



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

God's People Living as God's People

October 16, 2022

Hebrews 12:12-17

Clint Pressley

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; ¹⁶ that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷ For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

(Pastor prays)

When I was in high school, in the 9th or 10th grade, there was a class called Drivers Education. Back then it was a semester class typically taught by a coach who did not want to be there. Part of the class was actual driving. So you'd start the car, and the coach would point to tell you where to go. There's not much instruction except my particular coach taught me that if you're driving your car and you want to light a cigarette, you can take your knees and steer while you're lighting it. Taking the course and actually driving the car are two very different things.

I wish I could speak Spanish. A group of us from Hickory Grove are going to Ecuador and I presume we'll be with folks that speak Spanish. I have tried a

program called Duo Lingo. And I have come up with 10 Spanish phrases but I can't speak Spanish. It's one thing to want to do something and it's another thing altogether to actually do it. Sometimes I'll watch YouTube to learn how to play the piano. I want to play an instrument. It's one of the regrets of my life that I didn't learn to play any musical instrument. I played the coronet, which is a short trumpet, in the 5th and 6th grade but finally put that down. I'd like to be able to play the piano or the guitar. It's one thing to want to do something, it's another thing altogether to do it.

In Hebrews 12, from verse 4-11, you read that God disciplines the people that he loves. It's one thing to have that conceptual knowledge and it's another thing altogether to actually live with the clear knowledge that God loves you. It's one thing to be theologically trained and to know good doctrine and to even practice devotional living; it is another thing altogether to have it come into your life.

Remember, this is a preacher preaching a sermon. And what he's done for almost 12 chapters is give us doctrine after doctrine after doctrine. He starts with the assurance, helping us understand why do we go through the hard times. And at the end of that you see the word *therefore* in verse 12. This is taking this passage in 1000 different settings and applying it into our lives.

Because the truth of the matter is...

God's People Must Live Like They Actually are God's People

You and I, members of Hickory Grove Baptist Church are called to live as if we actually are God's people. To be a member of Hickory Grove Baptist Church, you've got to at least either be baptized in our baptistry or baptized somewhere else by immersion, which is a declaration that Jesus Christ is Lord. So theoretically, everybody that claims to be a member of Hickory Grove have at one time said, Jesus is my Lord. God's people must live like we actually are God's people. In the passage you can go through the verses and pull out the practical things. There are eight practical actions that will help

you live as a child of God. Here's the first one, number one. What do you have to do to live like God's people?

Use the whole Bible

What I mean by that is don't just have a verse on your refrigerator or on your mirror or even tattooed on your skin. That is a fine thing to do but what this preacher has done is, he's come to his people and he just sat down all of this Bible. This passage is amazing in its scope. When you look at verse 13, there you'll find a quote from Isaiah. And you'll find a quote from Proverbs in verse 13. In verse 14 you will find the Psalms. And In verse 15, is Deuteronomy, the Law of God. Then you get to verses 16 and 17 and the preacher goes all the way back to the beginning, the foundations in Genesis. If you have a Bible that has footnotes, probably down at the bottom of the page, there's the apparatus that tells you all of the other cross references that are in that passage right there. It is astounding. The preacher is quoting the prophets, he's quoting wisdom literature, he's quoting Psalms. He's quoting the law of God. He's quoting the book of Genesis. He's taking the whole panoramic view of the Bible. And he says, this is God's message.

There are certain kinds of theology that we have. There's historical theology that tells you how God works providentially through history. You have systematic theology that will set down on one doctrine and pour deeply into things like the doctrine of God. But you have other theologies like Biblical theology that gives us the story of God.

From creation to man's fall in sin to redemption in Christ; and the consummation the end of the age when Jesus comes back. And then the new creation of the heavens and the earth. As a person that calls yourself a Christian, it's important that you are using the whole Bible. You build your life on a foundation from Genesis that tells you exactly who you are by God's creation in his image. It's important you understand that you were created in the image of God; that you are aware of your own dignity because of God's creation. It's important that you are aware of God creating man and a woman.

