July 2, 2023

Sermon 31

Hebrews 12:12-17

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We’re going to be looking at these verses in connection to what we talked about last week, so we’re going to be talking about the discipline of God. We serve a relational God, and I want to preface, before we dive into the text – because it is a brief text, but there’s a lot there. I was having a conversation with somebody this week and we were talking about this guy that we just prayed for, Ahmed. And I see Catie Cloys is here, and we’re excited to have you. She’s been over there serving. You’re home, now, right? You did two years and you’re here for six months. Okay. But when I think about what God’s doing in places like that, we often have conversations with students, where they’ll say, “How do we know…,” – I want you to listen, church – “How do we know that our faith is the one true way? How do we know that Jesus is the one and only way?”

There’s a lot to unpack there. We could start by saying that Jesus himself said, “I’m the way, the truth, and the life, and there is no way to come to the Father except through me,” or, “There’s no salvation apart from me.” We could go to the conversation that Jesus had with His disciples, where He said, “Who do people say that I am?” and there were different answers. “Some people say that you’re a prophet, some people say you’re Elijah,” – some people would say this, and some people would say that. He asked, “Who do people say that I am?” And they said, “You’re the Christ, the one true Messiah.” And what we do with Jesus determines so much about what we are and the direction that we’re going to go. So, we could go down that path and ask, “What did Jesus say?” Jesus claimed to be God, so to reject Jesus’ claims about himself, we have to reject Jesus. You cannot accept part of someone’s self-revelation. I can’t say to you, “I think you’re kind of honest.” What kind of relationship can we have? Am I right? What kind of friendship can we have? Because relationships are built on trust. So, if Jesus says things like, “I am God. I am the Son of Man that Daniel prophesied. I am the fulfillment of the Law. I am the One that the prophets wrote about. I am God,” and you go, “Well, you know what, though? There has to be other ways,” – you cannot partially accept Jesus, right? We can’t partially accept Jesus. So, when we wrestle with what we do with other faiths, and other faith claims, and other belief systems that describe God to be something other than what we believe the Bible teaches, what I think is important is that we come to a place where we see how God relates to His people relationally.

The way that God relates with us relationally is so powerful in what we saw last week in that text. To care enough to discipline, so that someone might be shaped, and strengthened, and grown into something greater, something better, and in the Christian context, something holy, that’s the greatest picture of God that ever could be painted. No other system does that. No other system does that. And if you do a quick study of comparative world religions, to which I would add Darwinian evolution, New Atheism, and any form of agnosticism, which are their own religious systems, because they seek to answer the worldview questions. So, belief systems or religious belief systems – whatever you want to call them. The Judeo-Christian ethic and the Gospel of Jesus Christ that’s revealed through Scripture, is the only thing that’s ever been given to us in which man interacts with God through a work of reconciliation, by which God has drawn man into a relationship. Because of that, the disciplining hand of God is an act of love. I hope you saw that last week. It's something beautiful, and powerful, and wonderful.

If you grew up in a situation where you got physically abused, or some of you were spoiled, probably. I don’t know. We’ve all been around that kid at the restaurant, where we’re like, “I know what would fix what’s going on at that table, right now.” But, whatever your experience and your interaction with discipline was, God disciplines us because He loves us. He chastens us as a part of the relationship that we’re in with Him. And in that sense, discipline is a type of apologetic. It's a form of defending the faith that we have. We don’t serve an empty God. We don’t say prayers to an empty space. We’re in relationship, knit together by the Spirit of God, bound to God by His Holy Spirit.

And I would say this before we dive into these verses. One aspect that I want to point out about the disciplining hand of God is that God often disciplines us in a preventative way, by the conviction that He brings by His Holy Spirit. If you’ve ever experienced an afflicted conscience, where you’re on a path, you’re on a trajectory – it could be that you’re about to make a decision, you’re about to go into a relationship, you’re about to make a business decision, you’re about to make a personal, moral decision, and you feel an unrest, and literally an afflicted and conflicted conscience, that’s a form of discipline. That’s God removing peace in that moment from you. The God who promises to give us peace will disrupt our conscience. That’s different than struggling with anxiety or anxiousness. God’s not making you anxious, like, “Oh, man! When dad gets home, what’s that going to look like? I dread my father coming home.” No, it’s God saying, “I’m going to conflict your conscience so that you cannot be at peace with this decision.” It's God turning us before we go down that path. That’s a preventative aspect of discipline.

