

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 12:12-17**

To better understand how to be healed.

Read the Text:

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. (Heb. 12:12-17, ESV)

Study the Text:**The Race Continues**

It seems strange that on the heels of a lesson on discipline the author would add a "therefore" and seemingly go to a completely different subject. But remember, "It is for **discipline** that you have to endure" (verse 7). The author is still in a race metaphor. He noted that when one is trained in discipline, they will yield "the peaceful fruit of righteousness." But his audience is in the painful part of discipline, not the peaceful fruit part. They are exhausted from the race. Below is a breakdown of the key terms and concepts in this passage.

TWO PATHS FOR THE LAME

The author starts by acknowledging his readers are exhausted. "Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees." In a race, if your hands are drooping and your knees are weak, you don't have much left in the tank. This is where injuries happen. In Hebrews 10:36, the author uses the word ὑπομονῆς (hypomonēs), which means to remain under pressure. "For you have need of **endurance**, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised." When you remain under the pressure of a weight, you gain strength. But here the author is not building strength. If you remain under the pressure of a back squat with "weak knees" while on uneven ground, you will be injured. Therefore, the author encourages his readers, tired

from the race, to “make straight paths for your feet”—through the discipline of endurance (12:7). By doing this, they will not go down the path of injury—“out of joint”—but rather be healed. But why are they lame in the first place?

SEE TO IT THAT NO ONE FAILS

First, we must understand that the author rarely addresses an individual in this letter - he is encouraging a community. This chapter is no different. No one can “see to it that no one fails” alone; that work happens only in community. And if community is in view here, then the “healing” promised in verse 13 is better understood with James 5 in mind: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” In enduring discipline, honesty with one another in community is what makes your path straight. Confession within a safe community will not leave the lame - or, put differently, the one with drooping hands and weak knees who is close to quitting the community - worse off. It will bring healing instead. Be the one who confesses. But also be the one who is worthy of being confessed to. Now that we have seen the path to healing, we can ask honestly what caused the wound within the community. We see two answers with examples from the Old Testament.

STRIVE FOR PEACE WITH EVERYONE

The first answer the author gives is for his readers to “strive for peace with everyone.” He is not alone in this request. In Psalm 34, David says “seek peace and pursue it” (Peter actually quotes this verse in 1 Peter 3 as well). Paul also writes in Romans, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” The author contrasts “strive for peace” with a “root of bitterness,” showing an alternative path inside a community. The phrase “root of bitterness” is itself a callback to Deuteronomy 29, where Moses asked the Israelites, “Whose mind has turned away from the Lord our God, to go to serve the gods of those nations? Who among you is a root growing up with gall and bitterness?” Grindheim writes, “Since the remedy is to pursue peace with all (v. 14), it seems that the cause of bitterness may be lack of community cohesion.”¹ When bitterness is pursued, peace with everyone is removed, and the lame are not healed.

STRIVE FOR HOLINESS

The second answer is for his readers to strive “for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” Another verse speaks of seeing God. It is found in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. He says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). But what does it mean to be holy or for a heart to be pure? The author provides his example from “Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.” The story of Jacob and Esau is found in Genesis 25. Verse 34 describes Esau’s heart as “despising his birthright.” And Genesis notes in verse 32 that Esau says, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?” Then “he ate and drank and rose and went his way,” seemingly in practice showing he cared so little for his inheritance that he quickly finished his “single meal” and went about his life. His actions and his mindset were for his now, not for his tomorrow. Esau was so short-sighted that he sold the promises from his father’s inheritance for very little. Esau’s despising of his birthright is its own kind of lameness — a heart already giving up before the race is over.

WHEN HE DESIRED TO INHERIT THE BLESSING

Although only one verse separates Esau’s meal from his desire to inherit the blessing, it spans decades in real life. Isaac is called “old, and his eyes were dim so that he could not see” (Gen. 27:1). Esau finally comes to the point where he wants the inheritance. “Afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.” Isaac requests, almost ironically, for a meal to

¹ Sigurd Grindheim, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023), 635.

be prepared (the exact thing Esau was willing to trade his birthright for), and this time Esau feels he has enough time and energy to go the extra mile to hunt, kill, prepare, and cook... The problem is he doesn't have the time. Jacob deceptively receives the blessing Isaac meant for Esau, and by the time Esau arrives, even his tears cannot change the outcome. The author is not asking us to decide whether there is a point of no return from sin's own hardening of a heart or simply death. Recall Hebrews 6: "Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation... And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" and Hebrews 3, "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Unlike Esau, whose tears came too late, the author writes to people who still have their 'today.' His warning is real, but so is his confidence in his readers.

What About Now?

Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 6: "Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat... Is not life more than food... Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?... But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.'" Just as Esau's appetite for the immediate cost him his future, Jesus calls us to resist that impulse by trusting God for today and tomorrow. He did not live by faith and patience, holding out to inherit the future promises. Likewise, we should seek first the kingdom of God, as most of the faithful mentioned in chapter 11 did, and hold onto the beautiful inheritance promised to us in Christ. For we are "heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Romans 8:17).

Additionally, as we seek the kingdom, we need to make sure we are in community. For we are all under pressure. We all have our areas of hurt, weakness, and lameness. And these verses call us to not put out of joint others who are lame. This is what it means to be in community - that it is better to acknowledge our lameness (drooping hands and weak knees) together in order for healing through confession to happen now, as opposed to drifting away from the community and finding yourself to be like Esau, and that the door for repentance has closed.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Hebrews 12:12–13. What imagery does the author use to describe spiritual weariness?

2. What does it mean to "make straight paths for your feet"?

Day Two

1. Read Hebrews 12:14. What two things are commanded to believers?

2. Read Hebrews 12:15. What does a “root of bitterness” cause?

Day Three

1. Read Hebrews 12:16. Who is Esau? What did he do in exchange for a single meal?

2. What does the author call him for his choice?

Day Four

1. Read Hebrews 12:17. What happened when Esau later desired to inherit the blessing?

2. What does it mean that “he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears”?

Discuss the Text!

Session 28 Discussion: Endurance

Endurance is exhausting. Life in community is messy. The temptation to quietly drift from the community, whether because we are busy or living in sin, is real. But Hebrews has reminded us to “not neglect the gathering,” and now calls those in the gathering to “see to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God” because of a “root of bitterness” or “unholiness.” Strive for peace with everyone and pursue holiness. Talk as a group about what it looks like to carry this weight together.

1. Icebreaker: Think of a time that you were exhausted. What kept you going? What made you want to quit?
2. Is there a place in life where you feel “drooping hands and weak knees”?
3. What does it look like for someone in this group to help strengthen you?
4. Do you strive for peace with everyone? Is there a “root of bitterness” you have allowed to grow in a relationship or in this community? What should you do?
5. Kid Talk: Has there ever been something you really wanted right away - a toy/ type of candy - that made you forget about something even better later? Talk about how Esau did something like that, and how God wants us to be patient and trust Him for what is best, even when waiting is hard.

Takeaways:

1. Strive for peace with everyone.
2. Don't let today cost you tomorrow.
3. Healing happens in community, not in isolation.