This is not a political thing. This is the Christian God creating us man and woman and doing so in his image. This is God sanctifying marriage is a creation ordinance between a man and a woman. That is not a cultural thing. That is from creation. It is good for you to get a hold of the creative order. You get that from the whole Bible.

It's good read the law of God in Exodus and Deuteronomy. It's good the preacher is preaching that because the law of God reminds us of how far we have fallen. It reminds us that we cannot keep the law. It is designed in several ways to show us the will of God. It is also there to show us our own sinfulness. The law of God is there to remind us of God's holiness and our sinfulness and that despair is designed to drive us to the cross of Christ. Because Jesus Christ didn't come to abolish the law. He said, "I've come to fulfill the Law." Jesus kept the law perfectly where we can't. The law reminds us that we need the gospel. And then Jesus died as a sinner, although he wasn't a sinner, he died as one on our behalf. The law of God requires death for sin and Jesus took it. The law reminds us of the seriousness of the gospel; that Christ has suffered for us.

The preacher here quotes wisdom, he quotes the Proverbs. If you have small children or if you have the adult children, a good thing to do is take the Book of Proverbs, read the Proverbs and pray them to your sons. They were written by a man for his children. Proverbs. You read that and there's the wisdom of God. The wisdom of God reminds us of our need. You can take the Proverbs, there are 31 of them; and just pray through one a day for your children. Just add that to your devotional each day.

When you read this passage, you have the Psalms. They are there for your own personal prayer life. Oftentimes when I'm leading the church in prayer, I'll use a Psalm. Why? Because this is David pouring out his heart to God. This is where we learned to come to God. The Psalms are there to remind us as the deer pants for the water, so my soul thirst for you, Oh God.

There we are reminded that the Lord is our shepherd. We are reminded that we were hungry and thirsty. We are reminded that our sins are before God and that God forgives. The Psalms. If you are struggling and something has you down, take the Psalms and pray through the Psalms.

The prophet Isaiah is quoted here twice; the prophets remind us of having hope in a troubled world. And all the prophets, major and minor, live under this oppression from outside forces and yet had hope in God. If you are going to live as a child of God, you need to live the whole bible. Don't just tack it on. Don't have a verse or two that you can quote. Come to know the story about our good God throughout the entire Bible. This is why we press it into our people. This is why every pastor on this staff is accountable to every other every single day. Use the whole Bible.

Here's the second action step.

Fight depression

Sometimes it's overwhelming. Sometimes it's beyond you. John Newton and William Cowper are two men in history. William Cowper battled depression his entire life and John Newton fought so hard to help his friend. Sometimes it's more than you can bear but sometimes there needs to be some effort on your part. Look at this in verse 12. *¹² Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,* That *therefore* is very important because it hinges. It is built on all the verses 4 through 11. In versus 4 through 11, you are reminded that the Lord disciplines those he loves. All of you would say, yes, I am in fact his favorite. Yes, God disciplines the ones he loves so if that's the case, therefore you are loved. Therefore, with that love, lift up your drooping hands. Look at the imagery, staggering along, weak knees, exhausted. And the command is to look up. How do you do that? You base it on verses 4 through 11, God disciplines those that he loves. This idea in verse 12 is of somebody who has been going along and is just paralyzed now. That is when you feel like you're not any use anymore to God. Sometimes it's so heavy. What are your responsibilities when you are faced with this sort of thing.

