

Hebrews



**Promises
Faithfully
Kept**

Hebrews 12.14-29 (CSB)

Where the Cleat Hits the Turf: The Disciplined Christian Life

Last week Stanley walked us through the Scripture that commands us to run after Christ. As Stanley pointed out that kind of running is a long distance running. The Christian life is a marathon that we must run all the way to the finish with Christ Jesus as our pace setter, our forerunner, and the One who has finished the race and will help us finish our race.

This week's passage continues with some of the running imagery, sports imagery that speaks metaphorically to how we should live as Christians. Its focus is on where the rubber of your shoe meets the surface of the road we are to run in the marathon of the Christian life.

I know this may come as a surprise to you, but I've never been much of a runner. Even in my best shape, I only would run 400 meters at a time. The sport I trained for in high school was football, a game of sprints.

So, I'd like to use illustrations today from a sport I know better than running, the American game of football.



I remember playing my first high school game this week 24 years ago. My first and last complete games were played on the same opponent's field in what was called a jamboree. The three high schools from our parish, the same thing as a county anywhere else, were playing as a preview to the regular season. Each team would play a different team each half.

I was big enough and strong enough as a freshman to fill in for a senior that had a season ending injury shortly before the season started. So I was in the first play of the first half game of the jamboree.

Those who had never played a snap of a regular high school game learned that night that the actual game is not like practice. In practice your teammates tend not to go full speed against you and not use all their strength against you. In the actual game, things get fast and heavy. We must practice how we expect to live when times get fast and heavy. You'll put into play what you have been practicing when you face difficulty. What will you do when it is time for the rubber to meet the road or the cleat to meet the turf? Will you follow Jesus in your life when pressure is put on you in this world? You will if you have made it your practice of running after Jesus as instructed by God according to His Word.

**14 Pursue peace with everyone,
and holiness—without it no one
will see the Lord.**

15 Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springs up, causing trouble and defiling many.

16 And make sure that there isn't any immoral or irreverent person like Esau, who sold his birthright in exchange for a single meal.

**17 For you know that later,
when he wanted to inherit the
blessing, he was rejected,**

**even though he sought it with
tears, because he didn't find any
opportunity for repentance.**

**18 For you have not come to
what could be touched, to a
blazing fire, to darkness, gloom,
and storm,**

**19 to the blast of a trumpet, and
the sound of words. Those who
heard it begged that not another
word be spoken to them,**

**20 for they could not bear what
was commanded: If even an
animal touches the mountain, it
must be stoned.**

21 The appearance was so terrifying that Moses said, I am trembling with fear.

**22 Instead, you have come to
Mount Zion, to the city of the
living God (the heavenly
Jerusalem), to myriads of
angels, a festive gathering,**

**23 to the assembly of the
firstborn whose names have
been written in heaven, to a
Judge, who is God of all, to the
spirits of righteous people made
perfect,**

**24 and to Jesus, the mediator of
a new covenant, and to the
sprinkled blood, which says
better things than the blood of
Abel.**

**25 See to it that you do not
reject the one who speaks. For
if they did not escape when they
rejected him who warned them
on earth,**

