LOOKING TO GET RIGHT WITH GOD

Hebrews 12:12-17
11/17/04

Introduction:

**** We need God's direction for life! Let's get on His track and go!***

I. LOOK _____: What _____ are you trusting? (v.12)

II. LOOK _____: What _____ are you on? (v.13)

III. LOOK _____: What _____ are you seeking? (v.14)

A. Diligently pursue _____ (v.14a)

B. Diligently pursue _____ (v.14b)

IV. LOOK ____: What _____ should you avoid? (v.15-17)

Are you...
A. Missing God's Grace? (v.15a)

Are you...
B. Stewing with Bitterness? (v.15b)

Are you...
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Are you...
D. Living with Irreverence? (v.16b-17)

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Introduction:

V. 12

"Wherefore" - In light of the fact that our Heavenly Father disciplines His children (12:5-11) [and these Hebrew Christians were perhaps enduring His corrective chastisement], the Lord now gives us some practical exhortations to alter a detrimental course of action our lives have taken.

These verses resume the "race metaphor" used in 12:1-2.

[Note the references to *"knees"* (v. 12); *"paths...feet"* (v. 13); *"follow"* (v. 14); *"looking diligently"* (v. 15).]

Four imperatives provide our four points:

1. ***"Lift up"*** (v. 12)

2. ***"Make straight"*** (v. 13)

3. ***"Follow"*** (v. 14)

4. ***"Looking diligently"*** (v. 15)

**** We need God's direction for life! Let's get on His track and go!***

I. LOOK UP: What promises are you trusting? (v.12)

In running, it is usually the arms, then the knees, that become weary. The arms begin to slump and the knees begin to wobble (MacArthur, p. 402).

"Lift up" - An imperative, meaning to set upright, to lift up from a fallen, drooping, listless, lifeless posture to a revived, energetic, upright posture.

No one can run track with his arms hanging down!

"Feeble knees" - knees that have given up (paralyzed & lame).

The words ***"hand down"*** and ***"feeble"*** (perfect passive participles) imply that at some point in one's past he allowed such a "giving up" spirit to enter his life. The condition still remains, but by God's grace, something can be volitionally done about it!

Don't stay a victim to your discouragement. Get going for God!

The worse state a believer can be in is to be stuck in the "blahs," the slough of despair.

To have both weak arms and knees describes one who doesn't have the strength to do anything ("arms") or go anywhere ("knees").

Have you ever felt that way? Blah, sullen, lethargic, unmotivated?

There is no legitimate excuse for such an attitude in a child of God.

This verse is a quote of Isaiah 35:3. The picture is one of gloom.

In the context of Isaiah 35:1-2, Isaiah was seeking to encourage Israel with the future bliss of the Kingdom.

Move from discouragement to Godly encouragement.

These Jewish believers whom the writer of Hebrews is addressing apparently grew weary and discouraged due to their own unbelief and sin. For which cause, God was disciplining them -- not to keep them down, but to wake them up as to the need for immediate repentance for their rebellion.

Although we all have our "moments" of discouraging circumstances, we have so much to be grateful for. Count your blessings:

1) Life (*"abundantly"*)

2) Salvation (eternally)

3) A Savior (permanently) -- who will never leave us

4) Opportunities (to make a difference in someone's life)

Etc. etc.

Live by faith (Heb. 11).

II. LOOK AHEAD: What path are you on? (v.13)

"Paths" - tracks; the word refers to a running lane which has been made by the feet of runners (Rienecker, p. 715).

"Make straight paths" - There is a sense in which you make your own path (lane) to run on in life.

Your present difficult life may be the result of your past choices you have made. What you sowed, you now reap. Unclutter now, and you will run better later!

"Straight" - Two ideas:

--Not crooked
--Level (not bumpy)

Both sharp turns and an uneven surface do damage to the knees.

Don't get off track:

When we veer off of God's straight and narrow path (will) for our life, we transgress into dangerous territory (deep sudden holes, traps, quicksand, obstructive weeds and sticks and stones wait for our feet).

Clear out your lane! Don't clutter your running lane:

So many allow obstacles into their paths by disobeying God's Word. Such obstacles (stumbling blocks) will hurt us (we will twist our spiritual ankles and strain or dislocate our spiritual knees. You can't run fast or well on a slippery, rocky, uneven road).

"Lame...turned out of the way" - A lame (weak) joint (whether ankle or knee) is susceptible to sudden twists -- the result being dislocation or being out of joint.

"Let it rather be healed" - Rather than cluttering our path in life with obstacles that will lead to further injury, God says to clean up and smooth out and straighten up your lane so that your weak limbs can be healed.

God through natural or supernatural means can heal the weakened life, if we set the right course to run on.

