

Hebrews 12 (Part 3):12–17 • Pressing On, Eliminating Stumbling Blocks

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Hebrews chapter 12. We're going to take a couple of more weeks, another week in addition to this one to get through the rest of chapter 12. We're purposely going through at a bit of a slower pace so that we can take time to think about the things that are being said here. So we're going to pick it up in verse 12, and then go through verse 17. And you can follow along as I read, goes like this,

“Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. ¹⁴ Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the LORD. ¹⁵ See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; ¹⁶ that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷ For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.”

I'll have you stop there. Let's pray.

Father, open our hearts to the ministry of Your Word today. Open our spiritual ears. Open our spiritual eyes. Help us to see. Help us to hear. Help us to receive.

We believe, LORD, that You want to speak to Your children and these are important words. So I pray Father, that we would give these the attention that they deserve and that we would be guided and directed by Your Spirit. For we pray it in the Name of Jesus our Savior, amen. Amen.

You know, those of you who are attending Calvary Chapel with any degree of regularity, you know that we're making our way through both the Old and the New Testament. I hope those of you who come on Sunday, and don't come on Wednesday, are still perhaps watching what we're doing on Wednesday night, because you need to be getting a good Old Testament study as well, so that you can understand things that are told you in the New Testament.

Here's my point. The exhortations that the writer of this letter is giving today in these verses are very much keyed to some Old Testament truths. And if you don't know the Old Testament, you're going to read this and kind of go, "Really? What's that all about?" And so it is important that you kind of have an understanding.

Remember the audience that this guy is writing to. He's writing to Hebrew Christians, Jewish Christians, and these people have been raised on the Word of God from the very first day. Do you know that kids in Old Testament times, even in New Testament times, were given the Old Testament to learn how to read?

They learned to read on the Torah of the Old Testament. So you know, I remember Dick Jane and Sally personally— when I was in school. I don't think they use that anymore, "Run, Spot, run," sort of stuff. Pretty dopey. They (kids in Biblical times) learned, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*" That's how they started learning to read, you know. Can you imagine?

So when the author of this letter is speaking to these people about exhortations that he wants them to take seriously in their walk with the LORD, he's going to relate a lot of Old Testament things and things that they would connect to the Old Testament, the writings of the Old Testament.

And I'll go through and explain these as we do them today, but.... I don't know how many of you were in sports in school, high school or college. If you were, you remember the locker room talk that the coach would give, usually at halftime, if your particular sport had a halftime. I played a lot of basketball and I remember those talks and that was usually when we were struggling. And the coach would pull us into the locker room and he realized we needed some encouragement to kind of, you know, press in and fight hard for the win, you know.

And the reason I bring that up is because these verses that we're looking at here in Hebrews 12 are kind of an equivalent to a locker room talk, an encouragement that a coach might give his team. Although today we're not talking about winning a game, we're talking about life and your walk with the LORD.

So there's, you know, somewhat higher stakes going on here. And the race of life is something the apostle Paul wrote about. Let me show you a passage from Philippians, chapter three.

Philippians 3:14 (ESV)

“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Paul wrote, *“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* And that passage is using the language of a race. And we've talked about this before, to talk about the fact that we need to press on. We need to press on. And pressing on means continuing on in strength and not failing. And these verses here in Hebrews chapter 12, and there's only a few that we're looking at here today, but these verses are all about what it means to press on. And that's why I wanted to start with that passage in Philippians.

These are the practical steps to pressing on. And what he's (the author) basically going to do in these verses is outline for us five areas where we— that we need to pay attention to in order to press on. And so we'll— for those of you who like to take notes, here's what you would title the note— your notes with.

