child that go with the responsibilities of growing up and part of the training. The reason I say that is because my impression is that these readers, the suffering they were going through was actually persecution for their faith.

That has been mentioned previously. It sounds like that may be what's going on. On the other hand, it may be that they are backsliding and God is bringing some trials on them and it really is like a spanking.

But what if he's saying, you're just caving in under persecution and forgetting that this is part of the chastening of the Lord. Not that God is persecuting you, but he's letting you face persecution as part of what makes you stronger, part of what makes you grow up. It's not pleasant to face these growth pains, but they are pains, but they also bring growth.

And it may well be that he is thinking of the persecution they're facing, which is the only suffering we've read about so far in their lives. There may be others we don't know about. But it seems strange to think of the persecution that a faithful Christian receives from the world as if that's the chastening from God.

Because we think chastening goes to disobedient children. But I think the impression here is that we're all children and we all need to grow up. We all need to become

stronger, wiser, more disciplined, more obedient.

Not that we're particularly disobedient, but we just need to learn to be more obedient. Christ himself learned obedience through the things he suffered. And through various kinds of suffering, persecution only being one kind.

There's a wide range. Remember James said in the opening of his epistle in James 1, he said, my brethren counted all joy when you fall into diverse or various trials. There are various trials.

There's sickness, there's poverty, there's rejection by people you wanted to be accepted by. There's physical pains and persecutions. There's criminal violence.

There's wars. There's all kinds of things that can be various trials. He says, count all joy whenever you reach and fall into any of those various trials.

All of it can be part of God's chastening. That is not that you've done something wrong, but that you need to grow up more. And he's increasing the plates on the barbell for you because he wants you eventually to press more than you can press today.

He wants you to run faster than you ran as a child. He wants you to exert yourself and win. And therefore he puts you through things that are uncomfortable.

Every weight lifter knows that if you're really going to make progress, you're going to have to lift weights until your muscles hurt. There's no pain, there's no gain. And that's true not only of muscles, that's true of just personal development.

If you stay within your comfort level, you'll never expand your perimeters. So God takes you out of your comfort zone. Persecution, if that's what you're going through, that can be seen as God's letting you face some hardship for your faith so that you can grow through that.

Don't forget that passage that speaks to you as son, saying, don't despise the chastening of the Lord. Embrace it. Don't be discouraged when you're rebuked by him.

He says there in verse five and verse six, for whom the Lord loves he chastens, he scourges, that means whips, every son whom he receives. It's a metaphor, of course, because God doesn't really take out a literal whip. But the idea is that when God puts you through your paces or gives you hardship or trials, it's like a father whipping a child to make him better.

Notice, though, that the Lord only does this to the people he loves and that he receives. Whom he loves he chastens, whom he receives he scourges. This is not rejection from God.

When everything goes awry in your life, you think, where's God? Does God hate me now?

Does God not love me anymore? No, he loves you. That's why he chastens you. He receives you.

He doesn't reject you. He receives you. That's why he scourges.

And he says if you endure chastening, God is dealing with you as with sons. For what son is there whom a father doesn't chasten? Every father takes in hand the rearing of his child and into maturity as a project. That's what God is doing with you.

But if you are without chastening, that is if you never have any troubles at all, never improving either, of which all have become partakers, then you're illegitimate. You're not a son. God would never allow one of his real sons to never grow up.

If you aren't one of his sons, he might leave you to your own devices and you never grow. And you see a lot of cases of that, of unbelievers who never really get any more mature in terms of character or spirituality or anything. They're not his sons.

Not in the sense that you are. Verse 9, Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the father of spirits and live? That is, we respected our dads when they took us to the woodshed.

And if God's taking you to the woodshed instead of starting to back away from your confidence in God, you should respect him. You should respect that he knows what he's doing and that he's doing it because it's good for you. And he says in verse 10, For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them.

Now he says, but he does it for our profit. And it's not clear, but he might be saying that not all earthly fathers really have the child's profit in mind, as God does. It's just they do what they think they should do.

Maybe they're offended that the child disrespected them, so they just take it out on the child. I mean, somehow that's not good discipline. But sometimes fathers just aren't that great at discipline.