Then, there’s the corrective aspect, where God says, “You’ve gone down this path in contradiction to what my Word says, or the Word that I’m speaking to you.” So sometimes there are consequences, but the consequences are always for correction.

So, as we dive into it, we’re in verses 12-17, but the first word in verse 12 is ‘Therefore.’ So, we have to connect that to the previous text from last week. I just want to go back one verse and catch verse 11. It says,

11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant,…

Any of you that grew up getting whupped, did you ever get that thing, “This hurts me more than it hurts you”? I’m so glad my dad never said that. My dad would literally say to me, “I ain’t gonna lie – this is gonna hurt.” I appreciate that now, looking back, you know. It's painful at 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.

Now, I want to take a minute, and we’re going to read down through verse 17. And in verse 16, we’re given the example of Esau who took what was pleasureful in the moment and gave away what would provide lasting, long-term peace and stability. And in verse 11, discipline of the Lord is doing the opposite. It's unpleasant in the moment, but the lasting impact is one of stability, and peacefulness, and growth. So, I think that’s important as we unpack that. For the moment, it’s painful, but it’s not painful without purpose. It's painful with purpose. That’s the way that discipline works.

The purpose of discipline is not revenge, it’s not retribution, it’s not restitution – the purpose of discipline is to restore, to reconcile, and to renew. In one sense, I think it’s like a reset. Maybe if you’ve parented, and you’ve had a toddler or a small child and you are like, “We just need a reset.” That could be a nap, it could be “let’s get home,” but we need a reset. Sometimes, you just need a reset. Sometimes, the purpose of God’s discipline is a reset.

In verse 11, we’ve seen that there’s a greater theological component to discipline, a greater theological component to discipline. We might say there’s a greater discipleship component, and that is what the role of discipline in our lives is playing in the process of sanctification. So, God uses discipline to grow and shape us more into the image of Jesus. The Lord is constantly doing this, and it says in verse 11 – the way that it words it – is discipline yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness, to those who have been trained by it.

Verse 12,

12 Therefore …

So, based on that…

…lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet,…

I can’t help but personalize a little bit when I read that. I think about the posture that’s being described in one sense, and one of the things we are constantly trying to say to young men in student ministry is to teach them how to present themselves, and how to make eye contact, and don’t mope, and don’t slump your shoulders. In my mind, I almost feel like the Lord is saying, “Present yourself as a child of God. Recognize who you are.” Know that the defining characteristic of your identity is that you’ve been redeemed by the blood of Jesus. You’ve been purchased by the blood of Jesus. That should be evident.

But the reality is, the writer is going into a bit of an athletic, or another sort of sports analogy. At least, that’s what the commentators seem to agree on.

He says,

…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.

There’s this idea that because of the disciplining hand of God, when we respond to that discipline, it puts us on a straight path where there’s less chance of something happening that could cause further pain or disruption. This is one of the things that’s so important about discipline – that the purpose of discipline in correction, when we receive that correction from the Lord, it’s to help us walk the path more effectively; to grow, to be stronger, to be more assured of the love that God has for us, to be more assured of our footing. But when we deviate, when we move off of the path of obedience, there’s the danger of being lame. I think of that picture of lameness is how, when we recently studied Genesis, all those years that Jacob walked with that limp from wrestling with God. But when you step off of God’s path, the Psalmist said,

Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

He says,

I’ll hide your Word in my heart to keep me from sinning against you.

We are given this path, so he’s saying that the preventative discipline of the Lord is that guiding presence and power of the Lord that keeps me on a disciplined path. But then, the corrective hand of discipline is that I step off of that path and it puts me back on that path. Because, the longer I walk on that uneven path, as a believer, the longer the opportunity is for me to be spiritually, emotionally, or even physically wounded. He’s painting a picture to stay on that path. And like I said, it seems that commentators all agree that this ties with the idea of running the race.

Remember two weeks ago, at the beginning of chapter 12, if you look back up to verse 2 – actually, let’s just read the first two verses.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

So, the idea is that, as I’m on this path, I’m running this race, and the disciplinary hand of God keeps me on that path, so that I don’t come off of that path. I’m fixed on Jesus. Jesus would use the analogy, “No man who puts his hand to the plow, looking back, is worthy of the kingdom of God.”

