**The One Another Obligations, Part Three**  May 24, 15

(How God Interacts in the lives of His People)

A follower of Jesus is a new creation.

But the follower of Jesus is also a person whose life is being restored.

How does God restore our lives. One of the ways he does so is by discipline.

Let’s consider what Hebrews 12 teaches us about God’s discipline.

**Hebrews 12**

**v.1** – *Therefore….*

This is a transition word. Based on what has already been said, this word informs us that conclusions and applications are about to be made.

**v.1** – *Therefore, since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses…*

The witnesses being referred to are the people of faith who lived before us – those whose stories are told in Hebrews 11. They were like us. They made both good and bad decisions. There were times when they were faithful and times when they let others and God down.

But the defining feature of their life; the thing that made the difference in who they were and how they spent their life… was their faith. And it wasn’t just that they had faith. It was that they had faith… in God.

**v.1** - *Therefore, since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses …let us throw off…*

To live a life of faith in God will require us to throw off some things.

In order to know what must be thrown off, one must make a careful evaluation of their life with the help of the Holy Spirit. But the sense of this verse is clear – there are things in our lives that have to go, if we are to pursue after Jesus with all of our heart, soul and mind.

What are we to throw off?

*…everything that hinders…*

It is interesting that the Spirit of God does not give us a list.

He simply says if anything becomes a hindrance, get rid of it.

Galatians 5 says we are to live by the Spirit… and to be led by the Spirit… and to keep in step with the Spirit. When we live Spirit-saturated lives, God by his Spirit speaks into our lives.

If something is a hindrance he’ll let us know. And when he does, it then becomes our responsibility to rid ourselves of this hindrance.

A second thing is mentioned.

*…and the sin that so easily entangles…*

We are told to deal with sin as we do with hindrances.

We are to throw it off.

It is good to think of and understand that sin is an entanglement.

It trips us up; it causes us to stumble.

Example of stumbling on my bike when the policeman told me to stop.

I lost my balance. I strained my leg muscles. I ended up on the ground.

If and when sin is given a foothold in our life, it entangles and diverts us from what is to be the primary focus of our life, which is what?

**v.1** - …*run[ning] with perseverance the race marked out for us.*

Here in this verse, we are told to think of our life as being like a long distance race.

This race has been “marked out for us.” It has a starting and a finishing line.

With Jesus as our example, we approach life as he did; we live like he lived; we invest our lives and make choices like he did. And in addition, we are reminded of the “great cloud of witnesses,” those who lived before us; who ran a similar race, and who crossed the finish line. Their example is meant to spur us on.

Perseverance.

Anyone who runs knows that at some point, they will be tempted to quit.

There will be a stitch in the side; a cramp in the leg; a loss of energy; or the inability to catch their breath. When these things happen, a trained runner this is the moment to persevere…

to keep going; to keep putting one foot in front of the other, until the cramp or the stitch subsides; until they get their wind back.

**v.2** – *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus…*

What does it mean to “fix” one’s eyes on Jesus?

The word “fix” means…to focus intently upon.

Our focus…on Jesus… is critical.

Without it we will not throw off the things that hinder and the sin that entangles.

If are eyes are not focused on him, we will not persevere.

**v.2** - *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus …the author and perfecter of our faith…*

The word “author” has the sense of pioneer.

Everything we face, Jesus also faced.

The word “perfecter” has the sense that Jesus was successful in living the life of faith he calls us to live. With Jesus it is not a “do as I tell you,” but “do as I did.”

**v.2** - ….*who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Jesus knew the day would come when he would hang on a cross. But he lived as he did, and he endured what he endured, because he focused on what would happen after the cross.

Isaiah wrote that Jesus was a man of sorrows (53:3). And that was true. But Jesus was also a man of joy. And joy is what enabled him to pass through the sorrows that came upon him.

**v.3** – *Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

If you follow Jesus there will be times when you will grow weary and be tempted to quit.

To be a Christian is like walking upstream.

Picture of rapids.

Example of tipping the kayak over in the Sooke River rapids.

You and I face constant pressure to live like everyone else in our culture; to go with the flow.

What is it that will keep us going upstream?

Considering Jesus…

Jesus on a daily basis faced opposition, but he didn’t cave in.

And his example is meant to inspire us, that it can be done.

In verse 4 the Spirit brings us back to the point regarding how sin entangles –

**v.4** - *In your struggle against sin…*

Before we met Jesus we learned to function without God in our lives.

We developed coping skills. We did what was best for us. But life without God always results… in death – emotionally, spiritually, relationally, and physically.

When we came to Jesus, he dealt a death blow to our old way of living.

This death blow was a once for all decisive action on the part of God.

But there is also a day to day response we make, where as Titus 2:12 says, *[the grace of God] teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,* ***WHILE*** *we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ…*

This response will be a struggle.

But here again, we have the example of Jesus and the promise of his help.

The pressure on Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane is beyond our capacity to understand.

