

Let's prepare ourselves for the study of God's Word this morning with a moment of prayer. Father, we thank You for the freedom that we enjoy and the opportunity that we have to assemble with believers of like mind to spend time in worship and fellowship, to be nourished up and strengthened through the ministry of Your Spirit, and the strengthening and the enabling that comes through Your Word in our souls. We pray for those who are not with us this morning that You'll be with them wherever they may be and in the tasks in which they are engaged.

We thank You for all believers who gather on this day of the week because they love You and are seeking to be more closely conformed to Your will. We thank You for the country in which we live and the government over it. We pray that You'll be with our leaders as decisions are made, priorities are set, and our national and state and local officials engage in the execution of their duties.

We pray that our nation will continue to be a place where the gospel is held up and communicated, where the gospel that reflects in the daily lives of believers can be observed and that God the Holy Spirit can use that to both win the lost and to encourage and teach those of us who are seeking to walk the narrow way through the straight gate that leads to life. We pray that You'll be with those who are overseas who are engaged in the work of evangelism, that their truth can be made clear, that those who are seeking will find, that those who have not heard the name of Jesus Christ will hear it and can come to saving faith. We pray that once that takes place there will be provision for teaching and for nurturing and for making of disciples so that our endeavors are not focused solely on winning the lost but also in bringing the immature to maturity and speaking the truth to one another in love so that we can all be built up within the body of Christ and reflect His glory.

We pray now as we worship through the study of Your Word that God the Holy Spirit will enlighten us, that we will chart a straight course, that we will not only observe and learn the things that are in the passage before us but that they will become a part of the resources in our souls, that it will be the substance of our meditations and will be the power by which we are changed on the inside so that our desires more closely match Yours, that our viewpoint of life will more closely reflect that of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask these things in His name. Amen.

For our Scripture reading this morning, turn with me to the book of Hebrews, Hebrews chapter 12. It is an opportunity, I suppose, to take a look at the mention of our current hero in the study of Genesis, Jacob. He is mentioned in verses 20 and 21 of chapter 11.

I find it significant that in the roster of heroes of the faith, when the author of Hebrews comes down to Jacob, the episodes that we have seen beginning with his life in the camp of Isaac, the dealings he has with his brother, the relationship he has with his mother, his departure, his seeing of the vision of the stairway or the ladder to heaven with the angels ascending and descending, the trip to Haran, the marriage, the 20-odd years that he spends with Laban, his return to the land—we have many details of the life of Jacob. His sons and the episode with Joseph and the eventual descent into Egypt during a time of famine and his eventual death in Egypt and being taken back to the land and buried.

Of all of the details that we have on the life of Jacob, there is one episode that is singled out in Hebrews as an example of Jacob's faith. And that example is right at the end of his life, the last thing that he does before he passes away. In his final moments, verse 21 of chapter 11 says, "By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph."

He pronounces blessing on all 12 of his own sons as well as Ephraim and Manasseh. But isn't it interesting that out of the entire—how many chapters we have in Genesis dedicated to the life of Jacob? It's nigh unto half the book—is the section on Jacob. The one example of faith that is singled out is pretty much what he does with his dying breath when he crosses his hands and blesses the sons of Joseph, leaning on the top of his staff.

So, if nothing else, it reminds us that the section of Jacob's life that we are now engaged in studying, where he is in Haran with the brother of his mother, Laban, is not necessarily going to be a shining example of faith. We can review our own lives and realize that many phases or sections or whatever are not exactly shining examples of faith either. But they are nevertheless important parts of our lives.

They are parts of our lives where God is at work. God can use circumstances. God can teach us even when we are not doing well by an eternal standard in the same way that you can look at famous men, you can look at

great generals or great leaders, and if you read a biography, their childhood may not have portended great things.

People probably had no inkling that many of these were destined for great things. I've read several different biographies of Theodore Roosevelt. When he was a child, they didn't really think he was going to live.

He had breathing problems. He was afflicted with terrible asthma. He was puny and sickly.