I’ve tried this. I’ve tried to mow. I don’t plow, so I tried this on the mower. I tried to mow with a zero-turn. Those things are sensitive, you know? I always imagine that I’m flying a Blackhawk helicopter when I’m on that, because I’m still ten years old. I’m driving that mower, and what happens if I look back? I just try to imagine that and I can never keep it straight for very long. It's that idea that we have to look ahead. We fix our eyes on Jesus and we run the race that’s in front of us.

These words in verses 12-13 are taken from Isaiah 35:3, and those were words that were spoken by God to encourage the exiled Israelites. I want to read that. Isaiah 35, I want to jump over there for a second and I want to read this. Now, the context that God was speaking to the Israelites in, was that you have a nation of people who had all the promises that God had made to them, but because of their disobedience – we could go down this other path where, because of their disobedience they are living under the consequences of their own sin. There’s a tension when it comes to the discipline of God.

For those of us who are Christians – let me think how to word this – Romans 8:1 says,

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

That means there’s no condemnatory judgment. As a child of God who has been washed in the blood of Jesus, we’ve been clothed in the cloaked righteousness of Jesus, we’ve been given the Holy Spirit in our heart, and our mind, and our soul, and we’ve been imprinted with the hand of God, the Spirit of God has sealed us, the Spirit of God indwells us, we’ve been given (1 Corinthians 2) the mind of Christ, we’ve been given the righteousness of Christ – so we don’t have to worry about condemnatory judgment. In other words, God’s not going to condemn us to Hell. God’s economy doesn’t work where it’s like, “Well, you made a mistake, so I’m going to revoke part of my grace.” Discipline doesn’t work that way. What happens, though, is that sometimes we have to live out the grace of God differently, meaning we have to live with the consequences of sin. I have to live with the consequences of my actions, but I can do that knowing that God’s grace is still with me, God’s spirit abides in me, God’s Word is real for me, the mind of Christ is present in me, the righteousness of God is the righteousness that I’ve received, but there are consequences.

As a Christian, can we agree? Would you agree? You don’t have to ‘Amen’ or raise your hand. I mean we’re this close to being a Presbyterian church, we are so quiet in here. You guys should see what it looks like from right here. It's intense. I’m not going to lie. I’ll tell you who I look at from time to time, Josh Schwarting – I feel like that’s my happy face. I’m okay, I’m good. But can we agree, there are times when you know you’re a child of God, but you have to live with the consequences of your sin and action. It’s just reality, man. It’s just reality. But some of us have a stunted view of God’s grace, where we think like Judah, when Joseph is interacting with Judah, and we say, “Well, we didn’t commit this crime, but there’s something else we did way back there. I guess God’s going to judge us for that now.” God’s economy doesn’t work like that. God’s grace is never revoked. His salvation is not revoked, but sometimes we live with the consequences of our sin.

Let’s think of some examples. David after Bathsheba. Do we see lingering consequences for the rest of his life? Yes. How about the moment when Paul – this is a beautiful picture of the consequences of one’s actions. Paul and Barnabas are on a missionary trip in the book of Acts. And there’s a guy named John Mark who is with them, and he’s Barnabas’ nephew, and John Mark quits the team, creates some problems, and he basically gets out of the will of God, is what it looks like. So, he quits, and then later he wants to come back on the team, and Paul says, “No, he can’t come back on the team.” Barnabas is like, “Hey, bro, where’s the grace? Are you gonna just be judgmental?” “I’m not being judgmental. I forgive him, but he can’t be on the team because he can’t be trusted, and we’re getting ready to go through a really difficult region and a difficult season of ministry, and I cannot trust him to be on the team, and I’m not going to babysit him. He needs to go grow up.” So, John Mark has to go, and Barnabas goes with him. It's a conflict that happens that splits a team. But later, we see that God’s hand was guiding the whole process, because Paul writes to Timothy, when Paul is about to be executed, and he says, “Send me John Mark. He’s useful to me for ministry.” So, what happened in those years between those two events is that John Mark lived with the consequences of his own actions, but he humbled himself. And Peter would write that when you humble yourself under the hand of God that He exalts you.

So, our responsibility is that when we deal with the disciplining hand of God, the corrective hand of God, or we’re living with the consequences of our own actions, to know that God’s grace is still sufficient, and He will grow me even when I’m disobedient, even when I’m having to live with consequences. He’ll still grow me.