What can you do? There are a couple of things to think on. Think on the love of God. Think how God has loved you. This is why the Bible is important. You've read the Bible; you know the story. Think on how God has shown love to you. Here's the second thing. Think on the cross of Christ. How is your doctrine of salvation? Think on what God has done for you in Jesus. Think on the gospel, apply that to your heart. Think on who you are in Christ because of the cross of Christ. Here's another thing to think on. Think on the hope of heaven. Sometimes things are so bad here that you will long for there. Sometimes things are terrible here to remind you how much better it is there. Think on the joy of forgiveness. Doesn't it feel good to know that you're forgiven? Have you walked around with guilt from something you've done and then have that removed and lifted? Think on the joy of forgiveness. Think on the fellowship of church. Think on how the church has loved you. You have brothers and sisters that want to walk with you. Sometimes the depression you can't help. I'm certainly not saying it's your fault. I'm saying there are some steps you can take that sometimes require some effort on your part. Let's just flip that over a little bit and say this also could be a command to the healthy minded people in the church to make sure you're coming along those whose hands are drooping and whose knees are weak. We are called to help the brothers. So we use the whole bible and we fight depression. Let me give you a third thing.

Be smart and compassionate

Hold these two things together, smart for you and compassionate to others. Let's look at verse 13. ¹³ *and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.* That has hints of Isaiah 40:3-4, *A voice cries:*

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;

make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ *Every valley shall be lifted up,*

and every mountain and hill be made low;

*the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.*

He's applying it to our own lives. Make a straight path. You might even interpret that word straight make a smooth path. So just interpret in literally. If you're building road, you get all the boulders out of the way. Our hearts and hammers group build ramps for people at their houses who have wheelchairs that can get up to the door. You need a smooth ramp. You want it to be as flat as possible with no obstacles. If you walk through the woods, oftentimes you'll see paths with twists and turns. Animals make those that are natural paths, avoiding obstacles. The idea here is not necessarily avoiding, the idea here is making it straight and flat. It's doing the necessary things, confronting. When the transcontinental railroad came across the country and to get over to the California coast, they had to go through mountains, blasting them out. The command is one to take seriously the problems that are in the way of your straight path because what's at stake is that you're not actually being able to walk. This is the idea of a straight smooth path being prepared with the whole lot of effort. So be smart. Get rid of the obstacles that are in the way of you walking a straight path with the Lord. Get rid of the stumbling block. For some of you that means getting rid of the people that prevent you from flourishing. Get rid of the wrong crowd. Do the hard and diligent work of making sure that your path is clear and straight so to prevent you from stumbling. How do you do it? Some of the stumbling, some of the sin we fall into is your own fault. So you just be smart. What are the things in your life that you need to be smart about? Maybe you need not pay very much attention to this person, or this show or this event. Be smart.

But also be compassionate. Verse 13 has this corporate feel to it. When I say corporate, I mean a community feel. It has this congregational feel in verse 13. *13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.* You could walk therapeutically and get stronger over the course of time. But maybe we have brothers and sisters that are not strong enough to walk by themselves. And our job is to come over

there and put his arm over my neck. We have friends that we see a brother struggling. You see a brother going through hard times. Maybe it is someone who is lonely and has been sinned against. Or it's a brother that's fallen into sin or that is just weak. We come and we apply the gospel and we do a fireman's carry for a little while until healing happens. Until she's strong enough to actually do it on her own. The gospel demands this. So the question I might ask is, are you being smart? Are you living smart? God has given you a brain to think clearly about how you can best serve the Lord and not fall into sin. What are the stumbling blocks that you right now need to carve out and get rid of? Or look around, are you being compassionate? Is there someone you need to take the next step and say brother let me help you with that? Be smart and compassionate. Let me give you a fourth thing to consider.

