

The Pursuit of Holiness (Part 7)

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[0:00] We're still on the same subject because I really do believe that Hebrews 12, the primary theme that runs throughout the chapter is the theme of holiness.

Not just our positional holiness, but a practical holiness. And that's why I've called this series of messages from the chapter, The Pursuit of Holiness.

That is, that's our role as we join God and His work to transform us, to make us more like His Son Jesus.

So that's our subject. And I'll get to verse 12. We're going to look at verses 12, 13, and 14 tonight. And then kind of carry on all the way through 17 next Wednesday night when God gives us the night.

And the theme really is the practice, our very practice of holiness in a way that others will observe and so will be affected.

[1:25] That God would do a work also in the lives of those around us as they observe our growth, our pursuit, and holiness. And that's going to be kind of the theme as we look at it tonight.

I was talking about Matthew a while ago and asking you to pray for him. And please do. Matthew, when he was a little boy, about the age of Cody over here, little Cody, he loved to sing.

Now, you know, now we can hardly get a squeak out of it. You know, now he still has a nice voice. But sometimes as a family we'll get together, maybe camping trip or whatever, we'll sing around the campfire.

And I'd have to get right up next to him just to barely hear that voice coming out. But when he was a little kid, he loved to sing. And one of his favorite songs was, I'm in the Lord's Army. Anybody know that song?

Alright. He'd sing it everywhere we go. And in fact, to my shame, I would admit to you, it was kind of embarrassing sometimes. Because he would just sing it anywhere. And at the top of his lungs, he'd sing the whole thing.

[2:30] You know, I may never march in. Oh, anyway. I'm not going to sing it for you. But, you know, one particular image that is always there when I think about this is the playground.

And there he is swinging. And he's singing that song at the top of his lungs. And I use that illustration to kind of set this up.

The church is an army. I mean, the song is right about that. I mean, the Bible does use that image, among other images, to describe the church.

But the church is an army. And it's the Lord's army. And we're in it. Because we're his soldiers. You know, we're soldiers of the cross. But someone has said, sadly, and I think they're right, the church today is the only army on the face of the earth that shoots its own wounded.

Have you ever heard that expression? Or not expression, that description. The sad description. Epitaph upon the church. And that's tragic.

[3:41] And though it's not always the case, obviously. I'm not trying to highlight any particular problem here. But it is a reality.

A sad reality. All too often, it happens. And now, the Bible speaks to this issue. I believe the verses we're going to be looking at speak to that.

And when we get into the text, in fact, I'm going to go ahead and read it right now. If you have your Bibles open to Hebrews 12, let me start reading in verse 12.

When I start reading this, you're going to think, well, I didn't know that that's what that was talking about. And so I may surprise you a little bit here. And I'll go ahead and say on the front end, not everyone agrees with the meaning of this text.

But let's go on without me setting it up so much here. You're going to be thinking, what in the world is he talking about? Well, look at 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 dislocated. [5:01] That's the New King James translation. But rather be healed. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Looking carefully, lest anyone fall short of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness bringing up cause trouble. And by this many become defiled.

Lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected. For he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears. Now, we're not going to get all the way to verse 17. Our focus is going to be 12, 13, 14.

Tonight and the next Wednesday we'll get the rest of it. But there you have the text. Now, let me highlight some preliminary observations. And I have this in your outline there.

[6:06] First of all, the pursuit of holiness, and by the way, what we're talking about there is being transformed into the very life of Christ, gradually becoming partakers of his holiness.

The pursuit of holiness is not an every man for himself proposition. That's the first kind of preliminary observation that I would have us make as we get into the text here in just a moment. It's not an every man for himself proposition. Now, certainly, God the Holy Spirit is the one who is able to accomplish this task, this holiness in our lives.

It's God the Holy Spirit who does that. But we have a role in that pursuit as well. And I'm going to apply this even further than just simply we have our own role in this pursuit of holiness.

There's God's side. There's man's side. And so if that's the case, if there is man's responsibility also in this pursuit of holiness or becoming holy like Christ, then, and here's the second point, second observation, we have an inescapable responsibility to help others in their pursuit of holiness.

[7:37] And you see, this is where each of us, where we most often fail. I mean, not only as individuals, but by and large as a church, we tend to fail in this area.