So, in Isaiah 35, God is speaking to the Israelites, who are living out, as a people, the consequences of their own actions. They have rejected the lordship of God, they’ve rejected the sovereign position that God holds over them, and they’ve chased after false gods, and idols, and experiences. As a result, they’ve been carried into exile. They are living as slaves and exiles under the dominion of another nation. So, God comes and speaks to them, and this is where the writer of Hebrews is quoting from. Isaiah 35:3,

Strengthen the weak hands,

and make firm the feeble knees.

4 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.”

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,

and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer,

and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

For waters break forth in the wilderness,

and streams in the desert;

7 the burning sand shall become a pool,

and the thirsty ground springs of water;

in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,

the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

What’s God saying to the people of Israel through Isaiah? He’s saying, “You’re living with the consequences of your actions, but the promises of God are still true for you.” What He’s promising to them is that the exile will end. There’s an end to this. The Lord is going to come and deliver you from this.

We might say, in our context, we’re still looking forward to the coming of God, to the Second Coming of Christ. We’re still looking forward to an eternal kingdom that will never end, where there’s no back pain, where your car ain’t gonna break down, right? The police ain’t gonna do a traffic stop and find out that your thing’s expired. Nobody is going to go hungry. There’s not going to be any cancer, there’s not going to be any divorce, there’s not going to be any child abuse. That kingdom is coming. So, we have to be reminded that, in one sense, - listen, in a bigger theological framework – we are literally living in a consequential age. We are living in an age of grace, under a covenant of grace, but we have to live under a covenant of grace because there are consequences to the original sin that disrupted what God had created. The consequences of sin is something that, even when I’m walking in fellowship and obedience with God, I can see the consequences of sin.

Christians are the only people who have an answer for the world’s evil. Evil is real because man rejected God’s plan and purpose. We’re also the only people who have a hope. The hope is in the resurrection; that Christ entered into the evil, He entered into the suffering, so that He might bring us out of it. It's beautiful. So, the consequence of sin is something that’s constantly all around us.

Let’s continue. Again, verse 12,

12 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;

So, let’s stop there and let’s talk about this. When the writer says, “Strive for peace with everyone,” we understand that. Jesus said He will bless peacemakers. “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Within that sermon, Jesus would talk about how important it is to be a peacemaker, and as Christians, we are called to as much as is possible to live at peace with all people. We have the power to forgive, even when someone is not seeking forgiveness. Have you ever felt the power that comes from releasing someone from something they’ve done to you, even when they don’t want to be released? Even when they don’t ask forgiveness? Even when they don’t say, “Will you forgive me? I’ve wronged you.” There’s something Christlike, there’s something powerful, when we release someone by forgiving them, even when they don’t seek that forgiveness. What it does, is it releases me from the grip of bitterness. It unlocks me from the bondage of this other person’s sin against me. It sets me free. It's very powerful. So, we are called to be those who strive for peace. So, the Scripture says to, as much as is possible, to live at peace with all people. As much as it’s possible, within Gospel reason, live at peace with all people. So, he says we’re to strive for it. In other words, you’re going to have to work at it. That word ‘strive’ means you’re going to have to work at it. You’re going to have to toil, and sweat, and work at it. Strive for peace with everyone.

Then, he says,

…and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

What’s he talking about? What holiness is there, that if we don’t have it, we won’t see the Lord? The holiness that comes from salvation. That’s another way of saying your sanctification. Listen – if a person is not being sanctified, they have not been saved by the grace of God. When Paul writes to the Corinthians, in all of their insanity, and he lists this atrocious list of sins, and he says, “Such were some of you – you were this, and this, and this – you were these things – but you were washed.” The blood of Jesus washes, and cleanses, and purifies us from unrighteousness. You were washed and you were sanctified to be glorified. This is a work that Jesus is doing.

We live in a day and age where you can identify as pretty much anything you want to identify as. You want to be a cat? We’ll put a litter box in the break room at work for you. True story in some businesses – y’all know this. That’s insanity. It’s insanity. You can just decide you want to be something that you weren’t created by God to be? What is that? It's people who don’t know the peace of God. That’s what it is. You’re this and you want to be that? But you know what? The Church has already got the market on this. We have people who have been identifying as Christians for 250 years, who are not Christians. “I’m a Christian.” “Tell me about it.” “Ohh, my grandma…” “No, no, I don’t know your grandma. We’re talking about you.” “Well, you know, my granddaddy was a preacher. “A preacher? I don’t know your granddaddy.” “Of course you don’t. He died in ’76. I’m just saying he was a preacher. I’m a Christian.” We’ve got this cultural Christianity that’s like a dryer sheet, and you get to work and you realize it’s still hanging on you. “Let me take that off. That’s not convenient here, you know?” We don’t identify as Christians – we are made Christians, by the blood of Jesus, the work of Jesus, the indwelling Spirit of Jesus, the seal of His Spirit on our lives.

