

Parents sometimes let their children pick their own discipline for breaking the rules. What do they choose? Some go low which is always a mistake – “nothing” or “go to my room for a bit?.” Some go too high, “I should be locked in my room forever.” Sometimes they hit it just right, but whatever the case, we, no matter how old we get, like to think we know what’s best for us.

What do we do when we struggle or have pain physically or emotionally that makes us cry out, “I don’t deserve this” humanly speaking? Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, *the pioneer and perfecter of faith* as he reveals himself in Word and Sacrament.

### **Under Pressure the Word Remains and So Will We.**

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses.”* In chapter 11 the writer to the Hebrew Christians showed us men and women who lived by faith. Some were imprisoned. Some forfeited riches and power. Some faced lions. Some died - all for their faith in Jesus. The world was against them, but God had promised them. God had prepared for them something better. They endured.

Now, with these in mind, he says to you, believer, child of God, one who trusts the Gospel and its promises and strength rather than your own, who suffers and struggles in mind, body and soul with this sinful world and our old sinful selves, *“let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”*

What weight do you carry? Is it doubt? Is it your sin or the sin of someone else against you? What sin entangles you? What sin makes you doubt whether you can still be a Christian because you lose to it so often? What is the 5 lb weight of sin you wrapped around your ankle that you thought wasn’t too bad in the beginning, but is bringing you to a halt? *“Throw it off...run the race marked out for us.”* How can anyone say that? Don’t they know how hard this is? Don’t they know it feels impossible? Yes, they do know. Yes, it was impossible for them and for us... on our own. *“Fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”*

Jesus thought it worth giving up heaven and thought it pure joy to come to rescue you, and a world of sinners who wanted nothing to do with him. Pridefully we thought we were the solution and we can do it, but also realize on the other hand in our clearer moments that we are the problem and should despair. Yet Jesus came for us, came to us and became one of us – true God and true Man. He spoke God’s Word. He reasoned, taught and explained, healed the sick and raised the dead. He helped all in just the right way, and yet so many rejected him and heaped abuse on him, and they crucified him. On the cross Jesus’ disciples could not have fathomed that this might be part of God’s plan. And then Jesus rose. He ascended. He rules at the right hand of God for you and all believers. That changed their mind. They thought differently. This was for our forgiveness and freedom, so that we are assured that we have eternal life. Now we think differently as we face the trials and struggles of our lives. We do not lose heart because God not only forgives us. He trains us. But how?

“Do you want to do sprints today?” asked no coach ever. You had to run, do burpees, sprint, lift weights or some other form of torture, I mean exercise. Coaches plan their practices, their drills and even their conditioners to build up their players for the game or race. Players often do not know exactly what they will encounter with their opponents, or course, but the coaches know. Even more so, God knows what training you need!

Our Savior trains us for this race. These pictures allow us to see why God allows us to suffer and feel pain and loss. *“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,*

*because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.*” Just take some “random” examples from everyday New Ulm children. When my son doesn’t wear shoes when he scooters and tries to brake with his bare foot, the consequence of that is usually enough that I don’t have to give him a spanking or time out to teach him to wear his shoes when he does those things. I will hug him, sit with him and show him a better way. God allows us to feel some of the earthly effects of our sin to show us our need to wear the armor of his Word and commands so we don’t foolishly glide down the path of sin. When my daughter starts running for the road chasing a ball with a car barreling down, you can bet she will hear my stern voice and if she does not listen causing a car to thankfully slam on the brakes in time and she is ok, then maybe that ball will be thrown away or someone gets a timeout. Doesn’t God stop us short of destruction sometimes, but then also give us a time out from certain areas of life? And when it’s time for the pacifier to go, sometimes it just has to go no matter how many tears or full sentences the child may plead with you to get it back. Doesn’t God sometimes take away the things that are becoming addiction or little idols in our lives and turning our eyes and hearts off of Jesus? If parents didn’t care, they’d do nothing. But parents love their children and discipline them with patience and love. And so does God. *“Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children.”*

The struggle is real: *“In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”* How are we handling these struggles? What if that day comes for us to either hold on to God at the cost of our skin, or to forget him? How will we react? How do we react?

Are there more complaints from my mouth about the struggles I have, rather than prayers to the one who cares the most, trusting him? Do I pursue every chance at escape I get whether that be through entertainment, scrolling, travelling, pleasure or quiet as though that will bring the happiness I need instead of fleeing to God’s Word and Sacrament? Do I play with sin until it backs me into a corner so that I feel trapped and unable to do the God-pleasing thing? Is it just easier to go on sinning? Am I lazy, and feel unqualified to even have a devotion with my family? Yes, I do these things, and I’m guessing I’m not alone. God help us. And he does!

*“Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”* Jesus suffered hell for me so I will never suffer hell. If I suffer here it is only temporary. He has promised me heaven. *“God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.”* God doesn’t punish me for my sin and sinfulness. He punished Jesus in my place. I stand in his grace. I am forgiven. You are forgiven. Now everything he allows is for my good, so that I share in his holiness, credited to me now through Jesus, mine fully in heaven. *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”* God trains me to find my peace in him. I *fix my eyes on Jesus.*

*“Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.”* My coaches used to say, “Everybody on the line.” You knew it was coming. Practice was almost over. You dreaded the pain that was ahead of you, the exhaustion you would feel running when you were already exhausted from a hot day and practice. But you get on that line, next to all your teammates. You encourage one another. You support one another. You wait for one another. You push one another. You run! Why? Because you are a team. God has made us a team, dear believers. *“Fix your eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”* He doesn’t leave you alone. He trains you. He loves you. He grows you in his Word as you sit at his feet together, as you gather together at his table to receive his body and blood for your forgiveness. He strengthens you so you also strengthen each other with the Word of God. As you are trained, you help others heal and stand up and strengthen arms and knees, so that they run with you. And we run until we join that great cloud of witnesses by Jesus’ side because of his mercy and grace. And so our great coach, our heavenly Father, our Savior says, “Get on the line.” And we do. We *fix your eyes on Jesus* for his forgiveness and his strength. And we run – to his glory. **Under Pressure the Word Remains and So Will We.** Amen.