Fight for peace

Fight. Fight for peace. Let me show you where I get it. You'll see the word strive in verse 14, strive. That word strive means to pursue, to go after, to be aggressive about, to be intentionally peaceful. Let me read it. ¹⁴ *Strive for peace with everyone*, This takes some effort. This takes some intentionality. This is also the words of Jesus, blessed are the peacemakers. What did Jesus say? In Matthew 5:23 Jesus says, when you are presenting your offering at the altar and then remember that your brother has something against you; It may not even be your fault, but your brother has something against you, leave your offering there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to your brother and then come back and worship. It's what Paul said to the church at Rome. If it is possible, you might even be under Nero's boot, but if it is possible as far as it depends on you... That's an important clause, if it is possible as far as it depends on you, live peaceably. When Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, in 1st Corinthians:7, he writes to people that are believers married to an unbeliever. And he writes to someone that is a Christian married to someone that's not a Christian and he says, look. If that person will stay with you, you stay there? And what it says there at the end of that paragraph is that God

has called us to peace. Now be careful. We are not called to peace at all costs. We stand by the standard of truth, of what the Bible says. We don't compromise the truth. We are not called to peace at all costs. We do not compromise the truth. We just don't weaponize the truth so that it becomes a battering ram or something to harm people with. We believe that the truth gives life and we want to bring people to the truth. So what about the peace? Here's a good way to step down and think about who you are at peace with. Here's the first one. Let's start with God. Ask the question to your own soul. Am I at peace with God? Have you come to faith in Christ, believing that God created you in his image but your sins have separated you from God. You put your faith that Jesus lived perfectly and died in your place. God raised him from the dead. He is ascended as Lord and you believe that. If that's the case, the Bible teaches you have peace with God.

Is there peace in your home, where you live and the people that live with you? Is there peace there? If you've got peace with God, that peace with God is going to now invade your home, and that comes largely through humility. Most of the time it's pride that keeps a home from being peaceful. Do you have humility to say where you are wrong and to accept responsibility and to listen? Or how about the church? Are you a person that brings peace and cohesiveness to the church through serving, worshipping and giving? It's always a disappointment to know how few people actually give at any particular church. What about your friends? Are you known as a person of peace by way of hospitality and being patient with them, bringing them to the gospel? What about with the world? Go beyond that to the next circle that's outside of you, the world. Are you being someone that is on mission for the gospel? Are you praying for your neighbors? If they went into a crisis, even if they weren't Christians, would they know you would come? Would they come to you as somebody who would pray for them? We need to fight for peace. How do we do that? Paul says, we are anxious for nothing, but in all things by prayer and supplication we add Thanksgiving. You let the request be made known to God and something's gonna happen. It's the peace of God that

surpasses all understanding. Guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. Fight for peace.

Let me give a fifth point.

Work for holiness

Join me there in verse 14. There are two things to strive for in verse 14. *Strive for peace with everyone*. That's the first one. Here's the second one - and for the holiness, *without which no one will see the Lord*. Holiness. Let's not get a distorted view of holiness. Holiness is not sanctimonious; holiness is not legalism. We live as people that are **already, not yet**. We live as people that are already saved and justified before God because of what Christ has done in us. So in some manner of speaking we are holy, but not yet. There's still a whole lot of work in most of us that needs to be done. We live in this already, not yet. What does it mean to be holy? I would reduce it down to saying it like this. You have been set apart for God in Christ. There is an internal change that brings about an external reality. So are you taking your relationship to God seriously? Is your relationship to God through Christ the number one driving passion of your life? Do you question everything in this world through the lens of holiness? Does this honor God?

Yesterday we were drinking coffee. It was early on Saturday morning, the 5K started at 8:00am and registration was at 7:15am. That's not really the time you want to be out on Saturday morning. So we're drinking coffee and I'm regretting my decision to be a part of the missions 5K. And just having finished my pot of coffee and I ask Connie, what would be best for me to pray for you? And her answer was: pray that I would be personally holy. Work for holiness. I'll give you a 6th point. What is the action step? It is to...

