

Sermon: The Four Helps to Faith

Text: Hebrews 12:1-17

Introduction:

Hebrews 12 begins by applying all of the details given in chapter 11. After explaining many heroic examples of faith, as well as instances of persecution, the writer refers to this collection of evidence as a "great cloud of witnesses." These facts of history should inspire Christians to endure persecution, as well as to struggle against sin. The ultimate example of this, of course, is Jesus, who endured horrific hardships. Through it all, He maintained His trust that God was working out all of those trials for a good purpose (Hebrews 12:1–3).

Another point made here is that most of the persecution a typical Christian faces is not as dire as what some have suffered. This doesn't make our experiences any less hurtful, but it helps us maintain perspective (Hebrews 12:4).

The suffering we experience, in truth, can come from two very different sources. Both, however, are reasons for us to trust in God, not to despair. When we fall short of God's will, we can expect Him to "discipline" us, the same way a loving father corrects a wayward child. That chastening is not a sign of hate—it's proof that the Father loves us enough to pull us back towards the right path. At the same time, a loving parent sometimes exposes a child to struggle for the sake of training, much as one would to develop an athlete (Hebrews 12:5–13).

Those who reject this idea, and who treat God's discipline as something restrictive, or unfair, or an excuse for bitterness, are like Esau, whose attitude cost him greatly (Hebrews 12:14–17).

So...as we come to our passage today, what do you consider to be the most valuable thing in your life? Your most valuable personal quality. If you had to finish this sentence, "*The most important thing that I possess is _____,*" what would it be? According to the writer of Hebrews, the most valuable thing in your life is faith. Faith is the belief that what God has revealed about Himself in the Bible is true, and that following Him is worth it. Without it, the writer says, you'll never please God, because you'll never go all the way with Jesus (Heb 11:6); you'll never fully commit yourself to the mission; you won't obey him in the hard areas; you'll never make it through dark chapters in your life.

Remember that the people to whom the author of Hebrews is writing are struggling because the Christian life has gotten hard for them—they are being persecuted, they have difficult questions, unanswered prayers. Some of them are barely hanging on.

So in chapter 12, the writer of Hebrews offers 4 helps to faith in difficult times:

- **Consider the Witnesses.** Take a close look at the list of heroes in chapter 11. These OT saints are like people in a marathon who started before us, and now stand along the sides as we run, telling us, "*Keep going. It's worth it! You'll make it—even when it doesn't make sense.*"
- **Fix your Eyes on Jesus.** When you give up on yourself, God won't! The cross shows you how committed He is to seeing it through. Always keep Jesus in mind in the midst of struggle.
- **Trust the Father.** He loves us enough to discipline us—all for an eternal purpose.
- **Focus on the Joy.** If this is the God who gave it all up to save you, doesn't that empower you to give up what you have for Him? Doesn't that make you willing to suffer for His sake?

Examination:

- Read **Hebrews 12:1-3**
 - What are the connections between running a marathon, and the Christian life?
 - What does it mean to “throw off everything that hinders”? What are some examples of weights that might hinder someone following Jesus?
 - What do you think the writer meant by the phrase “the sin that so easily entangles”? How have you experienced the “entanglements” of sin?
 - How important is endurance in following Jesus? Explain. When have you been tempted to quit following Jesus? What helped you keep going?
 - What is the value of looking to Jesus? Give examples from the text. How do you accomplish this in your life? How does focusing on Jesus help keep other things in perspective?
 - In what ways is Jesus the “pioneer and perfecter” of our faith? Be specific.
 - What was Jesus’ motivation for enduring the cross? What does that mean to you?

- Read **Hebrews 12:4-17**
 - Think of a time when you went through hardship. How did you respond? How might you respond differently if you had it to do all over again?
 - What can hardship reveal about a person’s relationship to God? What have you learned by going through hardship?
 - How can hardship affect a person’s relationship to God? How has it affected your relationship to God?
 - What do you think of when you hear the word “discipline”? When is discipline helpful? When is it not helpful?
 - How does God’s discipline differ from human discipline?
 - Why does God discipline his people (verse 10)? How have you experienced this in your life?
 - According to our text, what benefits come from God’s discipline? Which of these have you seen in your own life? Explain
 - What’s the hardest thing you’re going through right now? How is God using this in your life?
 - Re-read verses 12-13. What can you do to “strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees...and make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.”? What can you do to help others strengthen their feeble arms and weak knees?

Application:

- One thing I can throw off in order to follow Jesus is _____.
- One way I can better fix my eyes on Jesus is _____.
- One place I can turn for encouragement is _____.
- One way I can help others fix their eyes on Jesus is _____.