Things to GET or to AVOID in order to press on:

These are Things to Get or to Avoid in order to press on. And that's what he's talking about. All right? Things that you and I either need to get or we need to abandon, avoid, in order to press on in our walk with the LORD. And the very first one is found in verse 12. Look with me again in your Bible. It says, *“Therefore, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees.”*

I always think about Mother's Day. Every time I'm, every— it seems like every time I'm teaching a message on mother— I don't usually teach something special for non-Christian holidays. But somebody was kind of reminding me in our staff meeting this week that I'm starting off with, *“Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees.”*

And gee, that kind of applies to mothers in some respects, I suppose. It's not quite as bad as that one year when it was Mother's Day and I taught on adultery... and I don't know if I'm ever going to live that one down, for sure. We were going through Matthew and I didn't even think about it. I got up here and was like, “Happy Mother's Day.” And then I did this message on adultery. (Pastor shakes his head and grimaces) Sue was kind of like, “Honeeeey.”

Things to GET or to AVOID in order to press on:

- Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees

What's interesting about this statement of, *“Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees”* is this is symbolic language and it's not necessarily– it's not referring literally to people whose arms are hanging down and whose knees are wobbly and about ready to give way.

It's talking about people whose faith is weak. And again, this is that area where knowing the Old Testament connects to helping us understand what the writer of Hebrews is saying. Let me show you a passage from Isaiah chapter 35.

Isaiah 35:3-4 (ESV)

“Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God, He will come and save you.”

Listen to the very similar language, *“Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God, He will come and save you.”*

So when we look at the passage in Isaiah, we understand what the writer of Hebrews is saying to his audience when he tells them to lift their drooping hands and strengthen their weak knees.

He's saying, “Stay strong. Don't be anxious. God will save you. God will see you through. Put your faith in God. He will do it.” Right? That's the message.

So, drooping hands, feeble knees– it's all about weak faith. Okay? And this is, these are given to us here as a symbol of what weak faith is. And you'll notice that he talks about– you know, that passage in Isaiah talks about those who have an anxious heart.

I understand what anxiety is. I've dealt with my share of anxiety in life. And I can tell you in my life, I won't even say anything about you, but in my life,

anxiety comes because my faith isn't what it should be. And I've learned that over the years; my faith isn't what it should be.

So what the— what the writer is talking to these people about.... Remember, they were in a battle. They were in a battle regarding their faith. They were being persecuted because of their Christian beliefs by other Jews who were not Christians. And it was a battlefield. And life was being made very miserable for these people and they were becoming weak and weary. And so he (Hebrews author) told them here to, “Strengthen yourself. Strengthen yourself in the LORD.”

And we all become weary in the midst of battle. But when we give into anxiousness, and we begin to be anxious, we take on a secondary battlefield. You guys understand? We talked about this last week. The front, whenever you're talking about battle, is where the battle is being engaged. That's where the enemy— (he smacks his hands together) you know, that's where the fighting is going on. That's why getting closer to the front is a dangerous place to be.

What is our front as Christians? Well, the world. We're battling with the world, we're battling against Satan and his demonic hordes that are trying to mess with our lives and this and that and the other thing. So there's all these, there's these battles going on out here, and everybody knows that when you're fighting battles, weariness is a very real element that you have to deal with. Right?

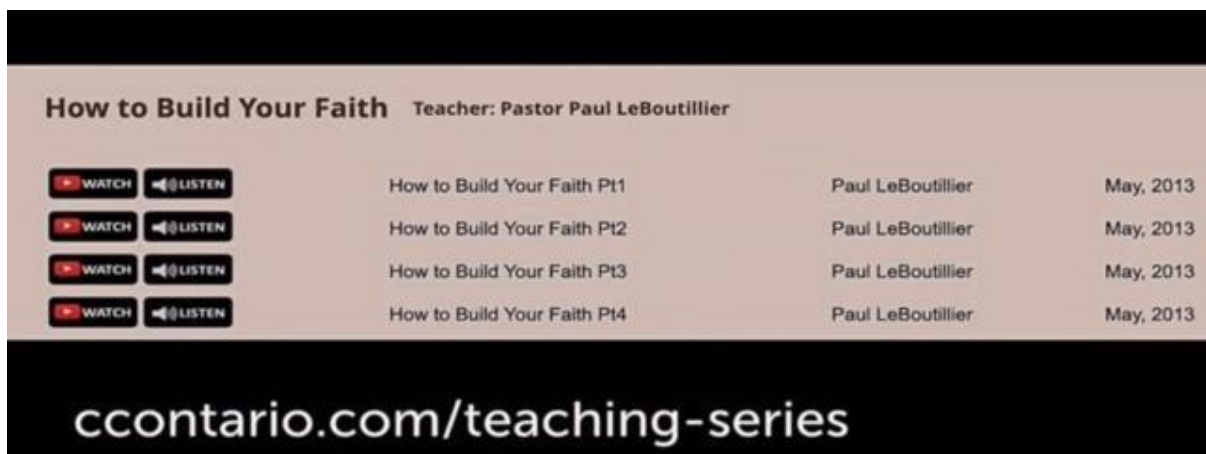
But if we don't deal with weariness properly, our faith becomes beaten down. We become weak and we become anxious. Now we're battling on two fronts (Pastor points away from himself) outside (and then points to himself) and inside. There are two battles going on and I think the inner battle is probably the tougher of the two, to be completely honest with you.

