

# Running the Race with Children

Hebrews 12:1-2 (Part 2)

Halifax: 25 February 2024

## Introduction:

Last week, I preached about running the race that God has given us to run that we might enter God's house at the end.

- Today, I want to preach about bringing our children with us that both we and they might get to God.

I am doing this because today we are baptising two covenant children (Ethan Barnes and Henry Talos) as well as welcoming a young man (Jack Bigney) to communicant membership.

- At this time, Ethan and Henry must be brought along by their parents—but Jack is now of sufficient age and maturity to bear the responsibility for running on his own.
  - He has taken solemn vows, which you will hear later today, to affirm that he is looking until Jesus and will run to the end.
  - His parents have brought him with them since he was baptised, and they are very glad to see him running on to God, looking unto Jesus.
- The sermon today is focused on bringing our children with us until they come of years and ability to run on their own.
  - Understand, of course, that I am not speaking about physical running, but spiritual running to God the Father, looking unto Jesus.

I will begin with a reading of our text... Hebrews 12:1-2. The same as last week.

- This is the holy and infallible word of God.

**Heb 12:1-2: Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

Thanks be to God for His word.

My main focus this morning will be to show you how to bring your little children with you on the highway to God's house of glory...

- But before I do, I should first make it clear that:

## I. The Lord wants us to bring our children with us.

A. We read Genesis 18 today as our Old Testament Scripture reading.

1. I stopped at verse 19, because there, God tells us clearly what He expects of those that He has called to come to Him for eternal life on the highway that He has provided.
  - He explains that He has revealed things to Abraham because He has chosen Abraham not only to come to Him, but to bring his household with him.
  - Gen 18:19: **For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do**

**righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.**

2. Note the words here.
  - He is not merely to *invite* them to come, he is to *command* them to keep the way of the LORD.
  - And what was that way that God has promised?
    - It was the way to His kingdom of righteousness, the way to Himself as the true and living God from whom we were cut off because of our sin.
3. In Genesis 17, God had promised to Abraham that He would be God to him and his children, and to confirm that promise, He commanded Abraham to be circumcised along with all his males.
  - The circumcision showing that all the children born to him were set apart as His people.
  - He told Abraham that any families that wanted to be His people must also be circumcised with all the males from eight days old, but that anyone who was not circumcised would be cut off—no longer having God as his God.

TRANS> Because of the way people think today—seeing everyone as completely separate—there are a lot of Christians who do not recognise that God accepts the children of those who have God as their God as His people.

- B. But Jesus made it perfectly clear that such children are still a part of His kingdom.
  - When parents were bringing them to Him that He might lay His hands on them to bless them, his disciples rebuked them (Luke 18:16:) **But Jesus called them to *Him* and said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.”**
    - The kingdom of God is His church, the people that are travelling on the road to the house of our heavenly Father—though some do not have faith and will not make it.
    - Jesus declares that these little children, including infants whose parents brought them to Him, belong to His kingdom.
- C. We haven't time to look in detail, but this is affirmed by the following facts.
  1. Every baptism where there was a household involved in the NT is a household baptism. Even servants were baptised with their masters unless they refused it—in which case they would have been dismissed—as was done by the faithful in the Old Testament.
  2. In Acts 2, when Peter baptises the three thousand on the day that Jesus poured out His Spirit, Peter declares to those who receive the gospel that “the promise is to you and to your children and to those who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”
    - The formula of a promise “to you and to your children” was well known to these Jews, for God had always received them and their little children who could not yet speak for themselves.

3. The Apostle Paul expressly declares in 1 Cor 7:14 that if one of the parents of a little child is a believer, that child is no longer unclean but holy.
  - Rather than the entire household being unclean, the whole house is regarded as sanctified, or holy—making the unbelieving spouse all the more guilty.
4. Finally, I would mention that in Ephesians when Paul writes to the church, he shows that the LORD still expects fathers to do what God told Abraham to do—to bring up their children in His way.
  - Eph 6:4 says: **And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.**
  - What else does this mean but to bring them up in Jesus—to train them or nurture them in the gospel and to admonish them to follow Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. As those who are in the way, who are holy, they are to be disciplined in the way of the LORD... just as God told Abraham to do.

And now we turn to our main focus:

## II. How are parents to bring their children with them in the way of the Lord?

- The answer is pretty much the same as last week.
    - We are to bring our children in the way of the Lord looking unto Jesus.
    - We will look at each of the three ways we looked at last week, only this week, it will be to see how it pertains to bringing our children.
- A. The first thing is that we must lead them look to Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith.
1. Do you remember what that means?
    - It is like this.
      - The whole church was cut off from God by our sin, just like everybody else.
      - We were guilty of sin and condemned, and fit only for everlasting rejection and punishment.
      - God had promised to redeem us so that we could come back to Him, but there was no way for us to get to Him. Our sin separated and condemned us.
    - But as the author of our faith, Jesus came from heaven to be one of us that He might bring us to God.
      - The word *author* speaks of Him as the founder of our faith, or the pioneer—the one who launched out ahead of us that He might break through the barrier that sin had erected and bring us all to God.
      - And as the finisher of our faith, He did it! He got through when nobody else could. He opened the way! He made the way for the whole church.
    - He got through by coming here from heaven, being born of a woman, living without sin, and then dying for all of us to atone for our sins!
  2. When God calls us to be saved, He calls us to look to Jesus as the way to.
    - He appointed baptism for us as the sign that we are those who are cleansed by faith in Jesus Christ who died on the cross to atone for our sins.