They're not always thinking of the child's benefit as much as they are ventilating their frustration or anger at the child. That's not good. But God only does it for our profit.

God doesn't ventilate against us. He does whatever is needed for our improvement, that we might be partakers of his holiness. We need to be made more holy.

And God has that as his project for us, to grow us up in holiness. He says, Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, so don't be surprised if you're not enjoying it. If you enjoyed it, it wasn't a trial.

It's a trial because you don't enjoy it. That's what almost defines it as a trial, so you don't

like it. Chastening doesn't seem joyful to the child because the child doesn't choose their own discipline.

The parent chooses it. And by definition, the parent has another plan in mind than the child has. The child just wants to go out and play all day and eat candy.

Parents have better ideas than that for the kid. So it's not pleasant to the child to be under the training and the discipline of a parent who's trying to bring them up to maturity. Chastening doesn't seem joyful at the time it's happening.

It seems grievous, painful. Nevertheless, afterward, not at the time it's happening, but in retrospect, when it's done, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Righteousness is the fruit that God is looking for in our life.

And discipline is the means by which He brings it about. At least it's one of the ways. There's other ways, but discipline is part of it.

Part of that discipline is through His Word. Obviously, the Word of God brings forth fruit too. But only as we come under its authority and discipline, only as we submit to it in ways that we wouldn't have if we didn't respect it, the Word of God itself becomes a tool of God's discipline to us, but also circumstances.

And God, all things, work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Everything God uses is to bring us up as mature sons and daughters and to bring about the peaceable fruit of righteousness in us. So we'll be partakers of His holiness.

That's what He says. Let's view your trials this way. It's God working in you.

He could protect you from this persecution if He wanted to. If He isn't, trust Him. He's got a reason for it.

You need it more than you think. Now, verse 12. Now, there's two other scriptures that seem to be echoed in this particular exhortation, especially in the end where it says, without which no one will see the Lord.

Probably reflecting on what Jesus said in the Beatitude in Matthew 5, 8, where He said, If you're pure in heart, you'll see God. That'd be holiness, internal holiness. Without it, you won't see God.

With it, you will. And no one will see the Lord without that. It's amazing how many Christians think that because they've signed on some dotted line and gotten baptized and joined the church and said a sinner's prayer and done some perfunctory hoop-jumping that now they're going to see God.

Well, no. He says you've got to pursue something here. Your life is a pursuit of

something.

If you're pursuing comfort or wealth or fame or relationships, whatever your pursuit other than God, that's not what you're supposed to be pursuing. You're supposed to pursue holiness, pursue peace with all people in your relationships, and holiness in terms of your relationship with God. And without that, don't count on seeing the Lord.

No one's going to see the Lord without that. Now, the other passage he's referring to is an Old Testament kingdom passage in Isaiah, in Isaiah 35. Isaiah has quite a few kingdom passages.

These are actually passages about the reign of the Messiah. These are all passages which many people apply to the Millennium. Lots of people think that when Jesus comes back, these kingdom passages will be fulfilled in a literal sense.

And what's interesting is that when the apostles would make reference to any of these kingdom passages, of which there are quite a few, there's got to be 20 or 30 of them in the prophets, if not more than that, lots of them, lots of references to the Messiah's kingdom. They are often quoted or alluded to in the New Testament. But the writers of the New Testament never apply them to a situation after Jesus comes back.

They always apply it to this life, as if we are living in this particular set of circumstances. The Messiah has indeed come. He is indeed enthroned in heaven at the right hand of God.

He has established his kingdom. These kingdom passages, in their own way, which is generally kind of poetic and somewhat symbolic, they speak about the present time. And this is an example of that, because the writer of Hebrews very clearly alludes to this, and he's applying it to the present circumstances of his readers.

If you look at Isaiah 35, it's a short chapter. We won't read the whole thing, but it says, let me just start in verse 3, strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees. That's directly quoted here.

Hebrews 12, 12, therefore strengthen the hands which hang down and the feeble knees. But that's not all. Isaiah 35, verse 4 says, say to those who are fearful hearted, be strong, do not fear.

Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with recompense of God, he will come to save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.