Because you've been given everything you need to stand against the powers of the enemy. But let me tell you something, when you're dealing with the issues of anxiety and worry and all the things that can go on in the inner person, you're fighting a different sort of a battle because you're kind of fighting yourself. And we don't fight ourselves very well. So it becomes really challenging.

What's the need? The need is to be strengthened in your faith. The need is to build yourself up in your faith, because when you build yourself up in your faith, you're going to be able to stand stronger in those times of difficulty, in those times of battle. Right?

Well, how do you build yourself up in your faith? What do you do when you're weary and you realize you're weary and you know that you're about ready to drop?

Well you know, back in 2013, we were going through our study in the gospel of Matthew at the time, and I paused that study to do four weeks on the subject of how to build up your faith. And some of you might even remember that— those of you who were around here back then. It's on our website. Let me show you. This is a little snapshot of what it looks like on the website:



It's called '[How to Build Your Faith](#).' You'll find it at the page that's shown at the bottom there. And you can see those incredibly catchy titles I put on those: 'How to Build Your Faith, Part One,' 'How to Build Your Faith, Part Two.'

I wasn't feeling particularly creative that month apparently. But it's all about building your faith. And so, these are available [on our website](#) and I would encourage you to look into them because they're messages that are very much geared to that whole process of just building yourself up in your faith so that you might be stronger in your faith.

But let me just tell you something else. Do not neglect the greatest invitation that any believer in Christ has received from Jesus Himself for those times of weariness that we all go through.

Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Let me show you this for Matthew chapter 11, where Jesus simply laid out the invitation, "*Come to Me.*" Don't go to the world. Don't run to these other things that you run to try to find relief, but come to Me."

Who is He asking to come to Him? "*All (of you) who labor and are heavy laden,*" and that's what happens to us in those times of battle. The laborious sort of difficulties of life become such that we are just weary and heavy laden, but I want you to see the promise that Jesus gives.

He says, "*I will give you rest.*" I will do it. He goes on to say, "*Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me,*" And oh, do we have a need to learn how to rest.

He says, "*I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*" He goes on to say, and this is fascinating, "*For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*"

Now the whole idea of a yoke of course, points back to the days before tractors when the way that a farmer would plow up his field is by using an ox or something like that, and they'd put a yoke around the neck of the oxen (team of more than one animal) and the oxen would then pull the plow or a cart or whatever it needed the oxen to do.

And that yoke was connected obviously. And that was the burden of the animal to carry the ark or to move the plow or whatever. It doesn't really match up to think of a yoke and a burden as being light and easy. Those words just really don't apply. I mean, have you ever watched an animal pulling one of those things? It's kind of like, good grief. I know God kind of made them for that, but still, it's heavy work.

And yet Jesus says in this passage, "*My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*" So that gives you some valuable information. For those of you today, right now, who are dealing with a heavy burden and who are feeling weary and about ready to drop in the harness, you need to know and understand something: that's not the burden the LORD gave you.