III. LOOK OUT: What pursuits are you seeking? (v.14)

"Follow" - A strong word used of hunters pursuing their prey. It means to go diligently after something with focus and determination.

A. Diligently pursue peace (v.14a)

"Peace" - Having *"peace with God"* (Rom. 5:1), we should have the *"peace of God"* (Phil. 4:7); and by extension, we should have peaceful relationships toward others.

Rom. 14:19 - *"let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another."*

Our objective in life is not to do things that would tear apart relationships with other Christians, rather our goal is to do everything in our power to:

1. maintain peaceful relationships (Jms. 3:18)

2. build strong relationships ("edify" = to build up)

Rom. 12:18 - *"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."*

"If it be possible" - if you are able, do what is in your power to maintain peaceful relations with others.

"As much as lieth in you" = from your standpoint, seek to be peaceful.

We cannot control whether or not someone else will be peaceful but we can control the peace from our end, from our side of the problem.

Too often you worry about the other side of the problem; you are concerned about their attitude and action toward you, and fail to remember you will not answer to God for them, but for you. Pay attention to how well you are doing to promote a peaceful relationship.

"Live peaceably with all men" -

Do your best to be what you should be to promote harmony and tranquility with:

1) your spouse
2) your employer
3) your neighbors
4) your in-laws and relatives
5) those who "hate your guts"

Some might say: "I can be nice to some enemies, some of the time; but certainly God does not expect me to be nice to all enemies, all of the time, does He?"

ANSWER: There are no exceptions.

Note - "no man" (v. 17a); "all men" (v. 17b); "all men" (v. 18). This includes saved and lost (cp. I Th. 5:15)

V. 18

You cannot influence anyone for righteousness unless they can feel at rest (at ease) in your presence.

James 3:18 - *"And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."*

Mark 9:50 - *"Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltiness, wherewith will ye season it? have salt in yourselves and have peace one with another."*

B. Diligently pursue holiness (v.14b)

Not only are we to zealously pursue peace, but holiness as well!

This is not positional holiness (which we have freely in Christ), but practical holiness (which is daily sanctification) -- being set apart from that which would hinder our walk with God and our usefulness to God.

To pursue holiness would involve a daily determination to rid our lives of that which is impure, unclean, and unfitting for a saint. Needed:

--A holy thought life
(from worldly lusts and obsessions to a focus on God and truth)

--A holy attitude
(from pride, selfishness, and anger to humility, love, and forgiveness)

--A holy language
(from vanity, vulgarity, gossip and slander to speech which edifies the hearers)

--A holy lifestyle
(from immorality and worldliness to purity of actions and love for God)

"Without which no man shall see the Lord" - Without positional and

practical holiness, no one will go to Heaven.

Note: Practical holiness is not what saves us, it is what distinguishes us who are saved. Those who are positionally holy will bear evidence by their practical holiness that such a saintly relationship with God does indeed exist.

I Cor. 6:9-11 - *"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye ar washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."*

(Cp. Gal. 5:20-21)

"Blessed are the <u>pure</u> in heart, for they shall <u>see</u> <u>God</u>" (Mt. 5:8).

IV. LOOK <u>IN</u>: What <u>problems</u> should you avoid? (v.15-17)

V. 15

"Looking diligently" - To watch out for, to oversee our own lives and be on guard for some dangerous, yea deadly, tendencies.

(Note: This admonition is especially application to the job of the bishop [overseer]: to be watchful regarding these areas of spiritual danger among his flock.)

Note: Four negative matters to look out for (the negative word ***"lest"*** occurs three times in vv. 15-16, and applies to four potentially bad failures in our lives.

Are you...

A. Missing God's Grace? (v.15a)

"Fail" = *hustereo* - to be without, to be in need of, to lack.

"Fail of the grace of God" - does not refer to losing salvation, but to lacking or missing the grace of God in one of two ways:

View #1 - To miss out on the grace of God to lead a holy life (v. 14 & 28). To forfeit such grace due to personal sin.

View #2 - To miss out on the grace of God which brings salvation (<u>not</u> to lose salvation, but to never really have obtained it to begin with)

(NOTE: This is a key idea in this book - cp. Heb. 2:3, 4:1)

Perhaps the writer keeps the warning general and brief because both admonitions are implied; this admonition applies to the lost and the saved.

[Hence: ***"any man"*** (anyone)]

To the lost, you need to take heed that you don't lose out on God's gracious offer of eternal life; and to the saved, you need to take heed that you don't lose out on God's grace to live a holy life!

Are you...

B. Stewing with Bitterness? (v.15b)

1. The CAUSE of Bitterness

a. Resentment

1). Feeling of unfairness regarding God.