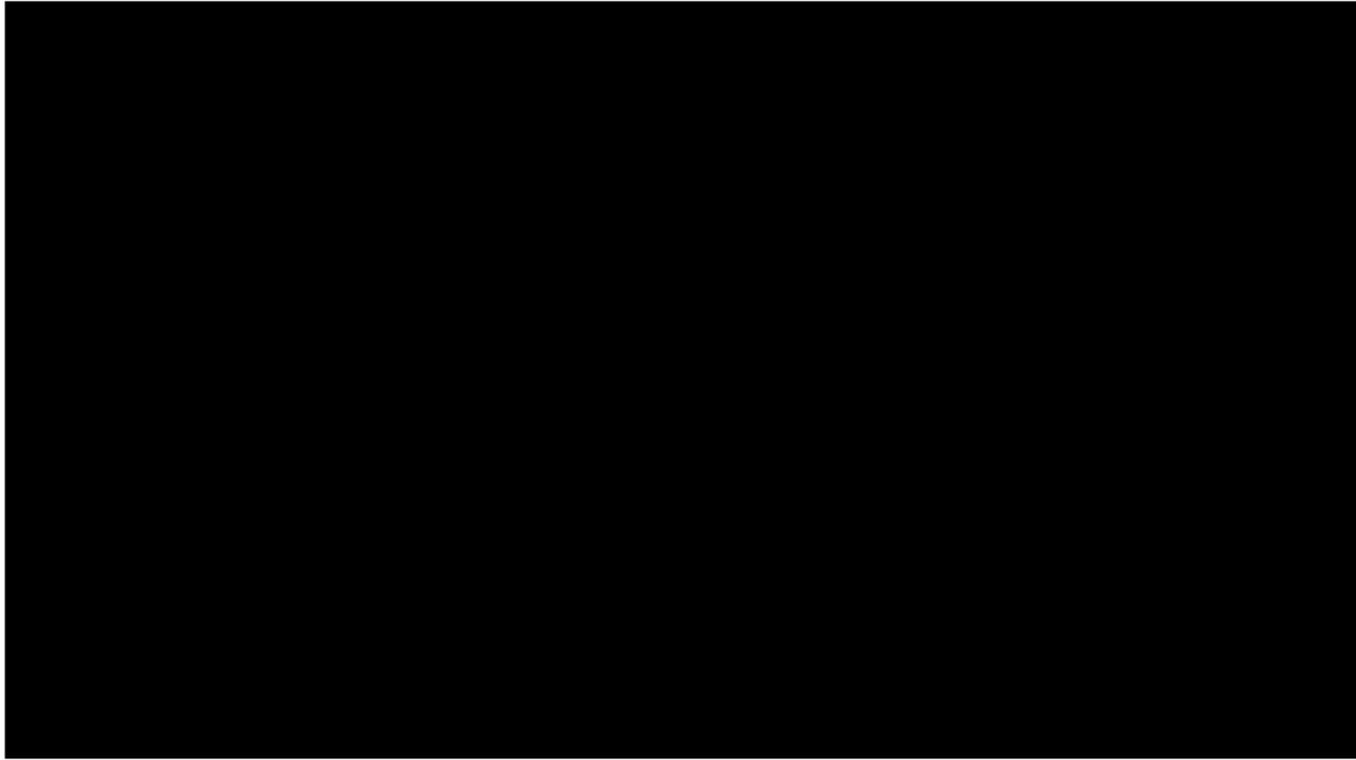
**even less will we if we turn
away from him who warns us
from heaven.**

26 His voice shook the earth at that time, but now he has promised, Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.

27 This expression, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what is not shaken might remain.

**28 Therefore, since we are
receiving a kingdom that cannot
be shaken, let us be thankful. By
it, we may serve God
acceptably, with reverence and
awe,**

**29 for our God is a consuming
fire.**



Pray

**Be part of the disciplined team
that keeps the path to Jesus
clean and clear. (Vv. 14-**

Be part of the disciplined team that keeps the path to Jesus clean and clear.

