

Sermon on **Hebrews 12:1-13** for 9th Sunday of Pentecost – 8.14.22

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You know it's going to be a fun day when your coach asks you, "Are you injured, or are you just hurt?" You took some hits or something's just not right and you slow up, let up, and look like you want to stop. Your coach pulls you aside with the right word so you can continue. Listen with the Hebrew Christians and find the key to keep running the race God's given you even with struggles and hurts.

Focus on your Savior Especially in Your Struggles.

1. Run the Race.

2. Recognize His loving Hand.

3. Reinforce, Recuperate, and Roll.

1. Run the Race. The Hebrew Christians were hurt with persecution and struggle and looked like many wanted to give up and stop. Like a good coach the writer to the Hebrews reminds them of believers from the beginning of time who had been hurt, grieved, persecuted within and from without, and struggled through the difficulties God sent as he called them to do, to move, to trust, and even to meet their death. And they all did it, victored, by faith in the promised Savior Jesus Christ. **Focus on your Savior and Run the Race.**

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, 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 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."

Are you good at complaining? I am, sadly, even if I don't voice it. We take note of our troubles, struggles and woes from the common cold to cancer, family troubles, financial worries, spiritual battles that wage in our hearts and consciences, despair, interpersonal conflict, and we're just scratching the surface. And we often try to find someone to blame.

One of the easiest things to do is to blame others, especially if we feel we can draw a line from our problem to them being careful not to draw that line to ourselves. This is like a sprinter looking at the runner next to them as they race or turning their head behind as they try to run. But this slows our run as we dehydrate ourselves holding grudges, and let anger, jealousy, indignation grow robbing of us of the cool waters of joy and ruining God's plan for us of peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control. It's hard to run this way.

Do we dare blame ourselves? It's not always accurate in every situation, but as sinners we are often part of the problem if not the problem itself. And like an athlete constantly checking their equipment or lamenting how tired and exhausted they are, we hold on to regret, carry our sins and shame with us, running focused on ourselves. Whether you get enamored with what you see or fall into near despair, this is no way to run. You almost stop as you gaze down at yourself.

Do you blame God? He allows these troubles to come to us. He is not the author of sin, no, but he allows us to suffer the consequences of living in a sinful world with sinful people (ourselves included) groaning under the curse of sin. Maybe we don't like the turn our course has taken and we just don't want to run anymore, feel we can't, and just want to stop, closing our eyes wincing in grief or pain.

It's difficult to run when you keep looking at the runner next to you, or when you are consumed with every shoelace, fabric of your jersey and keep looking behind, and you can't run well with your eyes closed.

Look to Jesus. Repent. Drop the grudge. Forgive as you've been forgiven. Drop the weight of shame you are carrying at Christ's cross. Don't be consumed by all the things that are wrong even though they seem to be ten feet tall in front of you. How can we run? **Focus on Your Savior, Especially in the Struggles.**

Look at Jesus. He ran the race, a race more difficult than you or I could imagine. And he suffered opposition from those closest to him. He was rejected, flogged, beaten, mocked by the very people he came to help and serve, all of whom should have known better. He did not stop to blame or complain like the thieves on the cross, but forgave those who pierced him. He did not lose focus on his Father in self-pity when he bore the weight you and I dropped there, the weight of our worries, our sins, our shame. He kept moving even when he took the turn in the course His Father set for him which led to a cross.

"For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame." He suffered along the path the Father had laid out for him as he bore the punishment we deserved. For what joy? Why did he consider the cross something

he was willing to do, as though it were a small thing to suffer compared with what he got in return? Why? It was because he was doing this for you, to win you and pay your ransom, to free you, to forgive you, to make you his own not just in this short life, but for all eternity! He considered the race worth running. He ran it through the cross and rose from the grave and now sits at the right hand of God ruling over all things, and marking out your course like a good coach and encouraging you on the way. His joy is you and your salvation according to his Father's plan. *Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.* **Focus on your Savior Especially in Your Struggles. Run the Race.**

2. Recognize his loving hand.

In your struggles against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, (quotation from Proverbs 3:11-12) "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." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined – and everyone undergoes discipline – then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of the spirits and live!

I don't often spank my children, but sometimes I have to spank, give a time out, or ground, not because I want to, but because they need it. They need a boundary to be clear and set, to keep them from danger, to keep them from going down a path of behavior that is wrong, inappropriate, or downright sinful. And I explain this to them. Why? Because I love them. I'm their dad. I am a sinful father who at best gets it partially right. As Christians we recognize that pain and struggle God allows in our lives is more than just inconvenience, or something purposeless we want to get rid of as quickly as possible. God is not toying with us in some sinister trick. We know God, our perfect Father, allows it, sends it, sets a limit to it, and uses it as a good Father uses discipline with his beloved children.

"They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness." If we are sinning and we suffer painful consequence because of it, it makes us wake up and realize and repent. If we see someone else struggle or fail, it can be a warning to us that we don't want to go down the path of sin. If we suffer something and we have no clue why, it doesn't mean it is linked to some sin we've committed or a direct punishment, but it makes us remember as sinners in a sinful world we need our Savior Jesus Christ, and we need to pray to him in good times and in bad. It reminds us to hold on to him.

Sometimes God is using this hardship to train us for bigger battles, or to help someone later on. And sometimes it's not so much about us, but God has an even bigger plan that will help another. We know his forgiveness and love. There are more that need to know about it. Sometimes we won't see the exact why, but we know the greater why – God has this in our course to run as we journey one step closer to heaven. There are things we'll see coming, and there are things we won't, but at the finish line we'll see he set a good course for each of us, and he will help us **Focus on him and Run the Race and Recognize His Loving Hand.**

3. Reinforce, Recuperate, and Roll. *"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. 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."* You may think you've suffered an injury that has disqualified you from the race. Maybe it's a sin. Maybe it's a level of despair. Maybe it's that you just never seem to get ahead in your life of sanctification. Maybe it's something else. Do not fear. You are not injured beyond recovery. He is training you. He knows how to strengthen you by the hills, and obstacles on your course that he has set for you. Jesus helps you run till you cross the finish line, and you will cross it. Your Savior has forgiven you by his cross and empty tomb. He strengthens you to get back up and run. He gives His righteousness and works righteousness in you. He will give you peace as he has promised to bless you. So **reinforce** the feeble arms. Brace up and **recuperate** the knees and ankles, and **roll** down the course God has assigned you. You are hurt, but you're still in this race. Jesus will see you through. **Focus on your Savior especially in Your Struggles. Run. Recognize. Roll. Amen.**