He had a caved-in chest and was sort of a bookwormish, strange little boy that didn't really do much by way of athletics. His family despaired of him living into his teenage years, much less on into adulthood. It's quite interesting to see what he made of himself beginning as a child and overcoming his disabilities in the same way that Glenn Cunningham, the runner who won a silver medal in the 1936 Olympics, was burned in a fire as a child, and they didn't think he would ever walk again.

The same thing with Wilma Rudolph. She had a similar experience where they didn't think she would walk, and she also went on to become a great runner. Over and over again you see, looking at the early experiences of someone just in the secular realm, that there was no inkling or no foreshadowing of great things to come.

And yet, in many ways, the great things that do come in those people's lives can be traced back to struggles that they engaged in and deficits that they overcame that molded their character and through which they learned principles that then served them well when they did have opportunities later in life. This, I think, is a helpful perspective on the life of Jacob because, as we have seen even up to this point, there is not much admirable in Jacob's operation. He knows God.

He is aware of the value of the blessing and the birthright. But his methods of seeking those things and the way he goes about his life is not admirable at all. Deception and subterfuge and plotting and scheming.

He has a lot to learn before he can become the father of the nation that is going to reflect God's glory and in which God will establish His presence on earth. So, when you look at Hebrews chapter 11, you don't find in the roster of great acts of faith, we don't find this section of Jacob's life mentioned. It is at the end of his life, after he has been through these experiences, that he is able to exhibit in the act of blessing his grandsons the faith that he has developed and the perspective that he has obtained through these experiences of earlier years.

So, the pursuit of faith, the process that God takes us through in our lives, is important. And it is important for us not to be discouraged if we look at ourselves and say, "Well, I am going to be the least in the kingdom. I don't have any examples of great faith."

I see people around me. I read stories about heroes of the past who I can't even stand in the same room with. I am in the darkness which is outside looking through the windows at these great glowing heroes of faith.

But this is why our Scripture reading this morning comes from Hebrews chapter 12. Because, are we to look at the great examples of faith and be discouraged, or are we to be encouraged? In chapter 12, the author says, "Therefore," after he has given us these great examples of faith, he says, "Therefore, we also, 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, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, 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."

These verses are probably quite familiar to us, and familiarity, while in the Bible it doesn't necessarily breed contempt, it can keep us from looking with fresh eyes at things that we really need to absorb. You'll notice just in these two verses, since we are surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses, and people have tried to say, "Well, this is the people in our generation and in our periphery who are watching us and that we need to be modeling faith in the same way that we look at the biblical figures. People are looking at us, so this should be our motivation."

That's not what this verse is saying. This cloud of witnesses, these are people whose lives are a witness to the power of God's grace. These are people whose lives are a witness to the power of God's mercy.

These are people who have demonstrated and who have a witness in their life of the things that God can do if He has a faithful servant to work with. The cloud of witnesses, this great cloud of witnesses that surround us, these

are the people mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11. He says, "The reason I have mentioned these, the reason I have brought these to your mind and have listed their examples of faith is to encourage you to lay aside every weight."

You can go back and look at many of the individuals mentioned in this list, and they had a weight to be laid aside. They had sins that ensnared them. But God's grace, God's faithfulness, God's mercy overcame all of that and made them into great believers, great examples because they had faith, because they endured.

They stuck with it. They persevered, even in the face of their own failures. It's one thing to be discouraged by circumstances.

It's something else, because that's external, and that's a conflict on the outside. It's something else to be discouraged from things you find within when you have a severe sense of disappointment in yourself because of bad judgment, because of failures, because of distraction, because of waking up to realize that we've been apathetic or indifferent or otherwise engaged and have forgotten who we are and why we're here. Well, when you look at the individuals mentioned in chapter 11, many of these people had that same problem, and it should be an encouragement to us, not a discouragement, that it is possible to lay aside these various weights that encumber us.

It is possible to lay aside the sin which so easily ensnares us and to run with endurance. It doesn't say run with joy. It doesn't say run with peace.

It doesn't say run with an emotional uplift. Many of these things are put forward in various circles of Christianity today as ways to be motivated, ways to keep up. Let's all get together and encourage one another.

Let's have a disciple meeting. Let's mentor one another. Let's model the Christian life for one another.