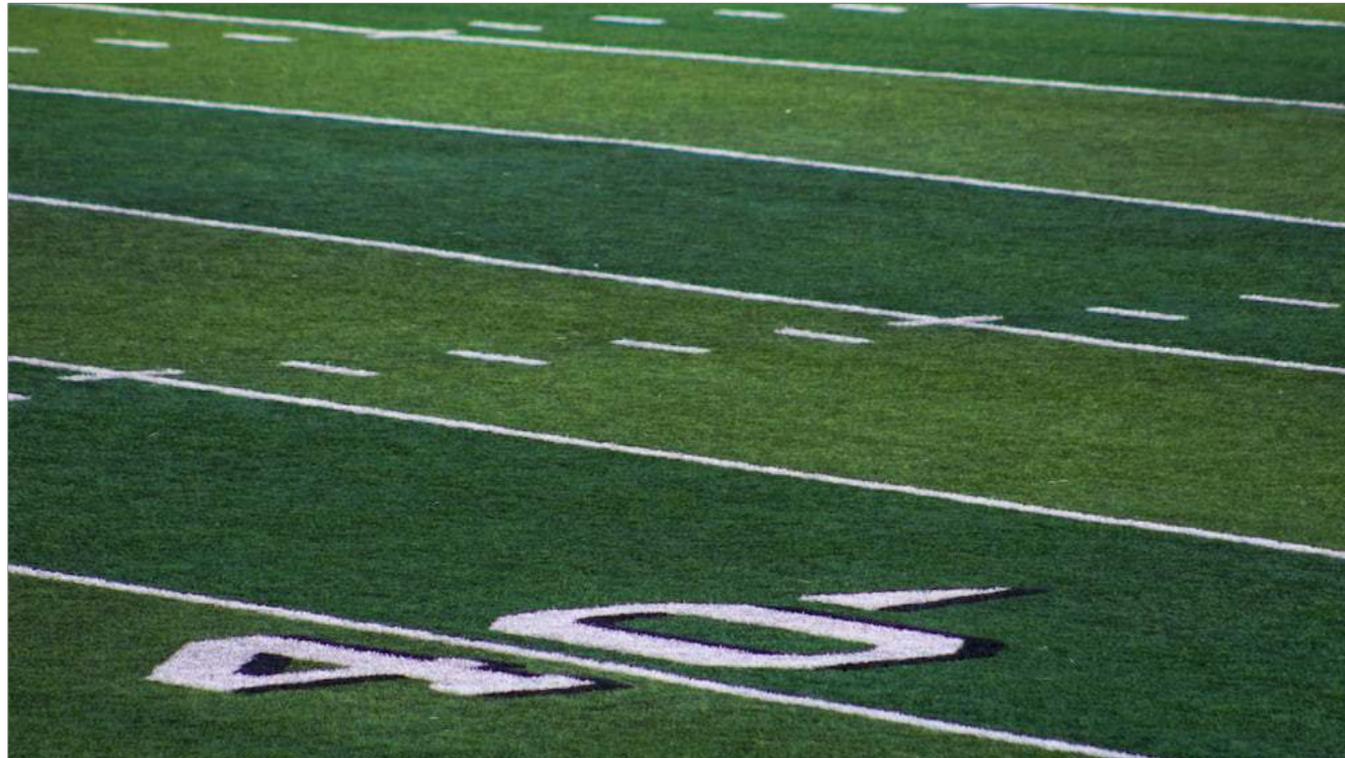
The author here echoes something Jesus said in the Beatitudes.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (Matt 5:8). If you have never been set apart by God in holy salvation, you are not one of His people. If you are one of His people, your life will evidence holiness.

If you are one of His holy people, you will seek to live at peace with the rest of God's people, the church.

As we saw last week, this comes from God disciplining us with both character formation and correction.

Illustration: When you watch a football game on tv this season, you will be able to see two disciplined teams running specific plays in coordination against the other teams. But there is another disciplined team that has made that game possible: the groundskeeping team.



I've always been impressed by the groundskeeping teams that work on professional sports fields. First of all, the creativity and precision is amazing. I'm not even talking about the painting of the lines and designs. I'm just talking about the grass lines.



I know this is a baseball field on the screen, but I want to point out how cool the different shades of grass are based on the direction of the mower cutting the grass. Do you know how difficult it is to stay focused over and over again so that all your lines are completely straight? That is art.

Be part of the disciplined team that keeps the path to Jesus clean and clear. (Vv. 14-17)

When I was playing my last jamboree in high school, I would have settled for a middle school version of that art. The team on whose field we were playing decided that they did not want to cut the grass on their field prior to the regular season. The grass was as tall as our ankles on the field. I had just moved from playing tackle for three seasons to play tight end because that was the biggest need on offense. I had convinced my coach that I had good hands and lost 35 pounds to change positions. So the coach was going to reward me with a pass called for me in that jamboree. As I began running the route, everything was going as planned. The linebacker and corner backs did not see the play that was coming. As I prepare to cut to the right, my cleats slip in the tall wet grass. By the time I get back up, the qb had to throw the ball to his secondary target. It was my fault that I slipped, but it was easy to slip because the yellow jackets declined to do the disciplined work of mowing the field ahead of the jamboree.

