Dear Lord, Please help me be the kind of person my dog thinks I am.
(Anonymous)
Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone…"
Galatians 6:10a

Prayer Study #522

HEBREWS CHAPTER 12

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The Race and the Goal

12 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [who by faith have testified to the truth of God's absolute faithfulness], stripping off every unnecessary weight and the sin which so easily and cleverly entangles us, let us run with endurance and active persistence the race that is set before us,* ***2*** *[looking away from all that will distract us and] focusing our eyes on Jesus, who is the Author and Perfecter of faith [the first incentive for our belief and the One who brings our faith to maturity], who for the joy [of accomplishing the goal] set before Him endured the cross, disregarding the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God [revealing His deity, His authority, and the completion of His work].* ***3*** *Just consider and meditate on Him who endured from sinners such bitter hostility against Himself*

[consider it all in comparison with your trials], so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Chapter 11 is the *faith* chapter. Chapter 12 is the *hope* chapter. Chapter 13 is the *love* chapter.

Hope in the theme of Chapter 12. To understand hope, we look at life without hope. Immediately examples, such as the doctor who tells a grieving family that there is no hope for the recovery of a loved one or a prisoner stands before a judge and is sentenced to life without parole and has no hope of ever being set free, help us understand what hope is. John Phillips says, "Hope, in the Scriptures, is not something vague, based on wishful thinking and uncertainties. Hope is vital and dynamic and real, because it is based on eternal verities. In Hebrews 12, God speaks to His children. That they are His children is evident because He chastens them. He sets before them grand and glorious future prospects, for He wants them to patiently endure present trials and testings. God is going to establish His kingdom, so amid all of earth's upheavals this 'blessed hope' should be the guiding star, the pledge of complete victory both today, as we trudge on through the desert sands, and tomorrow, when all His bright purposes are fully seen."

Peter writes in his epistle, *"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear..."* Proverbs 13:12 speaks of "*hope deferred*" as being that that *"makes the heart sick."*

There are two main sources of the hope that is in you:

First, His Name: *I will praise you forever for what you have done; in your name I will hope, for your name is good. I will praise you in the presence of your saints* (Psalm 52:9). Also, *In His name the nations will put their hope* (Matthew 12:21).

Secondly, His Word: *I will rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word* (Psalm 119:147). My late friend Pat Carver wrote of God's Word: "We believe God's Word and know it is TRUE. Jeremiah 1:12 says God watches over His Word to perform it, and Isaiah 55:11 says His word will not return unto Him void but will accomplish what it is sent to do. Knowing this, we can pray the Word about a situation and expect God-kind of results. The person we pray for has a free choice whether to accept what God has for them, and, by praying the Word on their behalf, we give them the benefit of choosing either life or death, blessing or

cursing, going God's way or their own way (Deuteronomy 30:19). As we confess His Word, believe it, read it, speak it, and act on it, we begin to merge with it, and it becomes our way of life. As we live the Word, His strength, His ability, His peace, His love, His joy, His confidence and His faith become ours. As we pray His Word, the weary ones, the weak ones, the deceived ones, the sick ones will be ministered to, protected by and brought gently to our Good Shepherd."

Barclay tells us that these first two verses are a near-perfect summary of the Christian life, and I might add that the first three verses of this chapter are some of the most moving verses in the New Testament.

The chapter begins with the cloud of witnesses. Who are these witnesses? Because of the first word in the chapter, *Therefore,* I would assume that the witnesses are those mentioned in the Chapter 11 Faith Hall of Fame. They were faithful men and women who paved the way for us and looked forward in faith to the Messiah. The writer of Chapter 12 most likely is not implying that these Old Testament saints are spectators to the race we are running. This is probably a figurative representation. We are to run the race as if they were cheering us on. We are to run inspired by their lives of faith. Since it is *so*

great a cloud of witnesses, it would probably indicate the millions of believers who have walked out the faith on the earth.

Inspired by those who have gone before us, we should run the race, not crawl it, not even walk it, but run with all we have within us. We must lay aside the sin that so easily ensnares us and hinders us. John Phillips says that sometimes legitimate things become weights in our lives and hold us back, things such as love of home and family, love of country, love of comfort and ease, contentment with job, security at work. The Hoppers, a Southern Gospel singing group's, signature song is "I've come to far to look back again," and as so many like to say, "The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint." We have to be patient and keep running with endurance. We can do this successfully only by focusing on Jesus.

The last two verses in this section show the love of Jesus for us like few verses do. He had to endure shame, the cross, and hostility from the very ones He was trying to save. Yet He did if with joy, knowing that what He was doing would save those who only had to accept what He did for us and believe in our hearts that He was Who He said He was. Now He sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty interceding for you and me. By

meditating on what He did for us, we will not grow weary and lose heart and quit.

In summary of these first three verses, the writer of Hebrews is telling us to do five things:

a. Lay aside the weight: The weight is any thing that is hindering your Christian advancement and could include things such as pride and arrogance.
b. Lay aside sin: The Greek word for sin is *hamartia,* which means *missing the mark*. This could be things like pornography and sex promiscuity.
c. Run with patience the race: We are a people who don't want to wait for anything. We must be patient in trials and tribulations, knowing that, if we are faithful and obedient, He will deliver us from them all.
d. Look unto Jesus: He is the Author and Perfecter of our faith.
e. Consider Him: We should analyze everything about the Pattern Son and follow His example in how He handled trials and tribulations.

The joy set before the Lord Jesus that enabled Him to suffer the cross was the redemption of mankind. There can be no greater love than this act of dying to redeem us, while we were yet sinners.

A Father's Discipline

4 *You have not yet struggled to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;*
5 *and you have forgotten the divine word of encouragement which is addressed to you as sons,*
"My son, do not make light of the discipline of the Lord,
And do not lose heart and give up when you are corrected by Him;
6 *For the Lord disciplines and corrects those whom He loves,*
And He punishes every son whom He receives and welcomes [to His heart]."
7 *You must submit to [correction for the purpose of] discipline; God is dealing with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?* ***8*** *Now if you are exempt from correction and without discipline, in which all [of God's children] share, then you are illegitimate children and not sons [at all].*
9 *Moreover, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we submitted and respected them [for training us]; shall we not much more willingly submit to the Father of spirits, and live [by learning from His discipline]?* ***10*** *For our earthly fathers disciplined us for only a short time as seemed best to them; but He disciplines us for our*

good, so that we may share His holiness. ***11*** *For the time being no discipline brings joy, but seems sad and painful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness [right standing with God and a lifestyle and attitude that seeks conformity to God's will and purpose].*

As stressful and difficult as life sometimes is, we have not been called upon to shed our blood for sin. Nothing we have to bear will ever compare with what Jesus had to bear, even if we lose our life for the sake of the Gospel.

The Amplified has put verses 5 and 6 in a more positive light than the King James. Verse 6 in the King James reads: *For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.* This comes from Proverbs 3: 11-12.

One day there will be a manifested Sons of God Company, a manifestation that all of creation is yearning for. These Sons, which will be both male and female, will have an intimacy with the Father that only children can have with their fathers, but this will be so much greater because God is the perfect and faithful Father.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SONS OF GOD

1. **Sons of God don't love the world and the applause of men**. *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore, the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.* (1st John 3:1-2)
2. **Sons of God shine as lights and don't complain.** *Do all things without murmuring and disputings that ye may be blameless and harmless, the Sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.* (Philippians 2:14-15)
3. **Sons of God walk in maturity and have put away childish things**. *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thoughts as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things.* (1st Corinthians 13:11)
4. **Sons of God speak the Truth in love.** *That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, who is the head, even Christ.* (Ephesians 4:14-15)
5. **Sons of God are called to praise Him.** *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show*

forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1st Peter 2:9)

6. **Sons of God walk in obedience and love.** *Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us and given Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor, but fornication and all uncleaness or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no fornicator nor unclean person nor covetous man (who is an idolater) hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience.* (Ephesians 5:1-6)
7. **Sons of God present themselves to the Lord.** *Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came along among them.* (Job 1:6)
8. **Sons of God are joyful.** *When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.* (Job 38:7)
9. **Sons of God are led by the Spirit.** *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.* (Romans 8:14)
10. **Sons of God tabernacle the living God and separate from the world**. *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with*

unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean things, and I will receive you and will be a Father to you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. (2nd Corinthians 6:14-18)

11. **Sons of God accept the chastening of the Lord**. *And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as sons. My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord nor faint when thou are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.* (Hebrews 12:5-6)
12. **Sons of God walk in power.** *But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.* John 1:12

Dake gives us 8 Reasons When and Why God Chastens:

a. When men refuse to hear (Job 33)
b. When they commit iniquity (2nd Samuel 7:14)
c. When men provoke God (Psalm 89:30-32)
d. When they forsake God (Psalm 89:30-32)

e. When men refuse to judge themselves (1st Corinthians 11:32)
f. When they stubbornly rebel (Deuteronomy 11:2-6, Leveticus 26:14-31; Numbers 14)
g. When men sow to the flesh (Galatians 6:7-8)
h. When His children need instruction and correction (Hebrews 12:5-10; Revelation 3:10)

What does chastening produce? It produces righteousness and peace.

Duties and Dangers

12 *So then, strengthen hands that are weak and knees that tremble.* ***13*** *Cut through and make smooth, straight paths for your feet [that are safe and go in the right direction], so that the leg which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather may be healed.*

14 *Continually pursue peace with everyone, and the sanctification without which no one will [ever] see the Lord.* ***15*** *See to it that no one falls short of God's grace; that no root of resentment springs up and causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;* ***16*** *and [see to it] that no one is immoral or godless like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.* ***17*** *For you know that later on, when he wanted [to regain title to] his inheritance of the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no opportunity for*

repentance [there was no way to repair what he had done, no chance to recall the choice he had made], even though he sought for it with [bitter] tears.

