

The Weak and Drooping Christian

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Hebrews chapter 12. Before we read let's ask the Lord for help.

Father we come to You once again, we know that this is Your word, we know in this very book we have been told it is living. Something that is living it has life; it has movement; there's energy there; there's power there; life. Oh we long for life and the word is life and these words are life and this Bible is a living word and we know that it is sharp and it is like a sword and it cuts and it separates. That's what we want. Cut and separate and breath life into us through it. May it not be stagnant, may it not be idle. Lord we pray that this hour before us would truly be profitable. Just speak Lord. Speak O Lord! In Christ name we pray, amen.

Hebrews chapter 12, and I know it's been a while since we've been here and that can kind of interrupt the flow. Let's read a rather lengthy portion of Scripture here. Hebrews 12, you remember prior to this we came out of the faith chapter. Hebrews 12:1 "Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses..." Those witnesses from Hebrews 11. "Let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run..." That's the idea here: let us run. "Run with endurance the race that is set before us..." Run. Don't coast. Don't meander. Don't drift, run. Don't walk. Don't sleep. "Looking to Jesus..." Your eyes need to be somewhere. Remember that last chapter was on faith. Faith is what looks to Christ, connects us to Christ. We are trusting Him. We are trusting in what He has done. We are trusting in who He is. We are trusting in that work, His perfect life, unblemished. The cross. "... the Founder and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross..." As He was motivated, so should we be. There is joy before us. A few more rolling suns at most. Think about it, the day is coming when we are going to start dropping off, one by one, entering glory. You think about this Bridegroom who jumps over hills and mountains [for us]. I think of that prayer of His as He is leaving this world, "My desire is that they would be with Me where I am." He desires it. Can you imagine it? He busts through clouds, He is leaping over mountains because you are there! His heart has been set on you. And that is going to happen to us one by one. The days are going to come where we start falling off, we're going to start going home! The joy that is set before us. He had a joy set before Him. He endured the cross. He endured suffering because of that joy, despising the shame. He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God "Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you will not grow weary or fainthearted..." Why? Because they were enduring the same thing: hostile sinners doing things to them. "...in the struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." It seems like what he is saying here is that there "struggle against sin" is to not sin as hostile sinners are coming against them. Don't respond in sinful ways. You haven't resisted yet to the point where they have actually put you to death. There's more resisting. There's more suffering ahead. You guys are only part way through the race! That's us. You haven't gotten to the end yet. "And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?" That's the issue. That's why people want to fall out. That's why people get discouraged because they forget something. Our minds need to be active, that's how we keep going well in the race. "...have you

forgotten the exhortation that speaks to you as sons? ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves and chastises every son He receives.’ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there who his father does not discipline. If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who have disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they,” our earthly fathers, “disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them; but God disciplines us for our good...” That doesn’t mean that our earthly fathers don’t; but not all do and not all do all the time. But our Heavenly Father does all the time for our good that we may share His holiness. “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” We are in training. You don’t just get saved and then just coast to the end. You get saved and now it’s training time. That’s what this life is all about. “Therefore lift up your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees...”

By the way the title of this sermon is the Drooping Christian (and it comes from verses 12). “Therefore lift up your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet so what is lame would not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone and holiness without which no one will see the Lord. 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 which many become defiled. That no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. 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.”

Okay jump back to verse 12. There is my title text: The Drooping Christian. The ESV translation says “drooping” but if we were to literally look at this in the Greek there is only one verb, and it is at the end. This literally reads, “the weak, hanging hands and the weak, paralyzed knees set straight.” Get them right! I don’t think it’s very difficult for us to see that our author is painting a picture for us that when we apply it to spiritual things and to the Christian life- you know what this is? Go from drooping, or if you’re not drooping... You know what it looks like if someone is drooping, someone is discouraged, someone is hanging down over against what? Somebody whose face is light up and they are all energetic. The whole idea here is “get encouraged again!” That’s the idea. This is a charge. By the way this is an imperative. This is a commandment. He is saying to Christians, “You have,” think about this, “a responsibility to run this race encouraged.” You may think, “Well if I am discouraged how do you tell someone to just be encouraged?” If someone comes in here does it work to just walk up to them (if they are cast down) and say “don’t be cast down”? No that is not the way Scripture operates. Don’t you remember that he said, “Have you forgotten”? You something needs to be going on in the mind that we have a responsibility to be thinking about in order to not be discouraged. We will look at that more in just a little bit.

It’s all in this book. Is this not a book that is all about not being discouraged, not being down or cast down, not giving up in this race? I just looked through these verses this morning. Hebrews 3:6 “We are indeed His house if we hold fast our confidence.” A confident people. How about Hebrews 6:18 “We who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.” There’s this idea of confidence; this idea of encouragement; sticking with this thing; to keep going. In Hebrews 10:19 it comes up repeatedly, “Therefore brothers since we have confidence...” That’s what he means when he’s saying this. Be confident. Be people of courage as you

run this race.

Hebrews 10:25, you know we're not to neglect meeting together as is the habit of some, but encourage one another. Encourage. That's why we come together. We need to encourage one another. We need to get people to where they are running this race with vigor, they are running it with courage, they are running it with confidence. Hebrews 10:35, "Therefore do not throw away your confidence." That's what this letter is about. This is a letter to keep people running in confidence. You know why? Because when you lose your confidence or lose your courage you are in grave danger. We don't always feel the degree to where there is danger. You know what this is saying in Hebrews 12:12? Raise the shoulders! Get those hands up. Swing those arms. Flex those knees. Be revived and run.

Notice verse 13, "Make straight paths for your feet." Now remember in verse 1, "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." Here in verse 13, we have again, it's a commandment. It is a charge from God, an imperative: Get those feet straight! Why? Because when they feet aren't straight what happens? You go off the path. That is what is going on here. You go off the path. Remember how this book started? We have to pay closer attention to these things, unless what happens? You drift! What happens when you drift? The feet aren't straight. That is how you drift. Your feet don't drift off the path when you're feet are headed straight down the path. You go off the path when you're feet aren't straight. You see that's the danger-people get worn out and the feet begin to turn.

You know that reminds me of "Pilgrim's Progress". Have you ever heard this part? I listen to the unabridged one often when I drive by myself. For whatever reason, the ladies in my family don't like that version, but I like the unabridged. They don't like the old English I guess. I listen to it when I go up to the city of Austin. Listen to this. You remember when Christian got to the gate and he went in and there was a guy on the inside whose name was Good Will? And here is a part of the conversation they had. "Look before you. Do you see this narrow way? That is the way you must go. It was cast up by the patriarchs, prophets, Christ and His apostles. And it is as straight as a rule can be make it. This is the way you must go. 'But,' says Christian, 'Are there no turnings or windings that a stranger could lose his way?' Good Will said, 'Yes there are many ways that lead downward upon this. And they are crooked and wide. But this is how you will distinguish the right from the wrong. The right one is straight and narrow.'" You know what? John Bunyan was very perceptive. Throughout this story you find people jumping walls, people taking other ways, people meandering off. Even at times, Christian himself, leaving and God graciously bringing him back on. It's a battle to keep the feet straight! And people perish. And if we really understood this, these verses ought to cause us to tremble.

Notice the last half of verse 13, I mean you need to notice this carefully, "make straight paths for your feet SO THAT what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed." You have a runner in a race for eternal life. He's spiritually lame. Something is wrong. There's a problem. The feet aren't right. Now look, at this point the lameness is not fatal. But they are in danger. And one of two things can happen (you see them there right?): healing-that's one option- or it comes out of joint altogether, and when that happens you're done. This is fatality spiritually speaking. He's not talking about a condition in which you come back. You say, "Well how do you know that?" Because of what follows. Because of the context here. Healing or it comes out of joint. We should tremble and I know we don't. I mean the Bible is dealing with the most serious dead serious issues in all of life. From the beginning of this book all the way to the end it's all about not drifting away from Christ. We know what it's like. You have somebody who is still in the church and it hasn't come out of joint yet, but there is a lameness. Isn't that

the dead giveaway? We recognize their feet aren't straight. What do you mean "not straight"? This path is looking to Jesus, that's the straight path. It's straight; it's narrow; and what we find is they are coming to church, they are singing the songs, they are here. But when you talk to them you can find there is a distraction now. There's some worldliness creeping in. Their feet are beginning to turn off, to not be right. And it may be that they have been running the race for a while and they are weary, they are worn, they are cast down, they feel like I need to take a break. Oh doesn't that happen? We justify it. "I've been running hard. I've been doing this, I've been doing that. I just need a little break." But I tell you what, if your little break gets the feet crooked, you are halfway to coming out of joint and it's fatal. We should tremble at these things. We see people like that. Their passion for Christ is ebbing. The first love is waning. The spiritual adrenaline is low. You've seen the person where they get to the place where Christ doesn't thrill their soul anymore. Why? Because when you talk to them that is not what they want to talk about. Spiritual things are not the first and most important thing. It's not in the forefront of their minds when you talk to them. It's something about the world! You notice it. And this person didn't use to be that way. What is that? It's the feet and they are coming off. They are going wrong here. The hand is on the plow still, but they are taking glances in other directions. It's very dangerous and if a specific change does not take place this thing rips out of joint altogether and then they are done. You know why we don't tremble? Because we don't think it's going to be us.

And yet here's Bunyan, he writes this book and he shows one person after another: they are going off, they are going back, and they are doing this or that. It's the few that make it to the end in that book. Why? He knew the reality. He knew what Scripture said. He know how many actually make it. He knows Jesus own words.

Look the seriousness of all this is found right here in the context. Let your eyes go back to that text there. Look at verse 14. "Strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness," what does it say, "without which no one will see the Lord." You see what's in his mind? His mind is, "You're not making it to see the Lord!" Just keep reading, "see to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God." You want to know what is on his mind when he's talking about this thing coming out of joint? It's you don't make it! You don't obtain the grace of God! This is what the whole theme of this book has been about. Reaching that rest. Coming to finish the course. Being like these men and women of Hebrews 11. Sticking to it in faith. Looking. Enduring. Keeping on.

You just keep reading, "That no root of bitterness springs up causing trouble." He's talking about the kind of trouble that's not just this little fleeting thing, this is the final trouble. This is the ultimate trouble. "By which many become defiled." He's talking about a defilement of total corruption. Look, just what follow it. "That no is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright." Men and women who sell their birthright. And what's happening? The feet aren't straight. The feet got off! You know what happens when this thing tears out of joint altogether? They sell their birthright. They trade it. That's what you see. For a single meal. "You know that afterward when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected." That is what this is all about. This is all about playing foot loose with Christianity and you just loose it.

And you know the thing is, I mean look at Esau there, he's hungry. That's all it was. He was hungry. He just had ordinary desires. You see the reason why some of us don't think we are going to apostatize is because we imagine it like just standing up in front of the church saying, "I reject Jesus Christ," and you just go back into the world. Or you go and join some cult or Satan worship or tear up Bibles. You see it's nothing that drastic. This is just a man who was given over to one of the common desires of life he sold his birthright. Do you recognize what that means?

He had every possibility of it being Abraham, Isaac, and Esau. But that's not the way we talk today. You know why? Because he sold his birthright. For what? A single meal. You know what? Apostasy to me, based on this, feels easy. It's just easy. It's just getting discouraged in the Christian life and saying, "I want to take a break. I'm just going to give in to some of my common desires. Just take a break" Before you know it, there is no going back. He is rejected.

I mean that is how all this fits together. It's permanent loss here. People succumbing. This is what happens to people. It's just easy. And you know what? He wept and he cried, but there was no repentance. I mean if you go back and you look at it, he wasn't broken before God. He wanted the blessing, that's why he wept and cried. But you know who he blamed? He didn't blame himself. You know who he blamed? Jacob. There was no contriteness. There was no humility. You know that is what repentance is all about: having a heart that is broken for sin. You know what happens to people? They get to a place where they are worn down, they are drooping, and they feel justified to just appease some worldliness. That's it. "Just don't pursue holiness," without which you don't see the Lord, "just don't pursue it as much. Just kind of coast. Just take a break. Relax." You know what? It's like one day he looked up and he recognized, "I want that birthright." And yet there was no repentance. His heart was hard. This is a wake up call. He is not able to produce contriteness. He's not able to produce brokenness over having sinned against God. He's bitter against Jacob. And he recognizes that what he lost is valuable and now it is too late.

You get people who ran well once, and this is such the picture of something in Pilgrim's Progress-that some of you may remember. When Pilgrim came to the Interpreter's house, Interpreter took him over to a man in an iron cage. I know some of you are familiar with this. "He took him by the hand and lead him into a very dark room where sat a man in an iron cage. The man to look on seemed very sad. He sat with his eyes looking down at the ground, his hands folded together. He sighed as if it would break his heart. Then Christian said, 'What does this mean?' And the Interpreter bid him to talk with the man. Christian said to the man, 'What are you?' The man answered, 'I am what I was not once.' 'What were you once?' The man said, 'I once was a fair and flourishing professor. Both in my own eyes and the eyes of others I once was. As I thought, fair for the celestial city and had quite joyous thoughts that I would get there.' 'But what are you now?' 'I am now a man of despair, shut up in this iron cage. I cannot get out. Oh now I cannot.' 'How did you come into this condition?' 'I left off to watch.'" That's just it: you leave off watching. You grow careless. You give in to worldliness. You give in to just the desire for a meal. "I left off to watch and be sober. I laid the reins upon the neck of my lusts. I sinned against the light of the word and the goodness of God. I grieved the Spirit and now He is gone. I've tempted the devil and he has come to me. I've provoked God and in His anger He left me. I'm so hardened my heart that I cannot repent." Then said Christian to the Interpreter, 'Is there no hope for such a man as this?' Interpreter said, 'Ask him.' Then said Christian, 'Is there no hope? Must you be kept in the iron cage of despair?' The man says, 'No none at all.' Christian said, 'Why? The Son of the Blessed has much pity.' The man said, 'I crucified Him to myself afresh. I have despised His person. I've despised His righteousness. I've counted His blood as an unholy thing. I've done despite to the Spirit of grace. Therefore I have shut myself out of all the promises and now there remains nothing but dreadful threatenings. Fearful threatenings of certain judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour me as an adversary.' Christian said, 'What did you do to bring yourself into this situation?' The man said, 'For the lusts, pleasures, and profits of this world. When I was enjoying them, I did promise myself much delight. But now everyone of those things also bite me and gnaw at me like a burning worm.' Christian said, 'Can you now not repent and turn?' The man said,

‘God has denied me repentance. His word gives me no encouragement to believe.’”

I mean that is all God has to do. You have light. You have put your hand to the plow, if you look back or your feet are out of line, you indulge in whatever it is and you justify it—Oh how easy it is to justify it! “Just a little bit of the world. After all I’ve worked so much, after all I’ve suffered so much!” Just a little indulgence and you know what? The day comes when he looks at the Scripture and there is no encouragement now. It is just a dead letter. And how can you make it alive when it is not. “His word gives me no encouragement to believe. Yea, He Himself has shut me up in this iron cage. Nor can all of the men in the world let me out. Oh eternity, eternity. How shall I grapple with the misery I must grapple with in eternity?” Then the Interpreter said to Christian, “Let this man’s misery be remembered by you and be an everlasting caution to you.” “Well,” said Christian, “this is fearful. God help me to watch and be sober and pray that I may shun the cause of this man’s misery. Sir is it not time for me to go on my way now?” Now listen to this email I just got last week, “My problem,” this man says, “is that I do not feel conviction. I do not feel bad when I sin. I do not feel love. I do not feel like I have a broken and contrite spirit. I do not feel desire inside. And yet I know that I want and wish to feel desire.” See he wants to feel but he can’t. This isn’t just any guy. He says, “I think desire is God’s Spirit pulling you to God. And I don’t feel God’s Spirit pulling me to God.” And you know what? He goes on to say that he has gotten to a point in his life where after being enlightened, he has come into this state. He came under the truth. He was there. And just like the man in the iron cage, he veered off. Just for a meal this happens. Men and women sell their birthrights for a meal all the time. We’ve been given Hebrews to shake us. Men sell their souls for a bowl of stew.

I mean, don’t think that hell isn’t filled with people who sold their souls for some trifle, just to appease some ordinary desire— an everyday desire. Think about it. It’s a desire for ease. “Just let me relax. Let me sleep for a little bit. Let me be unwatchful for a second. After all I’ve suffered a lot, I’ve ran the race for quite a while. I’ve served the Lord. I’ve done this. I’ve done that.” Listen you are in an enemy’s land and you aren’t done with this race until you get to the end. And if you start letting your feet go out, the next step is BANG it comes out of joint altogether. From the context here we are seeing that it is a holiness without which no one will see the Lord. You see “falling short of the grace of God”. You see men selling their souls for a meal. That is what he is talking about here. This is real life for us. We need to tremble. Men do make shipwreck. Men do go to hell. And brethren you know that it is just easy to go to hell. It’s a battle, it’s a fight to get to heaven. What kind of people make it to heaven? It’s the violent. People that fight for it. People that fight to keep their eyes on Christ; fight to stay in love with Him; fight, fight, fight. Fight for holiness, not for the American dream. Not for a bowl of stew.

But the thing we need to remember is what kind of people are these? The people at hand, the people in the context here, the people who are being discussed are drooping people. Remember verse 12? “Drooping people”. They are the ones that need to be warned this way.

You know what? When you have a young convert and they are here and they are all excited and they are filled with spiritual adrenaline, they are not the ones that need this. It seems that the drooping Christians are most in danger. Of what? Of missing the holiness with which we see the Lord; and failing to obtain the grace of God; and allowing bitterness, and trouble, and defilement, and selling their birthright. Why? Why is it drooping people are most prone to this? Look, our brother preached on it this morning. In the text he dealt with there was a “therefore” in it. Do you see verse 12? There is a “therefore”. Therefore are the kind of words that you build your minds on, you

build your thinking, you build your faith. This isn't a spiritual vacuum here. God doesn't say, "Oh that cast down one, go over there and tell him to be lifted up." That's not it. There is a "therefore". There are so many 'therefore' and 'for' that are connecting words throughout Scripture that tell us what? God gives us truths that need to fill your head; truths you need to think on; truths your faith needs to bite into; you need to latch [on to them]. And it's only as we think right, as we've got these truths in our minds. And when we are pondering them that we are able to lift up those arms that hang down, set the knees right, set the feet right, and run right.

Why? Based on certain truth. I picture this kind of like a mountain top. Maybe you will see this. The answer to all of this, the answer to why drooping people are most prone has everything to do with the 'therefore' here. Do you all see it? You all have your Bibles there. You can see the 'therefore'. Scripture argues with us. By argue I don't mean like how two little children argue, but it gives reasons. It seeks to convince. It appeals to our right thinking. The Bible is full of doctrine. Why? Because we need that doctrine. That doctrine gives us stability. That doctrine keeps us on the path. We're given things to believe. Truth. Truth is what sets the feet right. That's what we have. But what I see before the 'therefore' is the reason why we should lift our drooping hands. I kind of see this like a mountain and on top of it you have the 'therefore'. And coming up the one side: you're building, you're building, you're building. You have all the reasons to why you should lift up your hands. It's building, it's building, it's building. Then you get to the top and you lift up the hands. I see the Christian victorious, on the top of that mountain, standing on that 'therefore' with his arms lifted up. That's what it's called. Can you see the man? Can you picture a mountain and a man at the top and his hands are lifted up? And coming up the side of that mountain you've got all these reasons, these arguments that the author of Hebrews is giving us as to why we should lift up those hands.

And then coming down the other side, we've got apostasy. You've got failing in the area of holiness, and peace, and reaching this grace of God, and Esau, and going down it's just this downward spiral of apostasy. But in the middle is that triumph. I don't know if that helps you all, but that is kind of the picture I had in my mind as I was looking at all this. And clearly, what causes the droop-you can see it in verse 4 right? Weariness and faint heartedness. Which is caused by what? A struggle with sin. That's not any minor battle. You can see it in verse 5. Weariness caused by the discipline of the Lord. It's pain. I mean we're in a battle that is long; it is fierce; there is pain in the middle of it; there's difficulty; there's hills to climb. The Christian life is hard. It's pain. You can see it in verse 11. Do you see the word 'painful'? Brethren, if you walk the Christian life and you hear that it's through much tribulation. You don't lose the word tribulation. It's pain. Suffering is pain. Trial is pain. It is exhausting. There are so many calls to endurance in the Scripture because this is tough. This is a hard race. It's a hard course. It's a battle. It's uphill. It's against the flow of this world.

You know it from Hebrews 10:32-if you remember back- "Recall the former days..." What were these people enduring? After they were enlightened, after they had come to this truth about Christ, they endured a hard struggle with sufferings. I mean that is the Christian life: a hard struggle! Their specific thing was, "Sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach, affliction, sometimes being partners with those so treated. They had compassion on those in prison. They joyfully accepted the plundering of their property." They joyfully accepted it one day, but you know what happens? It begins to wear you out. And suddenly you wake up one day and the joy is not there. And suddenly the feet are going cocked here. You got your hand on the plow and it was joyful, but now you reach a place in the race [where] you hit the wall. Your eyes start looking other places. This is what this book is about. It's

rescuing us right at that point.

And you know what? The droop is the first step to *CRACK* out of joint altogether and then it is over. So when the droop comes you know that is dangerous ground because the next step, you end up like Esau. You can be healed at this point or you can come out of joint. It's serious. Every time a Christian comes to the droop it's a crossroads and apostasy is on one side. And remember, it's just easy. You sell it all for a bowl of stew. It's really easy. Being healed, being encouraged, taking the truths upon which we need to build our lives.

Now I want us to think about something for a moment. I once heard John MacArthur say that all pain, all suffering, all trials, should be viewed as the discipline of the Lord. Several weeks ago, I heard our brother Scott say, "You don't want to think of all suffering as being the discipline of the Lord." So Scott wants to take on John MacArthur. But here's the thing, you know why Scott says that? Because as you read the text and suddenly-when we are thinking 'discipline' a lot of times we're thinking, "I sinned and God responds by *SMACK* putting the rod to me somehow." And Scott can look at Scripture and say, "Hey I see examples like Job, who there was no specific sin, and God brought hardship into his life." Over against there are definite examples in Scripture, where we see that somebody sinned and they have to suffer in direct consequence of that sin. I mean can you think of a notable example among Christians? David. The sword was never going to depart from his house. And undoubtedly a lot of times when we think of discipline [we think] just as Scott did. You know why John MacArthur would say what he says? Simply because he's had like 8 years of Greek. And he recognizes something: this word-you see it- it is in verse 5, verse 6, verse 7, verse 8, verse 9, verse 10, and verse 11. Do you see the same word that shows up in all of them? What is it: It's discipline. The word 'discipline'. And if you look at the meaning of that word-you know we use the word discipline to mean more than just spanking our children.

How else do we use the term discipline? Now if I said, "That is a well disciplined military unit," you are not going to imagine some commander out on the battlefield paddling soldiers. That's not what you're going to think. What are you going to think? Trained. That is what you are going to think. And that word that is used all the way through here, it has that meaning. If you go to the lexicons, it's the instruction and training that leads to the forming of proper habits of behavior. Thayer's Greek Lexicon says, "it's the whole training and education of children." And of course when we read that unquestionably there is a feel and a flavor that makes us think about looking over our shoulder [and saying], "Did I commit a sin?" But the thing about this training-we see the word here in verse 11. "Those who have been TRAINED by it." This has to do with training.

You know what? All suffering is meant to purify our faith. All suffering. Whether we have actually sinned and done something specific [or not]. Because in the end, Job, even though there was no specific sin, you see him in the end better than he was before. You see it is all meant to take the slag out, to get the dross off, to make us holy. That is why I think MacArthur would say what he said. And I have wrestled [with it]. But as I've studied through Hebrews, the one thing that jumped out at me in the broader context here is among these folks being spoken to here, have you ever noticed that there is no specific sin that is called out? In fact, when you go back to verses 3 and 4, it seems that when he jumps into talking about discipline and "have you forgotten" in verse 5, it's coming right out of speaking about hostility that is shown by sinners. Which inevitably these folks are enduring, right? When you go back to Hebrews 10:32, you see the kind of thing they are enduring. They are enduring persecution. And it doesn't necessarily seem like, or there isn't anything in the letter that indicates that this persecution is in response

to some specific sin on their part.

Look, if you can look over your shoulder when something difficult comes into your life and you see that there is some blatant sin in your life, well God wants you to deal with it. But I don't think we need to deal with all suffering [that way]. Yes, self-examination should take place as we go through life and suffering will especially bring us to a place of self-examination. It happened to Job right? All through that book as he is dialoging with his 3 friends there, he's really examining his own life. And we should look.

But this pain, this suffering, this trial, this is what brings the droop. I mean that is where we were going. How do you get the drooping Christian? It's because they've been suffering and they have forgotten. Have you forgotten something? You get full of the droop when it's been hard. You know what it says there in John 15 right? There it talking about drooping, but it does talk about God putting the pruning shears to you. He cuts you. He lops off pieces of you. When God is producing this holiness in us and this righteousness, this peaceable fruit of righteousness, He hurts us. Now it is temporary hurt, but it's not meant to permanently hurt us. It's meant to permanently make us much better. It's meant to permanently produce holiness. But what happens a lot of times is we get feeling- you know what it feels like? IT FEELS LIKE THE LORD DOESN'T LIKE US! Right? He's being hard on us! And you forget that this is exactly how He produces the greatest amount of holiness in us.

You come through a difficult time with your family, a difficult time with your spouse, a difficult time with some kind of physical infirmity, just difficulties. You lose your job, financial difficulties, you get a lot in life. God has handed you something that you look around and you don't see other people have and you feel like, "Lord I can't bear up under this. This hurts." And you start to feel, "Man, does God not like me? He doesn't favor me the way He does other people." But what you may not realize is that He is favoring you more.

And what he is saying here is, "Have you forgotten?" Forgotten what? That He is dealing with you as a son. If you recall back in Hebrews 5:8, Jesus learned obedience through what? What He suffered. He learned. He was trained. He was disciplined. Not for sin, He had no sin. And what happens is that often times the people that have to suffer the most, they end up being the most like Christ. They end up being the most holy. And what happens is, when you get to the point of droop the way you get healed is to remember the 'therefore'. Therefore, what? Do you not see that God is treating you as sons? Verse 6, "The one He loves." Do you not see these words?

You have verse 10, "that we might share His holiness," verse 11, "the peaceful fruit of righteousness." For the moment it's painful; but what He is doing is something eternally healthy for us. If you get to the point where you droop and your feet aren't moving, not directly down, not running this race, not being perfectly set; you've got your hand to the plow and you've been going good, energized and strengthened and encouraged. And suddenly you get to a place where your energy feels like it's going, you feel discouraged, you feel like you've had to suffer too long, you feel like "Lord this is hurting. This doesn't feel like God loves me." But you have to remember, this is exactly how God produces the greatest holiness and the greatest righteousness. And you see, right at that point if you forget, you can easily end up like Esau.

But if you remembered, it's healed. That's what this is: lift up your hands, get your knees right, your feet straight. That is: be encouraged. I mean, look at this thing and realize my life is only a vapor, no matter how difficult my situation is it's only momentary. But your holiness is going to be proportionate to your suffering. And you know what? God could leave you alone a lot more, let you have ease, and you'll be far less fruitful. I'll tell you this:

when you step out of this world, when you go over to Revelation 14 it says, “their works follow them.” And I’ll tell you that there is a reward in heaven. And if God has put you in the crucible and passed you in the fire more than others, it’s to make you more useful, it’s to make you more fruitful. And you know what? For all eternity you will profit from that. It will be to your credit. It will be to your account. It will be to your eternal glory. It will be for your eternal good. Believe it.

The path to greatest holiness and the path to greatest usefulness and the path to greatest fruit, the path to greatest likeness to Christ, it’s a hard one. And I know it’s one our flesh recoils from. We would not pick it, but you can see that God does pick it and it’s the way He shows you you’re His child. And it is not meant to harm you forever. It harms you now. It harms you physically. It harms you for the short. But it is for your eternal welfare. And you’ve got to remember this. That’s the ‘therefore’. We’ve got to live on these truths brethren. This is how you survive in the Christian life! You have to remember the truth of God’s word. If you forget you end up in terrible places.

I mean you can see what’s here. You pick up, be encouraged, think about how God’s dealing with you. We need faith to survive this path we’re called to. We have to believe! You have to believe these things brethren. You have to believe that there is a God who treats His children this way and that this is an outpouring and a lavishing of His love, it’s not something else. Don’t misinterpret it. That’s what this is all about. This is about speaking to us in words and with truths, with doctrine, with teaching that is going to keep you going until you make it to the end when life hurts, when you’re cast down, when you’re depressed, when you’re discouraged, when you feel worn, when you feel like the trial has been too long, too painful. If you think right, “Wow, this is an indication that God loves me. This is an indication that God is for me, this is an indication that God is making me more holy. This is a good thing.” You can then jump up, get those feet straight.

“Okay Lord, I’m watching. This encourages me. It still hurts, but this encourages me. I can keep pressing on. I know You’re going to bring good out of this. I can’t understand it. And right now I wish I wasn’t in this, but I know that this is a caring hand. This is a kind hand that is guiding me, that is ordering my path, that has written this script. I’m not just here all alone. My God knows about me.”

It’s like I heard Charles Leiter say once, “The gardener is never closer to the vines than when he’s pruning.” He’s close. He knows. And aren’t we told in this very same letter we have a sympathetic High Priest who has had to endure sufferings beyond ours? So when He looks at us, we can’t say, “You don’t understand,” because He became like us in every respect and He suffered more than we ever have. That’s the whole argument, “You haven’t resisted to the shedding of your blood. He did.” And when you come to Him and you say, “Lord it hurts.” You see there is a throne of grace that I can go to and expect to find help in time of need. He’ll give me grace. He’ll give me grace. But you can see in this letter, He wants you to ask, He wants you to come, He wants you to walk by faith trusting, looking, and calling upon Him, thinking on these truths.

Brethren we are a young church, and most of us have a long way to go in this race. You need these truths. And even if you’re in a season of peace and rest and with no trials, it’s only for a little season. Only a little season. And when we put our hand to the plow and you look down that road and Jesus is waiting at the end, glory is waiting at the end, eternal reward is waiting, eternal life. “This day you will be with Me in paradise.” Paradise awaits us. We shall behold God face to face.

Don't sell your birthright for a bowl of stew. It's not worth it. This is the race of life. If you've got things in your life that are slowing you down, that are hindering you cast them away. It's not worth it. Brethren, Christ. Christ that glorified Bridegroom, He waits there. He beckons us on. For the joy set before Him. There is a joy set before us. I mean eternal pleasures. There is a joy. You don't want to miss this. You don't want to sell it cheaply. Don't be an Esau! I mean think. Think! Are your feet straight? Are they straight? Is there something in your life taking you off course? Have you coasted? Are you drifting and you know it? Stop now! Healing is essential. STOP NOW! Because very soon it could come out of joint. And then one day you look up and you say, "I need that birthright." And suddenly you find-just like the guy in the iron cage or the "I can't feel anymore" I go to God's word now and it's just dead. Take heed. Take heed.

This is a blessing from God because this is given to us to give us that encouragement. Your suffering it's on purpose. It's not purposeless right? Sometimes our suffering just feels like this is just so random, this is purposeless. But it's not, it never is. And if you can see behind the scenes, God is just working Christlikeness into your life. You don't feel it, you feel miserable-that's how you feel. And yet as people watch, they see. You don't feel it. Just like a child is growing and they don't feel themselves growing, but people that are watching say, "Wow he's put on 6 inches since the last time." That is what happens. It's love. It's fatherly. It's holiness. It's righteousness. And you know what? That is what He is doing by it and it says that we ought to strive after that holiness, without which no one sees Him. He's working holiness; we need to strive for it. In other words, rather than fighting, rather than going after the stew... and isn't it that spirit of bitterness? It's real easy to become bitter right? That's one of the things in here. You saw it there. That root of bitterness. When you're suffering it can become easy to become bitter.

Or he talks about striving for peace with everyone. You know if you're like these Hebrew people and their persecution is coming from other people, it's hard to be at peace with other people when they are the very people bringing pain into my life. Holiness... it's very easy to say, "I'm so wore out that striving after holiness and giving myself to that, I feel justified in coasting and taking a break for a while." And you get to the point where you think "I deserve a vacation and I can just give in to the regular appetites." And the next step before you know it, the birthright it's gone. And then when he wants the blessing, it's too late. God has given him over.

Brethren Christ is that treasure that is worth selling everything to have. And we can't see it, we don't behold that glory now, and we don't feel it the way we should. I mean we have seasons where our hearts feel delighted and they might feel overwhelmed and there might be joy and we have these fleeting views of glory. But I want to tell you that behind the scenes He really is altogether glorious and when we have Him that is what is going to make paradise paradise is that we have Him. He is at the end, He is the great treasure, He is the great reward. He is what we are striving for. God is giving us Himself. And yes there is hell to be had is you fail, but if you fail you lose the Treasure, you lose the Prize:eternal life, more abundant! Oh to be overwhelmed, over flowing with life because I have Christ. Who knows what we are going to be doing for all eternity. Don't sell that cheaply. God help us.

Father I pray You would make these words real, living, alive, powerful, preserving, and life giving. In Christ name I pray. Amen