We fail to see that God's work and God's desire to make us more holy is not only something we participate in ourselves with Him, but we also participate with Him in helping others also in their pursuit of holiness.

And so that brings a third observation. In a sense, the church is no stronger than the weakest of its members. Now that is also a business principle that I learned a long time ago.

So, but, you know, all truth is God's truth. If it's true, then it's going to line up with Scripture. And I think probably this starts with Scripture and that the business world applied it.

Let's just think about that a minute. Again, the church, for any organization, but especially true of the church, the church is no stronger than its weakest members.

[9:00] Now, God can take one committed Christian and turn the world upside down or right side up. Maybe that would be a better way to put it.

He can do that with one committed Christian and He has done that. He can do that and He has done that. But if we as a church, this is just kind of some preliminary considerations.

If we as a church do not recognize the importance of strengthening even the weakest of our members, we'll have to define what weak is and we'll get to that.

If we're not involved in that and not interested in that, then I doubt very seriously that we will ever accomplish anything great in our city. We need to focus on strengthening those even who are the weakest among us.

Now, each of these verses then that I've read just a moment ago and then we'll kind of flesh this out, each of these verses speak of my and your, our responsibility toward others in the church.

[10:10] I am to pursue holiness personally. I am. And we all are to be involved in that. But each of these verses speak also of those around us.

And I'll just kind of give you some examples here. Point out, highlight some things in the text. Verse 12 says, strengthen the hands.

Do you see that in the verse there? Strengthen it. If you have a King James, it's lift up the hands. I didn't jot down what the New American Standard says. What does the New American Standard say?

Anybody have a New American Standard? Say what? Say again? Your feeble arms if we need. Well, does it say strengthen? All right, strengthen. All right.

ESV. Lift. All right, so it kind of follows the King James. Lift up. And that really more in keeping with the metaphor. It's not actual literal hands that need to be lifted up.

[11:12] But the hands are dragging and the feet are dragging. And you can just see the metaphor, the picture of that. And so the idea of lifting them up is in keeping with the metaphor.

But the idea is to strengthen. All right, so, but the point I want you to see is strengthen the hands which hang down and the feeble knees.

See, not strengthen or lift up your hands. Now that's important and true. And in keeping with biblical teaching about our participating with God in this transformative work that He's doing in our lives, certainly we need to do that.

But that's not the idea here. Not your hands, but the hands. Not your feeble knees, but the knees. And I think clearly speaking of others in the church that need our help.

Verse 13 says, so that what is lame may not be dislocated or may not be turned out of the way. That's the King James.

[12:23] But rather be healed. So what is lame? Verse 14, without which no one will see the Lord. Not without which you shall not see the Lord.

You see the point I'm making here? Paul's picking his words here. He's inspired by the Holy Spirit. And though it may seem a little vague, he's clearly, the point is clearly going beyond the individual or the individual reader.

It's not my hands, my feet. It's not me that is lame, though that may be the case with us sometimes. But the lame, the feeble hands, the feeble feet, without which no one will see the Lord.

Now, the way these verses are worded then, I think we should understand that God is calling us to look outside of ourselves. Look beyond ourselves.

To others in the body of Christ. And to be involved in some way, in many different ways, to be involved in their pursuit of holiness.

[13:43] Verse 15 would be another example. Lest anyone fall short of the grace of God. Or fail of the grace of God. Not lest you fail, but lest anyone or any man, actually the Greek text is just the word any.

You have to supply the noun. It's implied. Anyone. That would be a more gender-inclusive way of putting it. King James puts it any man.

But the ladies are included here too. Alright, so clearly, God's word is exhorting God's people to look outside of themselves. To encourage those who are defeated.

To encourage those around us that are discouraged. Have you ever met anybody within this church that was defeated? Discouraged? Those who are trying to run the race.

Bring that metaphor back into play. And I'll do that several times when you go through the study.

But those who are trying to run the race, you know, live the Christian life, but who have tripped and tripped up by sin.

[14:46] Does that ever happen within the body of Christ? You bet it does. Or those who have come under or are under the discipline of God for various reasons.

We've already studied those passages that deal with the whys and wherefores of God's discipline. But when we come under God's discipline, sometimes we buck against it.

You know, begin to faint or begin to despise it. And so our responsibility as God's people is to rally around those who are experiencing some of these things.

And so, what I want to do then, what I'm going to do tonight, give you three things that we look at verses 12, 13, and 14. I'll go ahead and give you kind of the outline in the front end and you'll fill it in as we go along.

We really have exhortations here. And verse 12 is the exhortation to strengthen your weak. The weak among you. Verse 13 is the exhortation to strengthen your way.

[15:49] And verse 14 is the exhortation to sanctify your worship. And we will get to these, so don't worry if you can't follow me or if I'm going too fast. And then next Wednesday night, if God gives us the night, verses 15 and 17, we have the exhortation to share your wealth.

Now some of you think, whoa, wait a minute. Share your wealth. That sounds like some liberal kind of thing. Well, the wealth being the grace of God.

And believe it or not, that's something everyone needs every day and for everything in our lives.

And we can, believe it or not, share that with others around us.

So we'll get to all four of those things going along. I don't know how far we'll get tonight. We'll hopefully get to verse 3. Maybe not. Alright, so verse 12.

The exhortation is, strengthen your week. Not your week as in the seven-day week. The W-E-A-K kind of week.

[16:52] Alright? The week among us. Verse 12. Look at it again. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down and the feeble knees. I don't know if you, some of you might remember quite a number of years ago now.

I'm not sure when it was. It was at the Summer Olympics. And it was the marathon, one of the marathons. And there's a fellow running in the race that, you know, as they reported the story after the fact, we found out more about the fellow that he had entered the race but really didn't have any hope of winning.

Really not even any real plausible hope that he would end up in the, you know, the top runners. But he had entered the race to at least finish it.

And you might remember this. As he came, you know how they enter into the stadium and run that last lap, you know, or a couple laps, however many it is. And he was, I don't know, several hundred yards to the finish and he was really struggling.

In fact, he was about to collapse. And he would have collapsed if his father hadn't jumped out of the stands and ran out there on the track.

[18:07] Do you remember at least hearing about this story? I don't know that I saw it live. I don't remember which Olympics it was but I didn't see the video of it. His father runs out there and puts his, you know, gets under one arm and helps him get across that finish line.

It's really a tremendous story. Now, you know, in reality, in a real race, and it was a real race, in an official sense, you know, what he did was illegal for the race.

I mean, he did finish it but he could not have certainly won the race second or third, first, second or third with that kind of help. I mean, you just can't do that.

And so that was illegal and he would have been disqualified. Anyone would be disqualified and receive help like that. Now, aren't you glad that there is no such rule in the race that we're in?

In our spiritual race, the one that's been set before us. There's no such rule. We can have help and you're not going to be disqualified if God brings alongside of you another brother or sister in Christ to help you at certain legs of your race.

[19:22] And that's part of God's design. And that's what we need to get in on to be a part of what God is doing. And so, this is what Paul's talking about here in verse 12.

And so, A, I'll just give you several points to kind of follow along here. A, Paul's not talking about believers lifting up their own hands, their own knees.

And again, I'll remind you, not your hands, your knees, but he said, the hands, the knees. And so, I tell you, we have a responsibility to look for those in our body who are weak.

They're still on milk, spiritually, and need help, need encouragement, need discipleship, need mentoring, whatever.

Or maybe those within our body who are hurting, struggling, maybe it's not a spiritual struggle, maybe a circumstantial kind of struggle, and they need encouragement, need to be helped along.

[20:30] Because, you know, circumstantial difficulties and sufferings will also work their way over into our spiritual lives, our spiritual outlook as well.

And so, whether it's a spiritual hurt or a physical hurt or an economic hurt or whatever it might be, we need to be looking for people like that. Maybe people in our own congregation who are about to faint, kind of throw in the towel, you know, and not able to run their race.

And so, when we find those kind of people, we need to jump out of the stands like this fellow's daddy did and get out there and encourage them and help them along.

B, we're to help each other in all areas of weakness. Now, I've just mentioned several, but let me take this kind of a step further, kind of move it on into some areas of weakness within the body of Christ that we tend not to deal with and maybe don't want to deal with.

Now, I really do believe that overall, we fail quite often in all areas of weakness because we're kind of self-consumed a lot of the times and we've got our own troubles.

[21:53] I know old sister so-and-so and brother what's it call it there. I know, you know, he's got trouble, but hey, everybody's got troubles. And so, we don't, you know, we don't cross over there as we ought to in any and all areas of difficulty.