Water shall burst forth in the wilderness, streams in the desert, etc. Now, this business of the ears of the deaf being unstopped and all of that, and the lame leaping and such, is echoed, not quoted, but echoed in Hebrews 12, 13. And make straight paths for your

feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather healed.

This healing that's associated with this path. What's this straight path? Well, notice it in chapter 35 of Isaiah, verse 8. A highway shall be there and a road. It should be called the highway of holiness.

The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others, whoever walks that road, although a fool will not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go upon it. It shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.

The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing. Now, we're going to see in chapter 12 later on, he says, we have come to Zion. Notice the prophecy of Isaiah 35, 10.

The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. Just look back at Hebrews 12 a minute. And look at verse 22.

Hebrews 12, 22. But you have come to Mount Zion. Now, he's talking about a spiritual Zion as he goes on to explain, and we'll come to that, of course, as we progress through the chapter.

But he has in this chapter Isaiah 35 in mind. The ransom, that's us. We've been ransomed by the Lord.

Jesus said he came to give a life of ransom for many. The ransomed of the Lord will come to Zion. He says, you have come to Zion.

It says, let the weak hands and weak knees, feeble knees be strengthened. Well, that comes directly from Isaiah 35, and the writer of Hebrews gives the same exhortation. Make straight paths for your feet.

Well, there's a path, a highway of holiness. And notice the writer of Hebrews says, pursue holiness without which no one will see the Lord. That's the highway, the highway of holiness.

There are features of Isaiah 35 woven through this passage, which is just another witness of which many others could be given if we had time to go off on that kind of a digression. Another witness that the early church saw passages like Isaiah 35 as being fulfilled in the present experience of Christians under Christ's rule. We are walking on a highway called holiness.

The lion, it can't go there. The devil's like a roaring lion. If we're staying on the highway of holiness, he can't condemn us.

He can't destroy us. We need to be encouraged. We need to hold up our hands and strengthen our weak knees as we run this race on this straight path, this highway of

holiness.

So this is what he's alluding to here. And then it says in verse 15, and this verse is commonly quoted, I think, to make a point that the author does not at all have in mind. He says, Now it says, you don't want to have a root of bitterness springing up among you to defile many.

And then it talks about Esau, not a separate subject. It's an illustration of such. What is a root of bitterness? Now, here's where I think many people quote it to make a point that the author doesn't have in mind.

We use the word bitterness frequently to speak of a certain psychic state, an emotional state, to be, I'm embittered, I'm resentful. And many, many Christian preachers talk about, you don't want to have a root of bitterness. And what they mean by that is you want to get rid of any resentment you have toward people, you want to forgive people and all that.

That's a good teaching about forgiveness and all you need to do that. Of course, you don't want to have resentment toward people. But to speak of that as the root of bitterness is actually exploiting a modern convention of English where we speak of resentment as bitterness.

And so you don't have a root of resentment or bitterness, they say. And there's a lot of people who have like inner healing kind of teachings and stuff like that where they focus on, you've got a root of bitterness, you need to forgive somebody. And bitterness then is seen as like unresolved malice or resentment towards somebody, has to be taken out.

Well, I don't deny that such things have to be removed, but I don't think that has anything to do with what this guy is talking about. The term root of bitterness comes from Deuteronomy in a very specific context where it does not encourage us to understand it the way that is popularly used. In Deuteronomy chapter 29 and verse 18, Moses is warning the children not to violate God's laws.

And he says in verse 17 and 18, And you saw their abominations and their idols which were among them. Well, this is a parenthesis. Actually, it starts at verse 14 where he says, essentially, I'm making this covenant with you and your children and so forth.

But then he says in verse 18, So that there may 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 to serve the gods of these nations and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood, which also means bitterness. And so it may not happen when he hears the words of the curse that he blesses himself in his heart saying, I shall have peace even though I walk in the imaginations of my heart, as though the drunkard could be included with the sober. Now, what's being warned about here is not copying an attitude where

you think, well, I can get away with this.

I can walk according to the imaginations of my heart. I can worship other gods. I'll get away with it.

I'll have peace. I'll be blessed anyway. The idea of the warning is don't think you'll get away with this.