That's not— He doesn't give burdens that do that to people. He says, "*My yoke is easy. My burden is light. Take My yoke upon you.*" And what that means also, People, is that I have to jettison whatever yoke or whatever burden that the world, or my family, or I, have put upon myself that is weighing me down and causing me to be so burdened and so weary.

And that's the challenging part, isn't it? But that's the part where we come to Him and offload that burden, "Jesus, I just need to give You this because I can't carry it. I am so weary. I am so tired and I just can't do this." And that's an important confession to make, "I can't do this, LORD. So I come and I bring this to You." Right?

You know every time I go through one of those times in life— and I go through them just like you do— where things get weary and burdensome, the LORD always makes me aware of the fact that I need to get better at bringing my stuff to Him because I just, I don't know, I kind of lose sight of it. And I start trying to fix things on my own, you know? Which doesn't work, or I just think, "I got to buck up; be strong."

And the LORD's like, "Nah, that's not going to work. You need to let Me be strong through you."

And that means confessing your weakness, "I'm weary. I'm wiped. You know? I need You LORD, I need You to be my strength." So this whole thing about feeble arms, we need to lift those feeble arms and strengthen those feeble legs. It's all about your faith. How's your faith doing?

Is it strong or is it kind of having some issues right now? Well learn to take care of it. Learn to deal with it. Learn to bring it to the LORD and just confess to Him, "My faith isn't strong right now and it needs to be, and I need You to help me."

The next exhortation is given to us in verse 13. Look with me there in your Bible, "*And make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.*" Now again we're talking about symbolic language here. Okay?

Things to GET or to AVOID in order to press on:

- Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees
- Make straight paths for your feet

So let's put this next one on the ch— the list here, Things To Get or To Avoid to press on. And that is, "Make straight paths for your feet." And this is a word picture, and it's a word picture that's a little difficult for us to maybe relate to in our modern days with our concrete sidewalks and our paved roadways. But you know, in Biblical times, walkways— pathways were not very easy because they wound around wherever there was an obstacle in the way, like a tree or a rock or a hill or something like that.

The path would have to wind around and it wasn't very stable, you know. If you, especially if you were a person who was elderly or maybe who had a physical infirmity, an issue with your legs or something like that, walking could be very, very challenging.

So here's the picture that the author kind of wants us to see here. He's basically saying, "If you don't clear the roadway, if you don't clear the path," and we'll talk about what that means in a moment, "You're going to be like a lame man who's out walking along a rough path, who's literally putting his disabled leg totally out of joint because the walkway, the way before him is so rough and so problematic." And so he says, "Make straight paths," or if you will, "level paths for your feet." And what that means is make a safe place to walk so you're not constantly tripping and falling all the time.

Okay, so what's he talking about? He's talking about those things in life that make our walk with the LORD difficult because we keep tripping over them and falling into sin.

He's talking about the things that trip us up and fall us— cause us to fall into sin. That's what he's dealing with here. And we all have those areas. We all have areas of weakness, and your areas might not be mine, and mine might not be yours, but we all have them. The question is, do you know what yours are?

Do you know what those stumbling blocks in your path are, and do you know how to avoid them? That's called making a straight path. Making a level path for your feet so that you don't stumble, and what that means is making sure that those areas that are a personal weakness *to you* are not going to be a problem.

Romans 13:14 (ESV)

...make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires

Let me show you how the apostle Paul expressed this in his letter to the Romans. He said, "*Make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.*" That's another way of saying the exact same thing. Our flesh. Your flesh. My flesh. Comes with built-in weaknesses. Okay? And when we encounter issues that tempt our flesh, that are on the road, on the path that we're walking, it's a potential disaster for us to fall and to fall into sin. Right?

So what Paul is saying to the Romans is, "*Make no provision.*" In other words, don't make it easy for those things to crop up in your pathway. Make sure that you aren't seeing those things, that you're dealing with those issues along the pathway so that you're not going to stumble. Right?

Now you might be listening to me saying this and kind of going, “Well, Pastor Paul, that sounds kind of hard, ‘Make no provision for the flesh. Clear the roadway.’ You don't know my roadway; it's full of pitfalls.”

I get it. I understand that. But you know, there's an interesting promise in God's Word that says that as we trust Him, He'll actually do this for us as well. It's one of the most popular passages that people memorize, but they often don't think about what it means. Let me show it to you.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (ESV)

“Trust in the LORD with all of your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths.”

Proverbs 3:5-6, “*Trust in the LORD with all of your heart.*” Some of you can recite this by memory, “... *and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him.* And what will He do? *He will make straight your paths.*” What does that mean? It means He (God) will take things out of the way that are otherwise going to be a hindrance to you and a tripping hazard and cause you to fall into sin— as you trust Him, “*leaning not on your own understanding, acknowledging Him in all of your ways,*” which is on the path you're on. (You say) “God, this is the path I'm on. I'm acknowledging You in the midst of this path.”

His promise is that He will make level paths for your feet. That's His promise. Let Him do what He has promised to do.

Let's move on. Look at verse 14, where we're going to get our next point. It says, “*Strive for peace with everyone.*” (Mumbling in agony) Oh, I knew he was going to get to that one day or one of these times, “...*and for the holiness that without which no one will see the LORD.*”

Things to GET or to AVOID in order to press on:

- Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees
- Make straight paths for your feet
- Strive for peace and holiness

All right. Next point on our notes here: things to get or to avoid to press on with the LORD is to, “*strive for peace.*” That's with other people and also for

“holiness.” Basically, what the author is doing here is he's giving you an example of something to take out of the way that could potentially be a stumbling block along your path. Drama.

Drama. He basically, that's what he's saying. He's saying, “Avoid drama.” And by the way, that can be a full-time job sometimes. Can't it? Just avoiding drama. Have you ever noticed some people drama, just like, comes at them. Like, it's like they're a magnet. You know? And it's like, “Dude, you're always in some kind of drama. Don't you get tired of it?”

“I sure do.”

So he (the author) says, “We need to strive to have peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ, because if you don't, it's going to be a stumbling block to you. It's going to cause problems.”

Do you know how many people don't attend church? Because they dealt with some drama in the past that they never were able to resolve? Lots.

Some of you here might even have had a situation like that in your past. I have heard from so many people who've said to me, “Well, I don't go to church. I went to church for a while, but there were some people there and oh you know, we just had some drama.” I get it. I understand. But you know there's an interesting thing about drama. It takes two people to have it. It really does. I tell the same thing to married couples, “Pastor Paul, we're just arguing so much. What are we going to do?”

I say, “Stop arguing.” I know that sounds simplistic, but the point is, an argument will die down if you don't engage it. Right? It really will.

It's really tough to argue all by yourself. I mean, it's really hard. It's the same thing with drama. Now, there might be somebody who doesn't like you and there might be somebody who's even making life kind of challenging for you. But that doesn't mean you have to engage it. It doesn't mean you have to respond to it. You— what it's basically saying here is just strive for peace, you know.

Romans 12:18-19, 21 (NIV84)

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the LORD. Do not be overcome by

evil, but overcome evil with good.

Again, Paul talks about this. Romans chapter 12, I actually love this passage. He says, “*If it's,*” and I'm quoting this out of the NIV, “*If it's possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*” In other words, don't get embroiled in all of the drama.

So he says, don't take revenge. Leave room for God's wrath. It's written, “*It's Mine to revenge. I will repay.*” That's God's speaking there. And so he (the author) says, “*Do not be overcome by evil, but be— but overcome evil with good.*” But notice what it begins there with is, “*If it's possible, as far as it depends on you.*”

Because you see, you can't change the other person who wants to have drama with you, but you can change you. You can change your response and you can say, “I'm not going there. And they can say whatever they want to say, but I'm not going to say anything back. I choose not to.” Guys, do you understand?