Dwell on grace

Let's not forget that we are people of grace. Christianity is a religion of grace. We were saved by grace. Grace is the free gift of God, given to us. Dwell on grace. Do you see it in verse 15? Notice the phraseology in verse 15. It's very

important. Verse 15. 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;* See that three-word phrase, *See to it*. It is actually one word in Greek. It's where we get the word Episcopal or Episcopalian, or Bishop or overseer. The idea is for the congregation to look out for one another. It is the idea of accountability. Now, what are we being accountable for? *See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God*. Now the grace of God is a gift. The Grace of God is given freely. The Grace of God is available for all. The grace of God is here. See to it that your brother doesn't fail to appropriate and come to the grace of God. See to it that he comes and swims in the grace of God. See to it that he gives his life to the grace of God, that he's understanding forgiveness. This is for your heart and for others. Don't be so oppressed by some religion. Don't have this false understanding of God. Don't fail to appropriate it for your life. We take the Grace of God and then we extend that grace to other people. You make sure brothers and sisters see that grace. There's not a person sitting in this room that couldn't stand to have just a little bit more grace. Ask God and receive it. We need to dwell on grace for ourselves; and for others. And I'll give you a 7th one. It's in verse 15.

We need to kill bitterness

Bitterness. 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;* We've gone into this farming language. One preacher said that being bitter about something that's happened to you is like drinking poison and hoping somebody else dies. But this is different than anger. Anger shows up and explodes and you find out what the problem is. You have a big fight but then it's over. Bitterness is not like that. Bitterness doesn't explode, it's just as it's described here, as a root. Look, you don't see roots but they're there, underneath the ground, growing slowly without being detected deep under the surface. At some point, what verse 15 says is that poisonous food shows itself? It might happen in a relationship. It might happen in the morale of a community group class. It might happen in an atmosphere or a group of

people. And when that bitterness shows up, the text says it steals joy. It dishonors Christ. It poisons the church. Bitterness left unattended is a rot for you and it's a rot for those that love you. Bitterness must be killed. We must take it out of the ground and take it to the cross and have that poisonous rot crucified there and be healed by the grace of God. Leave that bitterness there. That's seven I let me let me just give you one last one. I'll close with this one. It's verse 16 and 17 and that is to...

Reject shallowness

Don't be considered somebody that's shallow. You hear what it says here in verses 16 and 17. It's underneath the phrase, *See to it* from verse 15. Verse 16 says, ¹⁶ *that no one is sexually immoral*. So let me just say it like this. You have high standards. If your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and as a Christian, what you've decided is by God's grace, according to what the Bible says, you are created in his image, and redeemed by the blood of Jesus, you now are the temple of the Holy Spirit. You have high sexual standards. That's just part of being a Christian. It's the joy of being a Christian, so we have those standards. Not only that, but we also don't have a carnal outlook. The preacher is gonna bring Esau in. But notice what it says there in verse six that no one is sexually immoral or unholy. Your Bible might say irreligious. What that means is the word carnal or worldly. I heard a preacher talking the other day about carnal Christianity; that someone got baptized and saved and is living like the world. They don't seem the different, he said. Let me just say there's no such thing as a carnal Christian. You have been redeemed by the blood of Christ Jesus, your Lord. You certainly will sin but that hasn't become your lifestyle. You certainly will stumble from time to time and do things wrong, your attitude is sour but that hasn't become your lifestyle. The preacher says don't present yourself as shallow. Reject it. Your standards are different.

Your values are different. What we have there in verses 16 and 17 is the description of Esau from Genesis. You go back and read the story. Genesis

gives the picture of Esau not getting a material blessing because his brother tricked him out of it. Esau was so upset because he didn't get the material blessing. Look, Esau didn't weep for guilt of his own sin. He wept because of wealth. And the whole point of this passage is reminding us that God's people must live like we actually are God's people. As we closed this morning, that's a good question to ask. So as we close this morning, what in your life needs attention right now? Maybe all of it didn't apply to you, but you felt something. What in your life needs to change? Do you need help? God is here. And he is willing. Join me as we pray together with your heads bowed this morning as we go to the Lord?

(Pastor prays)