Examples:

a) Hannah - Reason: childlessness (I Sam. 1:10)
b) Naomi - Reason: death in the family (Ruth 1:20-22)
c) Job - Reason: physical affliction (Job 7:11; 10:1)

2) Hurt feelings toward others.

a) Bitterness against spouse (Col. 3:19)
b) Bitterness against parents (Eph. 6:4)
c) Feelings of jealousy toward others (James 3:14)

b. Unforgiveness
(holding grudges)

2. The COURSE of Bitterness (v. 15b)

a. Bitterness starts off small
(***"root"***)

Cp. Deut. 29:18-19
Hurt feelings; wounded pride (usually not over life-threatening situations; little annoyances etc.

b. Bitterness rapidly grows
*(**"springing up"**)*

Unresolved Bitterness opens the door for Satan; It will grow into external manifestations of coldness, gossip, slander, a complaining spirit (Phil.2:14), judging motives (I Cor.4:5), vengeful spirit (Rom.12:17,19), critical attitude (Mt.7:4-5).

3. The CURSE of Bitterness (v. 15c)

a. Bitterness causes trouble personally
*(**"trouble you"**)*
1) Bitterness is as poison (Acts 8:23)
2) Bitterness affects your behavior
a) One's speech (Rom. 3:14)
b) One's actions (Example: Joseph's brothers - Gen. 37) (James 3:14-16)

b. Bitterness spreads to others
*(**"many be defiled"**)*

No bitter person is content to be bitter alone; They love to share "how they feel" to others, so they can join them in their poisonous attitude. "Misery likes company"

"defiled" - stained or polluted. Bitterness is a sin which spreads its infectious bacteria, its loathsome venom to others and influences their perspective of God and others.

Your attitude will influence the perspective of others; Attitudes are catchy. What kind of influence have you been?

4. The CURE for Bitterness

Diligently be on the look-out for bitterness in your life (v. 15a)

a. Seek restoration with an offending brother (Mt. 18:15-17)
b. Don't allow bitterness to take root in your life (Eph. 4:31)
c. Practice Biblical forgiveness (Eph. 4:32)

Six "Don'ts" regarding forgiveness:

1) Don't expect the problem to "heal itself"
2) Don't have the attitude of "Why try?" ("It's not worth it")
3) Don't play the "waiting game" (i.e. "When you give in and apologize, I will")
4) Don't "fight fire with fire" (I Pet. 3:9; I Th. 5:15; Rom. 12:17-21)
5) Don't practice "character assassination" (don't attack the person rather than the problem)
6) Don't dig up "old bones" (don't bring up the past)

How can you get over the anger?

1) Compare the sin you have been asked to forgive, with the sin that has been forgiven YOU.
2) Compare the cost of God's forgiveness with the cost of your own forgiveness.
3) Compare the consequences of your unforgiveness with the blessings of forgiveness.

Are you...

C. Lusting with Fornication? (v.16a)

"Fornicator" - Sexually immoral; illicit sex outside of God's boundaries.

Includes: --sexual lust
--pornography
--pre-marital sex Etc.

Sex is an expression of oneness between two people who are one with each other in marriage.

Pre-marital sex is a lie because it is an expression of a oneness that does not exist (SEE: Heb. 13:4).

Fornication should not be named even once among God's people
(Eph. 5:3 - *"But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints").*

Are you...

D. Living with Irreverence? (v.16b-17)

V. 16

Esau was evidently both a fornicator and a godless man (Gen. 25:27-34; 27:30-45).

He married pagan, unbelieving Hittite women against Isaac and Rebekah's wishes, and no doubt had pre-marital sex.

According to our world's standards, Esau wasn't so bad. He was a good hunter, a man who was congenial to his father, he may have made a fine neighbor -- but he was not interested in the things of God (Wiersbe, p. 142).

"Profane" - irreverent, or godless; to live a secular life.

To be worldly-minded; to be unconcerned about God's will and ways; to be uninterested in spiritual things.

(The amount of time spent in God's Word and prayer is a barometer of how spiritual you are.)

"For one morsel. . . sold his birthright" - For one measly meal (to satisfy his impatient appetite), Esau gave up his entitlement to a whole lifetime of privilege and blessing.

Esau "sacrificed the permanent on the altar of the immediate" (Bob Jones, Sr.)

V. 17

Sin can always be forgiven (as long as there is repentance). However, the after affects, scars, repercussions, results, etc. of that sin may <u>not</u> be removed.

Harvest still comes for wild oats sown.

Ex: Moses was forgiven for striking the rock, but was forbidden to enter the Promised Land, though he begged for a second chance.

EX: David was forgiven for his adultery, but the after-effect haunted him four-fold for the rest of his life.

Some people want God's blessings, but they really don't want God.

Conclusion: