

August 4, 2019 - Hebrews 12:12-17 - "Finishing the Race with Grace"

Introduction:

Mrs. Dulce Rodrigues is an award-winning author of children's books and plays and also of kids' short stories. Her frog story resonates with this passage. "One day, a group of frogs decided to make a race and get to the top of a high tower. A lot of people came to see them and give them their support, but the race had just begun and everybody was already saying that the frogs would not get there: Little by little, the frogs felt disappointed and discouraged, except for one of them that continued to run. And everybody cried out: « Give up! Give up! You'll never get to the top! » Listening repeatedly to these negative words led the frogs to abandon the race after all, except for the one frog that, despite what people were saying, and though alone and with great pain, continued to run and finally reached the top. Deeply astonished, the other frogs wanted to know how she had managed to do it. They came to her and asked her what her secret was. And it was then that they found out that... she was deaf!

A healthy life attitude is to never listen to people who are negative in their intentions. Be deaf to discouraging words and always follow Gods precepts and principles.

Note the word "wherefore" in Hebrews 12:12, the Christian life is compared to a relay race that lasts a lifetime. In this "race" we are called upon to continue in it even when we are tired and discouraged. We are also to keep others in the race and not allow them to falter. Finishing the race with grace requires us as believers to steadfastly persevere and...

I. Be an Encouragement to others (12:12-13).

1. Using a metaphor from Isaiah 35:3, the author writes: **Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees (12:12)**. What is the first sign that a runner is getting tired? It is drooping arms! Keeping the hands and arms up and in motion is critical to winning a race. After the arms drop, the next thing that happens is wobbly knees that reduce the runner's stride.

2. The word translated "**lift up**" is the root word **or-tho's** from which we get our word "orthopedic" and means to "straighten up." In other words, don't start drooping in defeat; don't give up. Instead, verse 13 states **we should make straight paths for our feet so the lame may be healed (12:13)**. The lame refers to the spiritually weak. There are at least two ways we can encourage everyone, even the spiritually lame, to finish the race with grace.

1) Restore. Some are spiritually lame because of sin; for them to finish the race with grace they need help to be healed. In Galatians 6:1 -Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, **restore** such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

The word translated restore (KATARTIZO, kat-ar-tid'-zo) means to "mend" and is used for setting a broken bone so it can heal. Physical broken bones take time to heal. The restoration process for broken believers also takes time.

2) Relieve. Galatians 6:2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. It describes another

way to help believers finish the race with grace. We all have burdens in life and sometimes they seem more than we can bear. That's why we need the church—our brothers and sisters in Christ. Have you ever gone backpacking with someone? Sometimes you must not only shoulder your own backpack, but also that of another if a person gets too tired or the trail gets too steep. Every church has some really tired spiritual "hikers" who need someone to relieve their burdens. To finish the race with grace, encourage everyone and...

II. Be a Peacemaker (12:14).

1. Hebrews 12:14 command us to: **Follow peace with all [men], and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:** This is not always possible because it can only be attained if both parties want it. We are not responsible for the other side, but we have a holy obligation to make every effort to live in peace with everyone. Some people are arrogant, obnoxious, belligerent, or even mean. However, that is no excuse for not doing everything possible to get along with them.

Romans 12:18 also states: **If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.** Romans 14:19 express this truth; **Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace...**

2. Few things grieve God more and do more damage to the church than conflict among believers. Most conflicts are just an unwillingness to settle differences the way God intended. Most people want a safe haven where there is love, peace, and fellowship. If a church is in a state of constant conflict, fussing, and feuding, many "runners" will drop out of the race because they don't want to be part of the conflict. Satan loves to see disagreement, dissension, and discord in the church because he knows they will destroy its ministry. That's one reason Jesus makes what statement in Matthew 5:9: **Blessed [are] the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.**

3. A major part of being holy is trying to get along with everyone. That's why the rest of Hebrews 12:14 reads: **and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.** The word "holy" means "set apart" to serve God. It also means we are to be Christ-like! In a practical sense, holiness is revealed in how we treat other people—our spouses, children, friends, co-workers, and the most difficult people. Requirements for finishing the race with grace are: to encourage, make peace—

III. Restrain Bitterness (12:15).

1. As the author continues writing about finishing the race with grace, he gives some stern commands. First, **Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled (12:15).** The word grace refers to God's special favor and the many benefits He gives to His faithful children.

Bitter people live in a spiritual "wilderness." The root of bitterness is reminiscent of Deuteronomy 29:17-19, where Moses warns the Israelites that worshipping other gods will plant a root that produces poison.

2. Because of the context, it seems the root of bitterness probably refers to bitterness that is the opposite of practical holiness. For example, the opposite of striving for peace with all men is becoming bitter, which is spiritual poison. Look at Ephesians 4:31.

3. Bitterness is characterized by feelings of resentment, cynicism, and hatred. It is also being sharp and disagreeable. Bitterness is a horrible sin because it is the opposite of forgiving others and seeking peace. Having bitterness in your heart toward any person limits your ability to love anyone and opens the door of your heart to the Evil One.

To finish the race with grace, encourage everyone, try to get along with everyone, don't be bitter toward anyone, and...

IV. Don't give up God's blessing for anything (12:16-17).

1. The writer warns of two things that can take us out of the race. The first in Hebrews 12:16 is the sin of fornication. The word translated fornicator (PORNOS, por'-nos) is the word from which we get our word "pornography." It refers to any sex outside the marriage of a man and woman. Sexual immorality was very common in New Testament times. Today's immorality is nothing new. It's not a new morality; it's the old immorality regaining ground.

2. The author also warns us not to be a profane (ungodly) person, **as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright (12:16b)**. A birthright was a special blessing given to the firstborn son. He would receive a double portion of the family inheritance and one day become the family leader. Esau was profane, or unholy, one day when he was very hungry and asked his younger brother Jacob for some pottage, or stew.

3. Jacob offered to buy Esau's birthright for a bowl of stew, which Esau accepted (Gen. 25:29-34a -c). In so doing, Genesis 25:34--- thus Esau despised [his] birthright. Esau held it in contempt, and disdain. Esau was unholy because he desired the world's pleasures more than the pleasure of God. Later, Esau wanted his father's blessing but was rejected though he tried to change his father Isaac's mind with tears (Heb. 12:17; Gen. 27:34-38).

4. Esau reminds us sin can cost us things we may never regain-such things as a good reputation, trust, a marriage, and most importantly, some of God's blessings. If you have dropped out of the "race," the bad news is you have already lost some of God's blessings.

Psalm 51:1 There is a saying: "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay." Don't let sin take you out of the race of faith.

Conclusion:

We must allow the Scriptures to strengthen us to press on in the race marked out for us. For our God is both a promise-making and promise-keeping God and will reward those who faithfully finish the race (v. 8).