We have great models. If you want to look at a model or an example, the Scripture gives us not only what can be seen with human eyes, but also the behind-the-scenes work, the spiritual invisible factors, and that's why our eyes are directed toward these individuals mentioned in chapter 11 and ultimately to Jesus Christ Himself. If you want to see a model for the life of faith, the author is going to go on to say, consider Jesus.

Why look at a pale and imperfect copy on earth in your current periphery or your current generation or even biographies of Jonathan Edwards or David Brainerd or Billy Sunday or D. L. Moody or anybody else you want to name that might be a historical figure? We have very limited and selective information, even in people that we directly observe, much less people that we read about in books. It's filtered.

It's incomplete. It is interpreted. This is the value of the Word of God because the Holy Spirit is superintending the record of someone's life and revealing, when necessary, things going on behind the scenes and giving us an accurate picture.

This is the place to look for a model and an example. To be disciplined, what better way to be disciplined than to be built up and encouraged and taught from the perfect record contained in Scriptures in the hands of God Himself, in the person of the Holy Spirit who wields that as a sword to reveal the thoughts and intents, to critique our thoughts and our intents, to enable us and give us the divine power to lay aside a weight and to avoid the snare of sin. Notwithstanding the good intentions and the well-meaning ministry that is engaged in by believers who try to disciple and who try to mentor, we have a higher and greater ministry from God Himself in these areas.

There is a place for encouragement. There is a place for speaking the truth to one another in love. But there is also quite a lot of cases today where believers seem to be elbowing the Holy Spirit out of the way and saying, "Let me help this person."

Let me be the mentor and the guide and the spiritual father of this person." But the author here says, "Run with endurance the race that is set before us." And this tells us something.

The race that is set before us requires endurance. If we do not endure to the end, we will not be delivered. You have the passage that says, "He who endures to the end will be saved."

This threw me into a quandary many, many years ago. So salvation is not assured and we don't have the idea that your salvation cannot be lost because right here it says you have to endure to the end to be saved. Well, this

is where our study of *sozo*, the Greek word for save or salvation, bears fruit because we know that there is a wide range of contexts where the idea of deliverance pertains.

And to be delivered, to be delivered out of this present evil age, as Paul terms it, is one of the reasons that Christ died for us. The good work that He is accomplishing in us and completing until the day of Christ Jesus that he talks about in Philippians 1:6. This is a deliverance, a deliverance that is ongoing.

The salvation that we work out with fear and trembling is not the deliverance from the lake of fire. It's deliverance from our fallen nature, deliverance from the world and the ways of the world, the devil and his ploys. You have it summarized in the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The deliverance that comes from that has to come from somewhere and it requires endurance. We're going to stumble and fall. We're going to find ourselves pressed down with weights and we have to keep getting up.

We have to keep stepping out of the snare. We have to keep pushing the weights aside and pick ourselves up. You remember several years ago, it was very graphic in my mind.

I don't often follow the Olympics, but I just happened to be watching the Olympics where ladies were running, and I forget the distance, but there was, I think, an Australian or New Zealand runner named Something Bud, and she ran barefoot. And there was another lady, Mary Somebody, who—you can tell my memory of it is somewhat imperfect—but the picture of it on my TV screen is quite clear in my mind because this Mary lady had been running for a long time. This was going to be her last chance to really medal in a big way, and she was running for all she was worth, and Zola Budd, or whatever her name was, came running up with her bare feet, and she had kind of a gawky style of running and her feet were flying around, and she tripped Mary whoever it was, and she fell, and this so devastated her that she couldn't even pick herself up.

She couldn't even retain her dignity or her self-control. She just laid there and was crying and rolling on her back and in the very obvious and graphic throes of self-pity that her last big chance had been ruined. And for weeks after that in the press she was excoriating this barefoot girl and that it was all her fault and just crying the blues, and it reminded me that the noble thing, something that would have impressed us as viewers, if she had picked herself up and gotten back on the track and finished the race, even if she came in dead last, all of the months of training, all of the dedication and the perseverance to arrive at that place and to be able to compete in that contest, to get up and finish the race, regardless, it is not the winning or the coming in first place or getting what you feel is your due.

It's persevering to the end and doing it with, in the human realm, we would say with style and grace and with poise, with integrity, with honor, that you have come there to compete and regardless of the obstacles, regardless of the challenges or the impediments, to get up and finish the race. I forever lost respect for Mary, whatever her name is, because she let her disappointment dissolve into self-pity and it released bitterness and a terrible complex of what we would consider to be sinful emotions and sinful words, sinful actions against this girl who had no intention of spoiling her day or ruining her life, but she let it be the defining moment of her career, what might have been, where getting up, dusting herself off, walking back over to the track and resuming the race and finishing could have also been the defining moment of her career, and that it's not, you know, the old hackneyed thing, it's not whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game.

There is an element of truth in that saying because it reminds us that the measure is not the external result, it's what goes on in our soul as we compete. That's what's being spoken of here in chapter 12, to lay aside the weight and the sin which ensnares us. We may look around and think that there are people who avoided the snares and who never were encumbered with the weights, and here we are and we're a pitiful example because we keep getting snared, we keep getting pushed down to the ground, but to run the race with endurance.

You'll notice it doesn't say let us win the race that is set before us, does it? It says run the race with endurance. Doesn't matter how many times we fall down, doesn't matter how many snares, doesn't matter how silly we may think we look to others. What counts is run the race that is set before us.

When we have an elevated perspective, both now and especially in the eternal future, we're going to realize that the race that's set before us is different than the race that is set before someone else. To compare ourselves to someone else is to compare apples and oranges. We have a different circumstance.

We were born with different strengths and weaknesses. We have had a different experience and a different way of being brought up and trained. Some of us come to Christ early.

Some of us come late. We've had a different path to wherever we currently are. We may be further or less far down the road than someone else.

There may be things that we have learned that they haven't. There are things they have learned that we haven't. But to look over the stripe in the adjacent lane and say, "Well, that person's ahead of me or that person's behind me," either way, it doesn't say, "Run someone else's race or be a commentator on someone else's race."

Our entire calling is to run with endurance the race that is set before us. We have our hands full running our own race. And even if we find ourselves tripped up by Zola Budd or whatever her name was, the barefoot, gawky runner beside, the point is, that's a part of our race.

We got tripped up. That's one of the factors. You see this in the military when you have tactical problems.

They'll set up a scenario where you go into an artificial environment where you're supposed to be on the bridge of a ship and they say, "Well, the bosun's mate runs up and says, 'Sir, we've lost watertight integrity and we're taking on water and we're listing to starboard and the pumps are not keeping up,' and what are you going to do?" And ostensibly, you may go in and they say, "Well, this is going to be a problem in how to navigate and come up and bring the ship alongside the pier," or "You're going to come into a certain place and you're going to drop anchor," and so you think the problem is about one thing, and as you're concentrating on that and you have your hands full, suddenly they'll throw in this wild-card circumstance and you say, "Well, now wait a minute. I thought this was an anchoring exercise or I thought this was a come up to the dock and tie up exercise, and now you're saying, 'I've lost watertight integrity.' What are you doing to me? I wasn't prepared for that."

Well, this is real life. This is what may happen in the real world. How do you deal with the unexpected? How do you deal with something that's not your fault? How do you deal with the circumstances beyond your control? That's a part of our race, and to be distracted and think, "Well, this person has caused me grief, this circumstance, it's not my fault, how unfair," is to lose sight of the fact that it is a race.

God knows anything that happens, He allows, He permits, and we are challenged to run with endurance the race that is set before us. How do we keep from getting distracted? Well, He says in verse 2, looking unto Jesus, He is the beginner and ender. He is the Alpha and Omega of our faith.

He's the one that starts it and He's the one that finishes it. He's the beginning of it and He's the end of it. And His example, He kept His eyes on the joy that was set before Him.

He endured the cross and all of its shame. He didn't get distracted by the people who were involved in bringing about the crucifixion. He didn't get distracted by the people who were conniving and plotting and those who were betraying Him for money.

He let nothing stand in the way of His goal, and the goal was to please the Father. It was His joy to do the will of the Father, to be a servant found faithful in the eyes of His Father, to be a worthy son, and that all of these things were a part of the Father's will, even the bad things, even the betrayal and the unfair criticism, the lying witnesses who came and testified against Him, the people who twisted His words and slandered Him and lied about Him, the people who were jealous of His popularity, the people whose pride was pricked by His truth and the things that He taught. He didn't get His eyes on people.

He didn't get His eyes on circumstances. He didn't allow Himself to dissolve in a pool of self-pity. He kept His eyes on the joy that was set before Him.

That's hope. Hope is the motivation of our life. The Lord Jesus Christ, in His humanity, moved forward and accomplished the will of the Father because He never lost sight of the hope, of the joy at the end of the race.

That's our example, and we are to do this looking, and looking is a participle, and it means this is the ongoing condition. We don't look once at Jesus and then go forward. We are always looking at Jesus.

How do we keep our eyes on Jesus and remember His example and remember the way that He exploited the power of the Holy Spirit and the sustaining power of the Word of God? We have to keep on looking. That's why

we spend our time in worship in the study of God's Word because this is where Christ is revealed. He's revealed in prospect in the Old Testament.

He's revealed in His earthly ministry in the Gospels. He's revealed in retrospect in the epistles and the letters of the New Testament. But every place you look in the Bible you see the Lord Jesus Christ and you see the joy that was set before Him by the Father, the accomplishment of God's purpose.

And this is what will give us the power. We do not innately, we do not inherently have the power to ignore people and circumstances and their effects on us. We are sorely afraid of shame.

We are sorely afraid of embarrassment. We're worried about how we look and how we appear to others. We have an instinct for self-preservation that causes us to be easily wounded by the bad opinions of others or the possibility of incurring someone's displeasure.

That's shame. The Lord Jesus Christ despised the shame, the ignominious nature of a crucifixion, being hung naked on a cross and spit upon and made the object of derision, not to mention the spiritual affliction of soul that comes from bearing sin that is not your own and being wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities and becoming as the off-scouring of all things, as Paul puts it. He endured the cross, despising the shame.

How? He kept His eyes on the joy that was set before Him. He never lost sight of the hope. And when we look unto Jesus, who is the beginner and ender of our faith, this is the thing to remember.

It's worth it. Even though things don't look bright in this world, even though it doesn't look like there's an impact or there's an effect or there's a value in living our lives heartily as unto the Lord, you can see in Jesus' example that as a result of His faithfulness, although from an earthly perspective He dies an ignominious death on the cross, from a heavenly perspective He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. There is no higher place of honor in the universe than the right hand of the throne of God.

The right hand is always the place of honor. And the Lord Jesus Christ, because He didn't lose sight of the hope, because He focused on the joy and didn't let Himself be distracted, He is seated in that high place of honor. We have the opportunity to be seated with Him, to be co-located with Him at God's right hand if we follow His example.

It is a discouraging thing to be in the early years of the life of Jacob, so to speak, when we find ourselves constantly learning lessons, constantly finding our weaknesses brought up to us and exposed. That's the phase of Jacob's life that we're studying in Genesis. But what does that example do for us? It is a reminder not to be discouraged, that endurance is required.

And it's one thing to talk about endurance, it's another thing to find yourself in a place where endurance is actually required. I have often envisioned in my mind, "Well, you know, I need to get back in shape and I need to run, and I can get up in the morning and go run, and it'll be hard at first, but I can think, you know, I can go, I can do this distance." So I get up in the morning and I put my stuff on and go out and stretch and head out into the darkness and the early morning mist.

And in prospect, when I was thinking about it, I thought, "You know, I'm going to go down, I'm going to run around the Water Tower Park X number of times and return, and I think I can do this." And I have it in my mind. When I am actually out there and I start my third turn around the Water Tower Park and my lungs are burning and my muscles are complaining because I haven't been consistent and I am now paying the price, it is a far different thing.

Because it's one thing to say, "I am going to endure." It's another thing when you are in the run to say, "I am going to keep on enduring," because now it's real. Now you feel the lactic acid building up in your system and you find that your wind is gone and your legs feel like lead.

And the thing that is particularly challenging is if you dedicate yourself to finishing a particular distance and then you see someone running the other way and you say, "Well, I don't want to look as bad as I feel." And so you try to straighten yourself up and pick up your step and look like somebody that's not dying the death of the out-of-shape runner just so that when you pass someone they don't realize that you're gasping and dying, and

you think, “Now why am I doing this? Here is somebody I've never seen before and will possibly never see again unless I manage to survive another lap and I am concerned about the way I...”

You know, this is evidence of flaws in thinking and bad priorities. But to endure in the act of running the race is a minute-by-minute decision.

And how do you maintain that endurance? Well, you have to think about something that is ahead. I am going to finish and not fail. I have set a goal.

It is a worthy goal. I know that once I have reached it I will be glad that I persevered, that I didn't embarrass myself by being distracted, by giving up, by letting my weakness and my past bad judgment and not running consistently stop me from finishing the course that is before me. And that's a crude illustration of where we are spiritually.

We can't get discouraged. We have a great cloud of witnesses, and these witnesses were like us and they had failures and they had years of their lives where there were no examples of great faith and there is nothing shining and honorable to point to. But they didn't abandon their relationship with God.

They didn't throw it over and go the way of Ishmael or Esau or Hagar or Lot. They kept coming back and throwing themselves on the mercy of God. They kept coming back and taking advantage of God's grace and God's forgiveness and God's mercy.

And because of that there are those shining moments of faith in their lives that serve as an encouragement to us. Not only their faith but also their lack of faith is an encouragement to us. And the goal and the ideal is set before us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And just because we don't meet the ideal doesn't mean that it isn't something to strive for. I think that it's important to teach our children standards of appearance and of neatness to keep their room cleaned up and so forth. And I look at my office and I think, “You know, how can I hold this standard up before the girls when I can't meet it myself?” But it is a standard and it is a worthy one.

And I need to aspire to it and I need to teach them to aspire to it. And the fact that I don't always meet it doesn't mean that I can't try to teach it to my children. If we had to meet a standard before we could teach it, there would be no pastors.

Because no pastor could teach the Word of God because no pastor meets the standard. There is a certain minimum standard that we have to meet or we can't exercise that gift. You can't fall into gross immorality.

You can't totally lack self-control. You can't be given to fits of anger and so forth. But no one is perfect.

And the fact that we are imperfect doesn't mean that we can't teach the perfect standard and that we can't point our eyes toward the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's the beauty of focusing on the message as a priority. The messenger has to be faithful.

He has to be a reasonably... A pot that you're going to carry something in can have some chips and cracks, but it does have to be watertight if you're going to get the contents from point A to point B. And pastors are not perfect. We all have chips and cracks in our ceramics. But hopefully we hold water.

So this is the goal. We look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. And when you go to verse 3, “Consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”

This is one of the most wearying and discouraging things there is, is when we have people in our periphery who do us an injustice. Jesus Christ received nothing but injustice from a great majority of the people that He encountered during His earthly ministry. He says, “You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood, striving against sin.”

And Jesus actually did. “You have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him. For whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and He 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?" Chastening is a sign of love. There's been a terrible misunderstanding that's been perpetrated in modern society that disciplining your children is going to wound them and make them think that you don't love them.

Chastening is an expression of love. If you love your child enough to want to prepare them for life, you're going to do the difficult. It is easier to avoid discipline than to execute it.

And yet, it is a mark of love. If God loves us enough to discipline us, we should love our children enough to discipline them and do so consistently. "But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate 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?" Our failures and the discipline that comes to us from God, the teaching lessons that we learn through our failures, we see this in the lives of children who learn by failing and who learn when they disobey and who learn that there is a priority and there is an importance on accomplishing certain things. And we don't just tell them once and they perfectly obey.

A lot of times it has to be reinforced through experience when they fail. But it is a better and more lasting lesson when it is learned through experience than it is when they just heed a verbal command and may come up against that issue later on and it hasn't been reinforced through experience. These human fathers in verse 10, for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but God, He chastens us for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

God works all things together for good, even our failures, even our experiences where we goof. God will use this to strengthen us and He uses it as a means for us to be a partaker of His holiness. And it is an amazing thing and it is an evidence of the greatness of God that He can take something that began as a sin and a failure and He can weave it together to enhance our ability to partake of His holiness.