Explanation: The author of Hebrews uses route and running terminology in our passage the yellow jackets could have learned from. In a race, runners do not want to get tripped up. Especially as they begin to get tired and weary, inconsistencies in the road can cause a runner to fall and potentially have a serious injury, serious enough to cause the runner not to finish the race. We are commanded to uproot any bitterness that would possibly start growing within the church. The analogy moves the church from being runners to also being the field that is run upon.

We are not only runners who are to focus on running after Jesus. We're not only the field upon which the runners run. We are also the groundskeepers for each other in the church, making the lanes easy for one another to keep running well.

A bitter root is something that can trip people up, but it is also something that can spread. People are naturally disciple-makers, but we will only reproduce what we already are. Jesus compared people in this world to wheat and tares, a poisonous plant that looks like wheat at first. In that parable about the world, the angels will

separate out the wheat from the tares on the last day. John Calvin, because he had a commitment to seeing the city and church as one thing, said that the visible church is being envisioned as having a mixture of the saved and the lost, accepting it as normal. But Jesus referred to that field in that parable as the world. As Jesus and the apostles point out multiple times, the field that is the church cannot afford to have plants that look like poisonous roots spring up without addressing them. If they do turn out to be bitter roots and not healthy grass or wheat, then they are to be pulled up so as not to make false disciples in the church.

We can only have true peace with one another if we are made holy by God and if we are pursuing that holiness in our actions. We can only say we are acting as the holy people of God if we are living in peace with one another.

The author used the terminology of peace and holiness in last week's passage. 10 [Earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time based on what seemed good to them, but [God] does it for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness. 11 No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

The author is addressing the need for formation and correction in our lives as the church. There are generally two parts to discipline. There is formative discipline and corrective discipline. Like parents, coaches must include both formation and correction. Very few champions start as self-taught athletes. Even if they start as self-taught, they reach another level of excellence when they team up with a good coach or helpful teammates. Formation teaches you how you should live or act. Correction corrects improper or dangerous behavior. Our coaches used formative discipline through teaching, examples, videos, and imitation to help us know how we are to form tackle without endangering our spines while taking the opposing player to the ground. That practice was formative. In one game a teammate received corrective discipline for how he tackled. Instead of performing a form tackle, he picked an opposing player up backwards and slammed him directly on his head. The referees tossed flags, but our coach took a further step of removing my teammate from the game.

Players have had their spinal chords broken from improper tackles, some have died. Runners have died from improper discipline or fueling in a marathon. The game of life has a greater consequence of eternal life or eternal death.

In the Christian life, we must accept that discipline, both formative and corrective, is part of the training to run with Jesus for life. In a small book on loving redemptive discipline within the church, Jonathan Leeman points out that part of the gospel is declaring Jesus as Lord. We do not preach the whole gospel if we only communicate that you can be declared forgiven. We are forgiven in Christ AND commanded to follow him. Jesus told His disciples that if anyone is to come after him, the disciple must take up his cross daily and follow Christ.

The Christian life is a continual and increasingly greater act of dying to yourself and finding your life in Christ. This means that we learn from Scripture and learn from those in the church who have followed Christ more closely or for longer. It means that we must always have our ears open for learning, even if we have followed Christ for decades.

God's assistant agents for caring and coaching are the people of church. One of the verbal ideas in v. 15 is that we are to watch out for or watch over one another. It is a verb associated with pastoral shepherding in other places but is expected of all the church here.

We are all prone to improper form the more exhausted we get, and we need the rest of the church to speak into our lives to help us keep going. The moment that we stop listening to others in the church about how we are following Christ or not, is the moment that we have become proud. Our practice of peace and holiness will only be as healthy as your willingness to accept the awkwardness of speaking directly to another about sin and righteousness, dealing with the truth in love.

Accept the awkward first step of believers speaking into each other's lives as part of God's loving coaching program for our team.

In extreme examples of need for correction, sometimes players have to be removed from the team after prayer and confrontation. This text points out that roots of bitterness that grow up will not just trip up others but have the potential to lead others into sin and unbelief. God does preserve those who are truly His as individual Christians, but He also reveals over time which local churches persevere. Those who continue proclaiming the gospel as a holy people persevere. Churches practice discipline for the honor of Christ, the purity of the gospel message, the credibility of their testimony, the best for the person erring in unrepentant sin, and the protection of the rest of the church.

As Paul Tripp says with parenting, so it is with sin in the life of the Christian and the church. When God exposes your secret sins, it is a sign of love from God to have the church confront your sin and speak to you about repentance and grace. To reject such love reveals a heart still set on either legalistic self-assurance or worse.

We had two different amazing running backs removed from my high school team, athletes good enough to be all-state players. They were removed because of their disrespect and dangerous behavior, which had the potential to influence other players to act similarly. As difficult as those losses were, the team would have been affected badly by their disdain.

It has been so much harder through the years to see people I once thought of as brothers in Christ refuse to repent and walk forward with the church in faith. It would have been even harder than that to watch them persist with the church and lead others to deny their Lord in either word or practice.

Don't be like Esau who downplayed his disobedience. He chose the world over running toward Christ. He now serves as an example to all of one who appeared to be in line with Christ but gave up the race for the sake of something fleeting.

We are in a greater time of revelation than Esau. We are compelled by so much more than fear of judgment.

Don't take for granted what it means to be on Jesus's New Covenant team. (Vv. 18-24)

Don't take for granted what it means to be on Jesus's New Covenant team.

I recently watched American Underdog about Kurt Warner. He wasn't ready to be on his first NFL team. He was cut after the first day of practice bc he told a coach he felt unprepared.

When he was given another chance years later with the Rams, he did not take that opportunity for granted. We should not take for granted the time in which we find ourselves. We are in the new covenant established by Jesus's blood.

The author compares two mountains as an analogy for the old and new covenants. Mt. Sinai is where God delivered the old covenant to Moses. When He did, He preempted this covenant with frightening displays of his judgment and holiness.

This mountain that Israel was to come near and that Moses was to ascend was set ablaze with fire and dark smoke and with lightning strikes. Through the thunder, the Lord spoke, saying for Moses to ascend the mountain but that none of the people were to touch the edge of the mountain. If even an animal were to touch the base of it, God would strike that animal dead immediately.

Understand this, the God of the OT is the same God of the NT. The same holy God then is the same holy God now. The Triune God revealed as Father, Son, and Spirit, is the same Triune God who created all things and led Israel out of Egypt. God has never changed and never will. God has not changed, but His plan for salvation has progressed and been fully revealed by the incarnation and atonement by the Son.

Under the Old Covenant, no one was able to approach God personally and freely. It was always through an imperfect mediator with a another sacrifice. In the New Covenant, we have come to Mt. Zion, not Sinai.

You know, I wondered for years, what is the significance of the reference to Zion. I mean, is it Jerusalem or Zion? Why is it in certain circumstances referred to as Zion and others as Jerusalem.

The term Zion is specifically related to Jerusalem in the concept of the place God dwells and in which His anointed servant reigns, anticipating the perfect eschatological reign of God.

In 2 Samuel 5:7 recounts David conquering the city of Jerusalem and taking it from the Jebusites. Once he took it and established his throne there, it became known as Zion. Throughout the Psalms and the Prophets Zion is referenced as the place of God's dwelling and the place from which He reigns over His people and to whom all nations should look in hope.

The author uses this strong reference from the history of Israel to communicate to Hebrew Christians that the end time hope of God has already come in Christ, even if it has not come in fullness.

We are told we have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem, or the greater Zion, in Christ, even if not the fullness of it.

You have come to Mt. Zion in Christ and the gospel, to the people of God in Christ, the church and all the celebration that comes with it.

22 Instead, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God (the heavenly Jerusalem), to myriads of angels, a festive gathering, 23 to the assembly of the firstborn whose names have been written in heaven, to a Judge, who is God of all, to the spirits of righteous people made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which says better things than the blood of Abel.

While we are to approach God reverently, the people of the church have no reason to be afraid of our Father. To use a Narnian reference, we have come to a festival of jollification without end. We have come to the party of the angels. The very judge over all things wrote our names in His book of life by means of the Son's very own blood. And not just us but all who have come before us and made perfectly clean.

In this world, don't give into fear. When pressure comes from the world, don't buckle.

As the author says, strengthen those weak knees.

I mentioned earlier that I played on the offensive line. I preferred playing lineman over any other position. I preferred that position because I knew I was going to hit another player every time and that I was going to be hit. I liked knowing it was expected. In the Christian life, we live both in constant celebration for the victory we have in Christ and in constant practice of sanctification as we walk through this world. You, as a victor in Christ, are both hitting against the darkness and being bombarded by temptation to turn from Christ.

Strengthen those weak knees. Don't buckle from fear.

You may have moments or opponents that intimidate you but depend on God and trust in the victory that has been accomplished for you in Christ already. You already have free access to God. But one day we will celebrate the victory in a greater way. When that day comes, it will be revealed for all whose team you were really on.

In the game of this life, will you be found to have lined up for God or against Him? (Vv. 25-29)

In the game of this life, will you be found to have lined with God or against Him?

My first three years of high school football we had a crazy cajun head coach. One of his favorite phrases was “crazy boy.” Are you a crazy boy? That’s what he said when he was joking with you.

What he could not stand is if you rejected his coaching and refused to give your best at the play he designed for you. So if an offensive lineman was either not doing his best or not doing the play right, and especially if it was both, he would throw down his clipboard, the vein in his neck would start bulging, and he would line up across from that player and tell the QB to run the play and tell the player to go at full speed. Without a helmet or pads, coach would barrel into that disrespectful player and push him on his backside to show how vulnerable he was making himself by not listening to his voice as the coach.

I can tell you his name and show you how to look him up on FB to ask him if that is true.

You didn’t want for coach Guillory to be lined up against you. You wanted to be lined up with him as your coach, as the voice you listened to as you went into battle.

Through this life, God uses tests to shake things us in our lives to show us whether we are standing on the solid ground of Christ or not. So we get small tremors of tribulation throughout and sometimes get bigger tremors. But one day God will shake up the whole creation. He will reveal those who have truly belonged to Him and those who merely acted like they were on the team.

You can only be on Christ’s team by faith. It is not by what you do, but what you do reveals if you have come to God by grace alone through faith alone. Know that God is going to shake everything up, the entire creation as we know it now. The shaking will reveal those who are not actually stabilized in Christ.

Check your legs. Are they stable in Christ? Are they continuing to run after Christ? If they are feeling wobbly, share with a brother or sister in Christ in the church, in your community group. If your faith is feeling shaky, know that you are with people who have experienced that. If your actions get the attention of others so that they speak to you out of concern, know that has been the case for every single one of your elders at some point in time.

Having our weakness revealed is something we are all susceptible to so that we grow stronger. The times a weightlifter's legs wobble the most is when we he is getting stronger with heavier weights and a greater number of lifts.

Keep clinging to grace. It is grace that makes your faith possible. It is grace that strengthens you to run after Christ. It is grace that compels you to obey the voice of God in your daily practice.

When all is said and done, those who have depended on God's grace will have found that God has been the voice in their helmet instructing them each step of the way as they have followed in faith.

God is a consuming fire. He will either refine you by the fire, or he will reveal that you never knew Him.

May we all be found to be those who listened to the voice of God and obeyed, for there is not enough pity in the world for the person who finds one day that he has lined up against the consuming fire of God's wrath.