Don't think that you're going to be the exception. This kind of thinking is a root that will produce bitterness. But bitterness doesn't mean resentment.

It's not talking about an attitude. Bitterness is in the Old Testament used to speak of the bondage they had in Egypt. It was bitter bondage.

In the Passover meal, they ate bitter herbs to remind themselves of the bitterness of the bondage. It means harshness, harsh circumstances. When Naomi said, don't call me Naomi, call me Mara, which means bitterness, because the Lord has dealt bitterly with me.

She means harshly. Bitterness means harshness. In fact, I think it's in Colossians in the King James Version, it tells husbands, don't be bitter toward your wives.

The modern translation is, don't be harsh toward your wives, because that's really what bitter means in the older English used in the older translations. A root of bitterness is a root of an attitude that will bring forth behavior that will result in bitter consequences, harsh consequences, trouble to you, harsh judgment from God. The bitterness is not a subjective feeling.

It's talking about a description of what will come upon you from God, harshness like they had harsh bondage in Egypt. The idea here is it's going to go badly for you if you begin to think this way. If you allow this root to spring up that begins to imagine that you can walk according to your own sinful ways and you'll still be blessed and you'll still be fine and that you will get away with it, that kind of root is going to lead you into behavior that's going to, in the end, it's going to be the bitter end.

It'll be harsh for you. This is what the bitterness means. The writer of Hebrews almost certainly has the same thing in mind when he uses the phrase from Deuteronomy, don't allow a root of bitterness to spring up.

What's that mean? We can go back to the temple system. We can give up on Christ. It'll be okay.

We won't suffer anything for it. That's the attitude that Moses is warning against, this idea that you don't have to do what God says because he doesn't always punish. It says in Ecclesiastes 8, I think it's verse 11, because the sentence against an evil work is not

executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil.

Because God doesn't punish right away, people get established in their wrong behavior. Oh, I got away with it. I might as well keep doing it.

Nothing's going to happen to me. I've tried it and nothing happened. Did the thing that I'm not supposed to do.

I'm okay. Let's keep going there. Because the sentence against the evil work is not executed speedily, the hearts of men, the evil is fully set in them to do evil.

And so this is what a root of bitterness is. When someone says, oh, I got away with it, I'll get away with it in the future. I don't have to do really what Christians say I have to do.

I don't have to follow Jesus. I can do something else. What's going to happen? What's the worst that can happen? Well, they'll find out.

Because the worst that would happen to people who went back to the temple system is they're going to get wiped out along with it. But you see, Esau is given then as an example of what happens when someone has this attitude of I can get away with it. This root in their heart that produces bitter judgment from God.

Esau experienced that. He says, you don't want to be like Esau. You don't want to be a fornicator or a profane person like Esau.

Now, is Esau a fornicator? Well, he might have been. We don't know. There's no record in the Old Testament of him being a fornicator.

Maybe he wasn't a very godly man. He might have fornicated. Why does this author mention fornication in connection with Esau? I don't think he's saying that Esau was a fornicator.

Esau was a profane person. And a fornicator is a profane person in that they're doing what Esau did. Not that Esau did it sexually.

Esau did it with his appetite, his food appetite. He gave in to the flesh. A fornicator is someone who gives in to the fleshly desires at the expense of his spiritual integrity.

Any Christian who fornicates is throwing away, at least for the moment, their spiritual integrity, their moral integrity, their birthright as Christians to be like Jesus. That's being tossed when you commit fornication. Now, many Christians don't agree with fornication, but under pressure they cave in.

They say, well, let's get this over with. It'll be okay. I can just do it and repent.

The root of bitterness. I can do the wrong thing and nothing bad will really happen. And that's what a fornicator does.

That's what Esau did, only not necessarily in the area of fornication, but he was a profane person in that, what? He sold his birthright for one morsel of food. Now, how is that like a fornicator? Much every way. He had a spiritual birthright by birth.

He was the firstborn of the most important family on the planet, and had he retained the birthright, his offspring would have brought forth the Messiah. That's what the birthright included, his being in the lineage of the Messiah. He didn't care about that stuff.