So, if a person is in Christ, what he’s saying is that the fruit of that is going to be evident in the sanctification process. So, this is what it should look like. If I am truly in Christ, I will not be the same next year as I am right now. It’s not possible. There’s no biblical model of an unmoving, fruitless Christian. What the Scripture would say is you’re not a Christian. If you’re doing the same thing right now, if you’re pursuing the same things, if your desires aren’t changing – this is hard teaching, y’all. A couple of times, I’ve been nauseous thinking about getting up here and saying this. You can’t just say, “I’m a Christian,” and just magic happens. When you surrender to Jesus, you confess Him as Lord, you receive the substitutionary work, He forgives you, He washes you, He cleanses you, He gives you a new spirit in you, He gives you a new heart, but you will never, ever, be the same. And you will never stay in one moment what you were in the previous moment. Paul says it this way to the Corinthians, you will change one degree of glory to the next. It's a degree at a time, a degree at a time.

14 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

In other words, at the end of sanctification, you’re facing Jesus, face-to-face. Sanctification always ends in the presence of Jesus. There’s no biblical sanctification that stops with me getting off the rails and going somewhere else. When God saves you, He’s got you. He’s conforming you to Jesus. He’s making you like Jesus. Some of us need to put our hand on the plow and work a little harder, and some of us need to relax and rest in Jesus. It's somewhere in that tension, you know. The grace of God is that He saves us and we don’t earn it. But the reality is, the rest of our lives the process of sanctification costs us everything. Salvation costs you nothing, it's free. But when you receive it, from that day forward, it will cost you everything.

So, he pivots toward an example. By the way, sanctification is not the work of your effort; it’s the work of the Holy Spirit in you. You know that, right?

We were at the NOC the other day. Dog people - some of you are dog people. Bless you. We have more dogs than any residential dwelling should ever have, and they are all big. But I saw this dog. Y’all’ve seen this. I don’t know what happened to the little fella, but he’s walking with his front feet and his back feet are in this rig with two big wheels. He’s running around on a leash. I was like, “Now, I get it. That’s me and Jesus right there, just grinding it out.” He’s like, “I got you. Come on!” That’s sanctification in real time. I’ve got to grind it out, you know? I’ve got to grind it out. He’s like, “I got you. I got you. Watch this!,” and He puts the brakes on. Okay, okay.

There’s a tension where you’ve gotta work, but you’re not working to earn His favor. You’re working to bring joy, and worship, and pleasure, in your experience in the relationship, and we strive to become more like Christ. And He uses this analogy of Esau. He says,

16 that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau,…

And it kind of took me a little while, and a lot of conversations with Rob, and we worked through this text. Why is he bringing Esau up and why is he using the sexually immoral reference? And the idea is that the step-by-step process of sanctification will only be disrupted by the momentary process of feeding the flesh.

Let me finish verse 17 and then give closing thoughts here, because the Esau thing is fascinating.

…who sold his birthright for a single meal.

He sold everything for one meal. I think this is where the idea of being hangry came from. He lost it.

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, in the moment, he caves into the demands of the flesh and he gives everything away for what will feed the flesh. Then, he feels sorry, but we know that biblical repentance is something that the Lord receives. But it says he is seeking repentance, even through tears. What’s going on? The reality is that he’s not getting there. He’s not willing to turn and surrender to God. I went back and read the Esau story, and what’s fascinating in the Esau story is that Esau went on and did really well in his own power. Remember the interaction with Esau and Jacob? Jacob goes out and he’s like, “I’m going to give you a bunch of donkeys, and money, and livestock, and I’m gonna hook you up. I’m going to pay you back.” And Esau says, “I don’t need your stuff. In fact, I’ve got more stuff than the inheritance would have provided. I’ve done well.” But he’s done well in rebellion and the danger…

Listen, as a pastor, in ministry, one of the things I’ve seen happen so much is that you’re pleading with someone to turn from their sin, and they say, “But I’m happy, and I’m flourishing, and I’m doing well.” But that happiness doesn’t go deep enough. They are living up here in the surface area of happiness, when every one of us – it could be when you’re 15 or when you’re 65, you’re going to come to an existential moment in your life when you realize, “I’ve not filled up the empty space.” Esau never filled the empty space. He filled the periphery. He filled the surface. He accumulated wealth. He had stuff and he was comfortable, but at some point he was an old man with no hope. Because he never turned in repentance and surrendered to Jesus. He lived for the flesh, in the moment, and it was a string of moments, after moment, after moment. So, I think the contrast is, as Christians living under the corrective, and disciplinary, and sanctifying hand of God, we submit to Christ, we walk – in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, it says,

For this is the will of God, your sanctification…

Your holiness. When you’re living in the will of God, there’s joy.