The struggle that went on inside of Jesus against sin was so intense that his sweat was like drops of blood. But he won. He came through to the place where he was able to say, *“Not my will, but your will be done.”*

Earlier in Hebrews, God’s Spirit promises (2:18): *Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

**v.5** – *And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons and daughters…*

The writer reminds his audience of who they are and the encouragement that is theirs.

To follow Jesus is to do so with a new identity – we are sons and daughters of God.

This is why we are told to throw off hindrances and sin.

This is why we fix our eyes on Jesus.

This is why in our struggle with sin we resist the temptation to give up and to give in.

We belong to God – we are his sons and daughters.

Who we are… affects how we live.

And who we are… changes how God interacts with us.

He does so…as our Father.

The next several verses explain what God our Father does to finish in us what he began.

Our Father knows that in running the race marked out for us, we will need his help.

What kind of help?

The help of discipline.

Here we need the Scripture, not our personal experiences, to inform us what discipline is.

**v.5b-6** – sometime God’s discipline is a “rebuke.”

A rebuke is a word spoken by God in love that says …you’ve gone off track.

When God rebukes, it is so that we might see things and ourselves as he sees, so that we would repent – turn away from, agree with, and welcome the Spirit’s control and leadership in that particular area of our life, and all with the goal of getting us back in the race.

Some of you have children who only need a word spoken to them to correct them.

But you also have children who need more than a word.

So it is in God’s family.

**v.7** – sometimes God’s discipline is “hardship.”

Is there anyone here who likes hardship?

It is easy to misunderstand God when he lets hardship come into our lives.

Consider what God said through the prophet Amos – 4:6-13.

When God uses hardship in our lives, he is not being vindictive.

He is acting in love… because you are his child.

And the extent of the hardship, will depend on how long it takes you to respond.

If he has to, God will increase the pressure on you.

But remember why he does so.

Through Amos he said: *so that you might return to me.*

If you follow Jesus, he loves you too much to do nothing if you go off track spiritually.

The point of the hardship is to get your attention.

It is to jolt you out of the lethargy or the deception or whatever reason explains why you are not running the race marked out for you.

That said, the goal of the Father’s discipline is so much more than to bring pain to your life.

Your Father is committed to completing in you what his Spirit began.

When you and I received Jesus we gave him the right to lead our lives.

So we are not to be surprised or angered when he does that very thing.

Some of you need to change your mind when it comes to how you view God.

He is a loving Father.

He works for good in your life.

Every good and perfect gift comes from him.

The demonic works hard to whisper lies into your mind that suggest that God is anything but good and loving. They do so in order that you might keep your distance with God; or that you might doubt his intentions for you.

Yes, God’s discipline is not pleasant.

But the consequences of unchecked sin in your life would be catastrophic.

So he courageously acts to root out the cancer of sin within you.

You can trust God.

Will you acknowledge that to him this morning?

Many of you have already bowed the knee to Jesus.

Will you yield to him again in the particular area of your life where he is disciplining you?

Do you realize the incredible things God is working out in you when he disciplines you?

**v.9b** – he wants you to experience the fullness of life Jesus promised.

Sin produces death.

The Holy Spirit who lives in you desires to produce life.

Will you welcome the Father to produce life in you?

Then tell him so.

**v.10** – he wants you to share in his holiness

We’ve talked about these two words before – justification and sanctification.

God disciplines so that in practice you will become what he has declared you to be.

We are not perfect. But we are being made holy.

This is what the Father is actively working to realize in every one of us.

**v.11** – he is training you so that righteousness and peace might grow in you.

It is because we are new people in Jesus that the Father acts to produce in us different responses and results than when we live life apart from him.

C.S. Lewis wrote: *Jesus said a thistle cannot produce figs. If I am a field that contains nothing but grass-seed, I cannot produce wheat. Cutting the grass may keep it short: but I shall still produce grass and no wheat. If I want to produce wheat, the change must go deeper than the surface. I must be ploughed up and re-sown.* Devotional Classics, p.8

Discipline ploughs us up.

Discipline sows new seed in us.

Will you welcome the Father to plough up your life and sow new seed in you?

Then tell him so.

How are we to respond to God’s discipline?

**v.9b** – by submitting to God.

Our old nature was energized by pride.

Learning to say “your will,” “your way,” “always,” is a response we will make again and again.

We submit to God when we trust him that he is at work for good in our life.

We submit to God when we thank him that he loved us enough to rebuke us and tell us the truth about ourselves.

We submit to God when we praise him that we belong to him – he is our dad.

We submit to God when we say yes to living as he wants us to live.

Will you do that this morning?

**The Blessing**

1 Timothy 6:19: *…take hold of the life that is truly life.*

How do we do that?

How do we take hold of this blessing?

By taking hold of God.

In him there is life.

There is nothing more important in this life than that you know God

So take hold of him.

When you do you will experience the life that is truly life.

And the life that is truly life will involve God bringing, if and when it is needed, the blessing of his discipline. He will not let you go.