What good is a birthright to me if I starve to death, he says. Give me some of that lentil soup. Now, notice he said, what good is the birthright to me? That's all he was thinking about.

It was himself. What is the birthright to God? What does God think about the birthright? Don't you value that? No, I just care about what it is to me. I'm hungry, you know.

I don't want to delay my gratification here. Just give me some food. Of course, if he didn't sell his birthright, he could have cooked up a pot of lentils himself.

It would take a few hours, no doubt, but he was hungry now. No delayed gratification for this boy. He wants what he wants now, what his flesh is craving.

Does he have to sacrifice something of spiritual value? Well, who cares? He didn't think he was going to sacrifice it, as it turns out, because it says in the next verse, for you know that afterward, and this was considerably afterward, years afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, that's different than the birthright. In Genesis 25, he sold his birthright to Jacob for a pot of lentils. Later, years later, when Isaac wanted to bless his two sons, and Esau wanted to get the patriarchal blessing, that's something else.

That's something the person with the birthright should have. But he had sold his birthright, but his dad still liked him best, so he thought, I can still get the blessing from my dad. I can still have my cake and eat it too.

I can have the benefits of having my birthright, even though I sold it, and I have a bowl of stew too. So, he thought he could sell his birthright and nothing would change. It's all good.

I'll be fine. I'll still get everything I've got coming to me. I'm not going to suffer anything for it, in other words.

But when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected. It says, he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears. The wording of this verse has confused a lot of people.

They think it's saying that Esau tried to repent, but couldn't. He found no place of repentance. He cried out and tried to repent, but he was beyond repentance.

He had committed the unpardonable sin or something. That's not what it's saying. It's not talking about Esau trying to repent.

He's trying to get his dad to repent. He said, Father, can't you reverse this? You gave Jacob my birthright. Isn't there a blessing you can give him? Can't you give me a blessing too? Can't I get something anyway? His dad said, sorry, nothing we can do.

Can't change my mind about this. The repentance that Esau sought was not his own personal repentance. He tried to get his father to repent of having given Jacob the birthright and to give it to Esau instead.

The Bible says he did so with tears. That's what it says here. It's referring to the time when he's begging his dad to change his mind or to repent.

He couldn't. It was too late. He had sold his birthright.

Years later, he found out what it would cost him. You see, that's the point. When you have this root springing up saying, I can do what I want to, there won't be any repercussions.

You may be encouraged. That root may be cultivated by the fact that you do what you ought to and you don't suffer any immediate consequences. I thought so.

It becomes an established pattern. I'll just do what I want to all I want. Nothing will ever come of it.

Esau went years after he sold his birthright before he discovered the cost. You know, Reuben went into his father's concubine and slept with her, essentially his stepmom. He slept with his dad's wife.

He had committed adultery and incest with somebody that was his dad's concubine, a little bit like that guy in Corinth who slept with his father's wife. Reuben did that, the oldest son of Jacob. The Bible tells of him doing that.

At the tail end of some chapter early on in the story, it says Reuben went into his father's concubine and slept with her, and it says, and Jacob heard of it. Then it's, next story, something entirely different. Years later, Jacob's on his deathbed and says, Reuben, you're out.

You lost your birthright because of what you did when you slept with my concubine. Years went by. Reuben thought he got away with it.

He thought he was still in line for the birthright. He's the oldest son. Why not? Sure, he

caved in, committed fornication, adultery.

Sure, he dishonored his father. Sure, he did a horrible thing, but look, nothing happened. Nothing came of it.

That's so often the case with people who do what they know is wrong, and they say, I'm really going to get for this. Oh, I didn't? Oh, okay. Then I can do this some more.

No pain in this, no consequences. That's what comes, bitter consequences come of that route. Esau wept bitterly trying to change things.

He found no place for his father to repent, to give him what he wanted. This is basically how we're warned not to think or begin to think in such a way as if you can do what you want and still get away with it as far as God is concerned. Not so.

It's a shame to have to break here in the middle of a chapter, because we were doing so well in taking a whole chapter per session up to this point. We're almost done, but there's too much good in this chapter to try to race through it in the next five minutes or something and finish it. We'll take it up again next time.