Dake gives us ten commands for Christians in verses 12:12-17:

a. Lift up the hands which hang down (v. 12)
b. Strengthen the feeble knees (v. 12)
c. Make straight paths for your feet (v. 13)
d. Let the lame be healed (v. 13)
e. Follow peace with all men (v. 14)
f. Follow holiness (v. 14)
g. Look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God (v. 15)
h. Look diligently lest you be rejected and find no repentance (v.16-17)
i. Look diligently lest you become a fornicator as Esau (v. 16)
j. Look diligently lest you be rejected and find no repentance (v. 16-17)

Contrast of Sinai and Zion: The Terror of the Old and the Glory of the New

18 *For you have not come [as did the Israelites in the wilderness] to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to gloom and darkness and a raging windstorm,* ***19*** *and*

to the blast of a trumpet and a sound of words [such that] those who heard it begged that nothing more be said to them. ***20*** *For they could not bear the command, "If even a wild animal touches the mountain, it will be stoned [to death]."* ***21*** *In fact, so terrifying was the sight, that Moses said, "I am filled with fear and trembling."* ***22*** *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels [in festive gathering],* ***23*** *and to the general assembly and assembly of the firstborn who are registered [as citizens] in heaven, and to God, who is Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous (the redeemed in heaven) who have been made perfect [bringing them to their final glory],* ***24*** *and to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant [uniting God and man], and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks [of mercy], a better and nobler and more gracious message than the blood of Abel [which cried out for vengeance].*

The writer is telling us that we do not have to come to Mt. Sinai, which represents the law. Indeed, all of the Pauline epistles and Hebrews warns of the bondage of the law. Anyone who studies these epistles comes away knowing that we are not to be Judaizers. In fact, verses 18-21 make it clear that we indeed cannot

keep the law. The law brings death.

On the other hand, Zion represents the ultimate, spirit filled life in Christ, the place where all Christians should aspire to be. Zion is a holy place (Psalm 2:6); the place of the dwelling of the Lord (Psalm 9:11); the Glory of the Lord (Psalm 102:16); the Rod of His Strength (Psalm 110:2); the place of His Blessing (Psalm 128:5); the place of Singing (Psalm 137:3); the place of Joy (Psalm 149:2); the place of Shouting (Isaiah 12:6); the place of a Quick Answer from the Lord (Isaiah 30:19); the place of the Fire of God (Isaiah 31:9); the place where Sinners and Hypocrites are full of Fear (Isaiah 33:14); the place of Salvation (Isaiah 46:13); the place of Joy, Gladness, and the Comfort of the Lord (Isaiah 51:3); the place where the Redeemer shall come (Isaiah 59:20); the place where the sons of those who have afflicted you and despised you shall bow down at your feet and call you, *The Zion of the Holy One of Israel* (Isaiah 60:14); the place of Beauty for Ashes, the Oil of Joy for Mourning, the Garment of Praise for the Spirit of Heaviness (Isaiah 61:3); the place of a Quick Work of the Spirit (*For as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children)* (Isaiah 66:8); the place of Restoration of the Backslidden (Jeremiah 3:14); the place to Blow the Trumpet, Sanctify a Fast, Call a Solemn

Assembly (Joel 2:1 and 2:15); the place of the Former and Latter Rain (Joel 2:23); the place where the Lord will restore what the enemy has taken (Joel 2:24); the place of Deliverance (Joel 2:32 & Obadiah 17); the place of Hope and Strength (Joel 3:16); and the place of Travail and Birthing (Micah 4:10). Most importantly, Zion is the place where Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant and the sprinkled blood are (Hebrews 12:24)

The Unshaken Kingdom

25 *See to it that you do not refuse [to listen to] Him who is speaking [to you now]. For if those [sons of Israel] did not escape when they refused [to listen to] him who warned them on earth [revealing God's will], how much less will we escape if we turn our backs on Him who warns from heaven?* ***26*** *His voice shook the earth [at Mount Sinai] then, but now He has given a promise, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the [starry] heaven."* ***27*** *Now this [expression], "Yet once more," indicates the removal and final transformation of all those things which can be shaken—that is, of that which has been created—so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.* ***28*** *Therefore, since we*

receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, and offer to God pleasing service and acceptable worship with reverence and awe; ***29*** *for our God is [indeed] a consuming fire.*

We are exhorted to listen to Jesus, who is speaking now to us through this writer. He is speaking from heaven. His voice speaking the law once shook Mt. Sinai, the place of the law, but in the future He will shake not only the earth but also the heaven. The shaking removes all that can be shaken, but His kingdom cannot be shaken.
Dake comments on these last verses: "The renovation of the heavens and the earth at the end of the Millennium will remove all things of the curse and those that are man made which need to be taken away, so that the things of God may remain eternally."

For our God is a consuming fire is taken from Deuteronomy 4:24. John Phillips comments on this last verse: "Grace gives us no license to forget God's holiness. He is our Father, but He is also a consuming fire. In the Old Testament, God put distance between the sacred Ark of the Covenant and the rank and file of the people even when the camp was on the march. The distance has now been removed, but the burning holiness

remains….For a Hebrew believer to go back to Judaism in the light of all that has been said would simply prove that he is an apostate and not a regenerate person at all.”