But, where we most often fail is when, do you think? Just if you were guessing. when one of our members is in sin, has failed in sin, maybe moral sin or whatever it may be, we just, you know, tend not to deal with that as we ought to within the body of Christ.

And I would venture to say that the difficulties that come upon members of the body, members of the church, are, you know, more often than not related to sin.

And, and we do not recognize it. We're not looking for it. We either don't care about it. I'd hate to think that that would be the case. But sometimes that is the case.

And we just don't care. You know, that so and so has, has kind of stepped off into sin. Or, we become, maybe on the opposite end of the spectrum, we become too judgmental in a sense.

[23 : 24] Condemning. Maybe the condemning would be the word, the better word. Kind of self-righteous, you know, in a sense. And so we don't, rather than deal with it, we do deal with it, we deal with it in the wrong way.

Or, we're convinced maybe the middle ground and it's just as dangerous, we're convinced that, well, you know, nobody's perfect. Everybody, you know, sins.

And, I don't even have someone in the body of Christ who would get to thinking, well, you know, that's pretty common. Everybody does that. You know, they just need to repent of it and deal with it and go on. And so we don't, we don't reach out and deal with that and help and encourage in those particular instances because, well, you know, we don't want to be condemning.

You know what I'm talking about? So there are several ways that we kind of react to those kind of problems within the body of Christ, but the end result is we don't deal with it at all. And so the person doesn't get better.

There's not restoration as there should be. But we have a responsibility to God and to the church and to the, by the way, the erring brother or sister.

[24 : 43] We have a responsibility to them to rebuke them and to seek to restore them to Christ.

That's the whole idea. you know, the Bible is very specific about what's called church discipline. In many churches, we're not going to have church discipline here because we think that's too judgmental or too condemning.

But really, the whole design of church discipline is to restore. And that's where we want that erring brother or erring sister to be restored to Christ and restored in right relationship not only with him but with his or her brothers and sisters in Christ.

And I heard a story, matter of fact, about a young pastor who had a deacon. It's not always deacons that sin.

It's just not. All right. Right, Mike? I said, I don't know. Okay. But had a deacon who had fallen into sin.

[25 : 53] And so, he got together his deacon body and shared with him his deep desire to go to that brother and confront him about the sin and to restore him to the Lord.

And so, as he was standing before his deacon body, one by one, he went to each one, one by one, and asked them, each one, if you had been tempted in the same way this brother of ours was tempted, what would you do?

What would have been your reaction? And one after another, they all answered, Pastor, I will never, never sin like our brother sinned.

Would never do it. Until he got to the very last deacon. And the last deacon answered this way, he said, Pastor, I feel in my heart that if I had been tempted and tested in the same way my brother was tempted and tested, I would have fallen even deeper than he did.

That's a pretty honest answer. And the pastor turned to the deacon body and said, this deacon here is the only one qualified to go with me to speak to this sinning brother.

[27 : 05] You know, because he's open to the reality that there isn't any of us, not any of us who are immune to temptation, not any of us who are not fully capable by the way of committing any known moral sin.

We're all capable of that. Even as God's people. So, you know, we need to strengthen our weak, the weak among us. Number two, straighten your way.

This comes from verse 13. And make straight paths, he says. Straight paths for your feet. Now he is talking about your feet.

He's talking about my feet as I'm reading this. Don, he's saying, you straighten your path, the path for your feet. So that what is lame, not if you're lame, but what is lame, that's now pointing me

outward.

Straighten your feet. Make sure your path is straight so that the lame around you is the point here, may not be dislocated. Or, I really prefer the King James here.

[28 : 21] Turned out of the way. Isn't that much more descriptive? Dislocated, yeah, dislocated from the fellowship of the body is the idea here. Not that that lame one would lose his or her salvation.

That's not the point. But, turned out of the way or dislocated, out of fellowship with the body of Christ. And so, the point here is that we're to make sure our paths are straight.

Now, you certainly know that when a runner, I'll just bring in the metaphor of the runner again, the race. When a runner is running a race, it is absolutely imperative that that runner stay in his lane. Right? Now, if he gets out of his lane, he's going to be disqualified. But, it could be even worse than that. If he gets out of his lane, he may trip up another runner, cause that other runner to trip and fall and be out of the race as well.

And so, it's a pretty serious thing, isn't it? Now, I would maintain that the same is true within the church. Now, you know, the old expression, no man is an island.