No chastening seems to be joyful for the present. It is painful. Nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

And in the same way that there are incorrigible children who choose to disregard the teaching and the training of their parents, there are incorrigible spiritual children, there are incorrigible believers who do not profit by the chastening and the discipline, who do not yield themselves to the correcting, rebuking, and instructing ministry of God in the Holy Spirit, who uses the Word of God in our souls to improve us and to refine us.

So, again, what is the conclusion? It is in verse 12. "Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be out of joint, but rather healed." Make straight paths for your feet.

Sometimes the reason we are continually failing is that we are trying to do something that isn't a part of our path. We need to have a straight path. We find that straight path in the Word of God.

"Rightly dividing the Word of Truth," that phrase in Greek literally means laying a straight course. If you were a bricklayer, it would mean lay a straight course of bricks. Don't have a wavering wall.

And don't try to build a wall on ground that hasn't been prepared. You can't lay a straight course of bricks on unprepared ground. The ground has to be level, perfectly level, if you're going to lay a good wall.

And to chart a straight course for our feet, we have to have the way lighted by the Word of God. "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, a light unto my path." How do you find that straight path so that your out-of-joint or feeble knees can be strengthened?

You know, when you injure yourself, the doctor will say you need to stay off of your feet or you need to refrain from certain kinds of exercise until you are healed. I was just reading something about that last night. Sometimes after a procedure or after an injury, you have to restrict what you try to do until you heal.

Well, that's what this is saying. If you find that your knees are weak, you've got to wait until your knees are strengthened. You've got to walk a straight path.

Walk a path that's not going to tax your weak knees. And this gives us insight into how to obey the command that we find two different places in Scripture about facing a challenge. In one place, it says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

And we think, "Well, the next time a temptation comes up, I'm going to be strong and I'm going to fend it off with the shield of faith and so forth." But in another place, Paul says, "Flee youthful lusts." He doesn't say resist youthful lusts and they will flee from you.

He says flee from them. Well, so do we stand and fight or do we flee? This is the light that is shed on that dilemma. If it is a case where we know that through the strength that God provides, we can put up the shield of faith and deflect the fiery darts of the wicked one, and God will give us a victory in that area and show us that through faith it is possible to be in a circumstance in which we have failed in the past, but now we are not going to fail.

There are other cases, and that's what the author mentions here back in verse 1. If we are easily ensnared by a sin, we have got to lay it aside. We need a path for our feet where that sin is not a possibility.

If, for example, someone has developed—and I'll use an example that I feel confident doesn't apply directly to any of us here—we know that there are quite a number of individuals in the body of Christ today who have a problem with pornography and for whom this is a stumbling block and is a constant snare. Well, if this is the nature of your weak knees or your hands that hang limp by your side and prevent you from doing what you are supposed to, what is the answer? Are you going to continue to try to stand and deflect that with the shield of faith, or are you going to flee?

Well, A, it's in the category of a youthful lust, which is a very powerful influence, and there are some of those from which we are to flee. You can find other things that fall in that category. It is also a youthful desire to be approved of.

An approbation lust can be a youthful lust that we have to get out of a situation where we are constantly trying to please someone. Sometimes we have to put some distance between ourselves and a person until our knees are strengthened and we can be around someone without craving their approval. And it isn't something that we can solve in a night.

We've got to get away. We've got to find a straight path for our feet, a path that we can walk in the light of the Word of God. This is where we separate.

This is where we put some distance between ourselves and the situation until we heal up. We don't keep going with a feeble knee and trying to walk that rocky path. And there are certain things, and when it says youthful lusts, think about the things that ensnare youth.

Physical passion is a constant snare for youth. Approbation lust, the desire for approval of others, is a youthful snare. And you can think of others.

A superficial evaluation of others. A snap judgment based on appearance. This is something that afflicts the youthful, those who are not wise.

And so this is one of the ways that we can discern whether we stand and fight or whether we run away to fight another day. And the Bible says in some cases, run away. It reminds me of Monty Python and the Holy Grail.

You get up there and you have the little rabbit there.