Drama gets bigger because we engage it. The writer of Hebrews is saying, “That's only going to be a stumbling block, and you need to get rid of this. You need to watch out for this. You need to get this outta your path. And if somebody is— wants to be dramatic, fine. Let them be dramatic, but you don't have to go there.” Very important.

Now you notice that the second part of this element here is the whole issue of holiness. We're supposed to also strive for holiness.

Do you guys remember last week we were talking about how God disciplines us? Do you remember why He disciplines us, why God brings discipline into our lives? Let me show you. We looked at this last week.

Hebrews 12:10 (ESV)

[Our earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time, as it seemed best to them, but [the LORD] disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

He says, “*[Our earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time, as it seemed best to them, but [the LORD] disciplines us for our good that we may share His holiness.*” God wants us to share in His holiness.

And He gives us even a further incentive that we might walk in it. He says that, "... *without holiness, no one will see the LORD.*" So he (author) is just, he's encouraging us to make holiness our pursuit.

In other words, instead of pursuing drama; pursue holiness. Can you imagine if we took half of the energy that we put into pursuing drama and we pursued holiness, the kind of people we would be?

Now I'm aware of the fact that some people get kind of tweaked out when they hear the word 'holy.' And they're kind of like, "Holiness, hmmm. That doesn't look much like me." And then you see passages about how, you know, we're to be holy as the LORD is holy. And we're kinda like, "Wow. Is that even like, possible?"

You got to remember something. The word holy means set apart. And that the ultimate meaning of holy is essentially 'other.' God wants you and me to be 'other.'

Other than what? Other than the world. The world runs after revenge. When somebody gets in your face, you get right back in their face. God wants you to be 'other.' He wants you to be holy.

He says, "*Be holy for I am holy.*" God is 'other.' Did you know that? Did you know that God is 'other'? Other than what? Other than anything you know. You know, all the people, all the circumstances, all the stuff you know and experience in this life. God is 'other.' He's not like people. He's 'other.'

And when He says, "I want you to be holy," He's saying, "I want you to be like Me." He's not saying, "I want you to be perfect." He's saying, "I want you to be 'other.'" The world is this way (Pastor gestures to his right). I want you to be 'other.'" He gestures to his left; 'other' is opposite the world's way. (The LORD continues speaking) "Be holy; be 'other.' For I am 'other.' I am different. Be a peculiar people, a people set apart for Me." Right?

Now when He says in this passage that "*without holiness, no one will see the LORD,*" He's not saying that you better be holy or you're not going to be allowed into Heaven. That's not what He's saying here. You have to be careful not to read these exhortations as if God is telling you to either save yourselves by your own effort or keep yourselves saved by your own effort. You know, over the years, as I've talked to more and more people, I've been made aware of the incredible number of people who read the Bible with an attitude of, "I've got to do this or else."

And I don't know if that applies to you or not, but.... And these are people who understand that salvation is free. It's a free gift, given to us by grace through faith. They know that *intellectually*. Right? They know that salvation is free, but when they come to all the 'To Do' passages in the Bible. They stumble over them because they see them as, "I've got to do this and it's a requirement for me to do. Otherwise I won't be saved."

And they don't understand that with– the 'To Do' passages given to Believers are given to us to help us to walk out our faith, to live our life in Christ. But that's not the way, that's not the way they see it. They see it as a requirement and it becomes a very challenging and very fear-inducing thing to them, which is really sad.

But you've got to remember that the writer of this letter is writing to Christians. He's writing to people who are saved. And he's telling him, "Here's– this is what you need to do to walk out your faith: Be 'other.' Be different." Right?

Next exhortation, verse 15 in your Bible, "*See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;*" Let's put on our next point here on our Things To Get or to Avoid, (in order) to Press on: It's "Don't fail to obtain the grace of God and so become bitter."