[29 : 31] Actually, the idea is found in Romans 14.7. That expression, though the words are not there, but the Bible says in Romans 14.7, for none of us lives to himself.

And it goes on saying, no man dies to himself. So, living, dying, you're not an island. Your living affects people around you. Your dying certainly does as well.

So, we're not just isolated individual people and everybody else be hanged. I don't care. I live the way I want to live. By the way, you know, it's not my fault if somebody follows my lead.

That's a bunch of baloney. That doesn't work within the body of Christ. So, did I give him A or did I skip that?

Alright, A, I should have already given it to you, but you can fill this in. Paul's emphasis here is on influence. Alright. As opposed to verse 12 where the emphasis is encouragement.

[30 : 37] We've already touched that. Emphasis here is influence because you're not an island. Now, B, there are those around us and those who will come after us who need a straight way to follow.

follow. It's absolutely imperative that they have a straight way to follow. You say, well, nobody's following me. Yes, they are. Yeah, they are.

They're influenced by the way you live. And especially if God is pleased to put you in a place of leadership within the church, then there are people who look to you.

You may not know who they are, not all of them. Certainly, your family is hopefully following you and there are influences within your circle of friends, but there are people you don't even know who are watching you and taking your lead.

And that's the idea here. Everyone needs a straight path to follow. As a matter of fact, in the Greek text, the word path here, it's kind of a descriptive word as most Greek words are.

[31 : 45] It really refers to the tracks that are left by the wheels of a cart that travelers would follow.

It's the tracks. You can kind of picture that. Can't you? Some old road and you've got where the wheels have gone and there's grass in the middle but you follow those tracks.

And so that's the exhortation here. So no matter how you're running your race, whichever way you choose to run your race, whether it's the right way or the wrong way or points in between, you will leave a track.

I mean, you will, no matter how you run your race. And it'll be behind you and there'll be others who will follow you. Children, friends, other believers, even non-believers can be looking at the way you're living your life and follow you, follow your lead in some areas and boy, we better lead in the right way.

And so see then, your path will either lead or mislead. It's going to do one of those two things. So how important is it then that our way be straight?

[33 : 05] Pretty important. Straight according to God's word. I think you understand that. Proverbs chapter 4 and verse 25.

Let me just read it to you. Let your eyes look straight ahead. Matter of fact, I think Paul was quoting somewhat from this passage.

Let your eyes look straight ahead and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder. I like this verse. Ponder the path of your feet.

That means give it deep thought and very serious contemplation. The path of your feet. And let all your ways be established.

Implication being established in God's word. Do not turn to the right or to the left. Don't deviate from God's path. Ponder that path. Keep on that, we might say, the straight and narrow.

[34:11] God's way. And it says, do not turn to the right or the left. Remove your foot from evil. Tremendous passage.

And that's the idea here. I think the reference is to that passage. So, this is not only important for us as we run. I mean, you can certainly apply that passage to your own personal race or your walk of life, walk of faith, but it also applies to those who are going to be influenced by us and are going to follow us.

And so, D, a straight path is especially needed for the weak in faith. Especially needed for that. Paul uses the word lame here, at least in this translation.

Lame. That is, those who are weak and limping, kind of limping along in their faith. And probably every one of us in this room have experienced seasons like that.

I don't necessarily mean just early on in your Christian pilgrimage. We all did then. We kind of limped along. And we're just little baby, baby Christians.

[35:33] But we do experience from time to time seasons where we just kind of limp along a little and not really operating on all cylinders like we should for various reasons.

And we need someone to come alongside of us and encourage it. And sometimes there will be people within the body who are easily misled. Kind of drawn off course by some aberrant theology or other practices of faith as well that might kind of lead them in a different direction.

They're susceptible to it because they're weak. They're kind of lame. And they need us to strengthen them, to hold them up, and to mentor them.

Within the body of Christ they're easily tripped. Easily tripped up, however you want to think of that. And so God forbid that anything, I think about this for myself, anything I would do that would be responsible in some way for turning a lame believer out of the way.

That doesn't remove responsibility, their responsibility. I mean, they sin, they're responsible before God. But I can bear some of that responsibility if by my lifestyle, if by my carelessness spiritually, that others are observing, that I would lead someone astray.

[37:04] Thank you.