I mean, don’t raise your hand, but how many of us have been broke as a joke but as happy as you can be because you and Jesus are tight? I’ve been there. I have about 120 interns right now who are like, “Uh, you mean there’s another way to live?”

I’m going to give a couple of applications and be done, but just thinking, how many of us have also either experienced or seen people who have everything the world could offer them…? Did any of you think – I’m not being judgmental, please, I’m just thinking out loud, which is dangerous as a preacher expositing a passage. You’re not supposed to do this, but we’re such a family here. Did any of you think, when those billionaires got in that submarine[[1]](#footnote-1), “Why are you doing that? What are you doing?” It's empty! Billions don’t fill the bottom space of your soul. Jesus does. Christ does. You can chase whatever the world’s offering you but you’re not going to be happy.

The way all of this is connected to last week’s text is, because we see the disciplining hand of God, we’re assured of sonship, therefore, walk in obedience, and fellowship, and relationship, knowing that He’s step-by-step conforming us into the image of His Son, and ultimately, we don’t live by the demands of the flesh, but we find peace, and happiness, and joy, through the process of becoming more like Jesus, the process that He’s offering. We keep our eyes on Him, walk the path, don’t get off on rocky ground, and stay the course. Stay the course and we will walk with Jesus.

So, how do we do it? The last step is this. I kept it super simple in the application and conclusion. Keep your eyes on Jesus every day. For me, I visit the familiar passages of Scripture and explore the unfamiliar passages often. Visit the familiar ones – it’s not like you wear them out. It's not like a pair of boots. You can’t wear them out. You can go back to the 23rd Psalm one million times and your soul will be nourished. Keep your hand on the plow, there’s work to be done. And be aware of how quickly sin can take root. And that root of bitterness – I’m out of time but it’s a reference back to a passage back in Deuteronomy, where God is speaking to the people, and He’s like, “You’ve been in the wilderness all these years and I’ve provided for you. I’ve given you everything you need. Your shoes didn’t wear out, your clothes didn’t wear out, I fed you, and everything is good, and yet you let discontentment creep in and it sowed a seed of sin, and it’s root sprang up and produced bitterness. Now, people are bitter toward each other, and toward God, and they are discontent. Listen, Paul writes to the Philippians,

I have found that in whatever state I am in to be content.

And contentment is produced by thanksgiving toward God. Get up every day and give thanks and you will be content, and that contentment is powerful, and you will grow more and more into the image of Jesus.

Let’s pray.

Lord, I pray that you would take your Word tonight and cultivate it into the soil of our heart, and soul, and mind. I pray that you would shape us and conform us into the image of your Son, Jesus. Lord Jesus, we worship you and we thank you for the sacrifice that you made to reconcile man to God. Thank you that there’s no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Thank you that you have set us free from sin and death, from the dominion, and slavery, and shackles of sin. You’ve brought us out of the domain of darkness and put us into the kingdom of your beloved Son. Heavenly Father, we thank you for that. Lord Jesus, by your blood that you would shed that so that we might be free. So, Father, now I pray that you would move in our hearts and lives and draw us into the worship that leads us to sing songs of praise and then, as we go out from here, the worship of obedience and the actions of our lives. That we would not go down the path that Esau went down, who would trade so much for a moment of pleasure, but that we would live in obedience and walk in your truth. We thank you that tonight we will celebrate baptism and all that it means. We are grateful and we give you thanks for that. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

1. In June, 2023, the Titan submarine, with a crew and passengers that consisted of five billionaires from around the world, was on a voyage to view the wreckage of the Titanic, when the submarine lost contact with the surface. Wreckage was later found that proved that the submarine imploded, killing all on board. Here is just one story covering the tragedy - <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/passengers-bodies-remains-titanic-sub-b2367037.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)