Things to GET or to AVOID in order to press on:

- Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees
- Make straight paths for your feet
- Strive for peace and holiness
- Don't fail to obtain the grace of God and so become bitter

The grace of God. Don't fail to obtain the grace of God. What is grace? Well, grace is God's favor that you can't earn. It's unearned. That's why we call it grace. God's favor– that is unearned. Paul says (Many scholars believe Paul is the author of Hebrews.), "Don't fail to obtain it, otherwise you're going to be bitter and you're going to pass along bitterness," and he's talking about legalism.

And this was a big deal for the people who were receiving this letter, and it's a big deal for some Christians today. You'll remember that the audience that he was writing to were Hebrew Christians being tempted to go back to the Mosaic law because of persecution.

So he says, "Don't fail to obtain the grace of God because it's only going to embitter you, and you will just pass along that bitterness to others." And this is

one of those areas where you need to know your Old Testament Bible. I want to show you something from Deuteronomy chapter 29.

Deuteronomy 29:18 (ESV)

Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go to serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit.

It says, “*Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go to serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit.*”

Obviously this is one of those exhortations about what to *avoid* along the path in order to press on. And he's talking here to these people, these Christians, about not going back to the law; that's failing to obtain the grace of God.

But can I just tell you guys that there are lesser forms of stumbling over the grace of God? Even if you choose to stay with the understanding that, “I'm saved by grace through faith. I know that.” But do you know that someone who continues to believe that can still stumble over the grace of God? It can happen very subtly.

I've seen it happen in my life. I've seen it happen in other people's lives as well. We're going through life; we're dealing with issues and in a very slow and sort of subtle way, we just start taking control. We start trying to figure things out on our own. We start trying to, through our own effort, fix our issues and instead of leaning—*not upon* my own understanding, I start leaning *upon* my own understanding. And what happens? I start letting go of grace.

And we forget the words of our LORD to the apostle Paul when He said, “My grace is actually sufficient for you. But it only is going to come into your life through your weakness.” Every time we start rising up in personal strength to try to fix our problems or deal with our issues or whatever the case might be, we start stumbling over grace; because grace is unmerited favor and power and ability from God to see us through situations that we don't have the ability or power to do. And so it's possible to miss the grace of God, even if you are continuing in your salvation as far as your faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Finally, the last exhortation, look at verses 16 and 17 with me. He (the author) says, “... *that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.* ¹⁷ *For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected for, he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.*”

So we'll put this as our last point on things to get or to avoid. And this is obviously something to avoid: sexual immorality and the unholiness that goes along with it.

Things to GET or to AVOID in order to press on:

- Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees
- Make straight paths for your feet
- Strive for peace and holiness
- Don't fail to obtain the grace of God and so become bitter
- Do not become sexually immoral or unholy

You know, you might be thinking, if you know the story of Esau, and you know that he was the brother of Jacob— who (Esau) was actually first born and as the first born, had a right to an inheritance from his father. You'll remember that he sold that inheritance for a bowl of stew. You remember that?

And you might be thinking to yourself, “Okay, I know that story in the Old Testament. What does it have that do— what does that have to do with sexual immorality?” Because the author is connecting sexual immorality and the unholiness of Esau together. And you're kinda like, “Well Esau's issue wasn't sexual immorality.”

But actually they have a great deal in common because what Esau did, is he threw away something permanent in favor of something temporary, which was dealing with his fleshly craving of hunger. He came in from being out in the field. He was hungry. Starving. Remember he overstated it to his brother? (Esau said) “I'm going to die if I don't get some of that stew.”

Jacob says, “Great. Sell me your birthright.”

“Ah, what's a birthright to me if I die of starvation?” (replied Esau) “Sure it's yours. No problem.”

You can see what happens. He (Esau) despised that which was eternal, that which was a treasure from the LORD in order for a momentary passing, fleshly need. And that Christians, is what we do when we engage in sexual immorality.

Sexual immorality causes us to fritter away that which is precious, that which is a treasure from the LORD for the sake of a momentary thrill. And I have watched over the years as Christians have frittered away their marriage, and their family, for a momentary passing fleshly thrill. It's over like that (snaps his fingers). And it's gone. And that's what he's saying, by the way, in verse 17. And this is important that we understand this, what he says in verse 17. Look with me again.

He says, *“For you know that afterward when he...”* and he's talking about Esau, *“desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.”* Now, this passage is basically reminding us that even though Esau, with crying and tears, repented of his earlier actions, there was no going back. He lost his inheritance. It went to Jacob.

But Christians, that doesn't mean he (Esau) couldn't be forgiven by God. And again, I want to just tell you that I hear from people from time to time who read verses like this in the Bible and it terrorizes them.

I had a young man who wrote me, just absolutely beside himself, because he had engaged in the past, in sexual immorality. And then he read this verse about Jacob who desired to repent but could— found no chance to repent though he sought it with tears and his interpretation of that is, “I've sinned in an unforgivable sort of a way, and there's no repentance available to me now, even though I seek it with tears.” And that's not what the writer is saying.

He's saying that sometimes there are earthly consequences to our sin and you can cry and scream and yell all you want. And sometimes those things don't come back. Sometimes they're gone. We frittered them away.

Sometimes God graciously allows some of those things to be restored, but other times, like in Esau's case, they don't come back. But again, that doesn't mean Esau couldn't be forgiven by God. I mean, I don't know. I don't know what Esau did or didn't do— as it relates to approaching God concerning his actions of sin. I don't know. But this passage does not mean that Esau was forever and all time lost because of one single action. That's just not consistent with what the Bible says. So just remember that, okay?

Just because God doesn't reverse the earthly consequences of our sin, it doesn't mean He's unwilling to forgive you. Sometimes we just have to deal with our consequences. And it's painful. And it's hard, but that doesn't mean God doesn't love you. It doesn't mean He won't forgive you; doesn't mean you're lost—because you couldn't get back on earth what you lost.

Things to GET or to AVOID in order to press on:

- Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees
- Make straight paths for your feet
- Strive for peace and holiness
- Don't fail to obtain the grace of God and so become bitter
- Do not become sexually immoral or unholy

So let's review these five exhortations once again: Things to Get or to Avoid. First of all, build up your faith. Lift your drooping hands and strength in your weak knees. That's all about faith.

Make straight paths for your feet. That's all about taking away those danger things, those encumbrances, those tripping hazards that might cause you to fall into sin.

Strive for peace even though somebody wants to have drama. Refuse to engage them and walk in 'otherness;' holiness. Don't be like the world when it comes to drama. Be 'other.'

Don't fail to obtain the grace of God. Don't stumble over grace. Don't start trusting in yourself. Continue to trust in the LORD.

And finally, do not become sexually immoral. Don't give in to immorality. Don't trade that which is precious and from the LORD for a momentary pleasure.

These are— this is a great pep talk you guys. This is a good old fashioned 'coach pep talk.' (We ask) "Hey, coach, what do we need to do to stay in the game?"

Here it is. Here it is. Take it seriously, "Think about these things. Ponder them. Pray about them. Tell the LORD, 'I need You. I need You to keep me in the game. I need You to strengthen me for every step of the race. I need You today.'" Amen?

Let's stand. We'll have some people up here to pray with you if they have a prayer need that's pressing on your heart. Can I just tell you guys, take seriously

that exhortation to come to Him. You know, we have a prayer team up here, but they're not the important ones to come to. They'll pray with you and they'll agree with you, but you need to come to Jesus. Right?

“Come to Me,” He said, “Don't go to the world.”

Don't put your trust in other people. Put your trust in the LORD. He'll take care of you.

Father, thank You so much for giving us this time today. Thank You for Your Word. Thank You for the power of Your Word, to transform our lives, to strengthen us. Thank You LORD for the tips that we are given, the important exhortations that are ours in these passages— to stay in the race, to stay on the path, to be strong.

Help us learn to avoid the things we're told to avoid. Help us to embrace the things we're to embrace. Help us to take care of the things that need to be taken care of. Thank You for Your goodness, LORD. In Jesus' precious Name we pray. And all God's people said, amen.

God bless you. Have a good rest of your day.