- And as those who are trusting in Him, He tells us that He is not only our God, but also the God of our children—that they are His people.
  - He has appointed that they also receive the sign of cleansing by Christ.
  - By that sign, they are identified as His people from infancy.
- 3. That means that we are to treat them as God’s people who are going with us to God’s glorious house where we will live with Him forever, delivered from all sin and evil.
  - We therefore teach them to look to Him as the author and finisher of our faith—to trust in Him as the one who saves us from our sin so we can come to God.
  - We lead them to worship Him and thank Him for what He had done for us, and to rejoice in His forgiveness and cleansing.
  - We teach them that their identity is with us and the whole church which has been cleansed by Jesus who hold fast to Him until the end.
- 4. Parents are wrong to leave their children to figure out their own identity.
  - They are left to flounder about and do not know where they belong.
    - This is the way the world has drifted and it is a miserable way to treat a child—even though we act like it is the only right thing to do.
  - Christian parent, God has identified them as His people, and it is for you to bring them up in that identity.
    - As those who have been redeemed by Him.
    - As those who have been forgiven by Him.
    - As those who have obligations to live for Him and trust in Him and to go on in His way until the end of their life when they will be brought into His wonderful house forever.
  - If they don’t have this identity, they grow up in unbelief.
    - And even though they are baptised and have the privileges of association with the visible church, if they are not looking to Jesus, they are not on the right path and they will not get to God.

TRANS> So the first thing we do for our children is lead them to look with us to Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith—the one who opened the way for us to come to our Father.

**III. The second thing we must do is lead our children to rejoice in our hope like Jesus did—looking unto Him as our example.**

- This is second thing we learned from Hebrew 12:1-2—that we look to Jesus “**who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.**”
- A. In other words, Jesus was so thrilled with going to the Father’s house and bringing His people there that He was willing to endure the cross.
  - We cannot begin to fathom what it was for Him to bear our sin sins before His Father—He who absolutely abhors sin bore the guilt of our sin!

- But He did it because the Father and the Father's house was so marvellous in His eyes—envisioning His warm, generous Father welcoming the people He redeemed into His everlasting house where everyone loves and serves so beautifully and perfectly, and where they see His glory from whom they had been cut off by sin...
  - The very prospect of it so filled Him with delight that He endured the cross.
- B. We are to follow His example—and set our hope on the glory of our Father's house so that we will endure whatever God calls us to endure here.
  - The way is hard here.
    - We are sinners and rebels, and we have to be broken.
    - We did not see the importance of honouring our heavenly Father and of serving Him—and we learn to do that when we are opposed in our service.
      - Like Jesus, we have to look at the glory and value of a place in God's house so that we can endure to the end like Jesus did...
        - Without turning away to the world and what it has to offer.
- C. Parents, it is for you to point your children to the glory of our Father and His house.
  - You need to tell them that even if they were to gain the whole world and lose their own soul, it would profit them nothing.
    - You need to teach them that the world is an empty show—that sinful lusts are deceitful lusts, they offer what seems pleasing and sweet, but in the end is vile and bitter and empty.
  - It is so easy to go wrong here.
    - Your children can see what is truly valuable to you.
      - They can see if God is more important to you than riches—or success—or honour—or being liked by others—or being safe and secure—or booze—or recreation—or romance—
    - Your children can see if the joy of God's house sustains you through hardship—through sickness and trials—through suffering wrongful treatment—
      - You may think it won't affect them if your heart grows cold—even that they won't notice—but I tell you that it does affect them.
  - I know you come short. I do too.
    - But when you see that you have, say so. Tell your children that in your weakness you have lost sight of the glory that is promised to us.
      - Tell them that Jesus is our perfect model and that you are turning back to follow His example.
- D. Parents, one of the best things you can do is read God's word and talk about the glory of God's kingdom—about its beauty and the emptiness of the world.
  - Pray for God's kingdom and teach your children to do the same.
  - Give thanks for the hope of glory, and most of all the hope of being with Jesus and with our Father in heaven.
    - Look to Jesus as He is the ultimate author of the Psalms—and see how He speaks there of His hope of glory.

- Sing with your children of that glory with Jesus! Soon it will be ours.
- Do you remember the third way we look to Jesus?
  - It is not as explicitly stated in our text...

**IV. We are to lead our children in looking to Jesus for grace and strength to endure in the way (the way to God that is marked out before us).**

- A. Enduring in the way means that we maintain fellowship with God.
1. When you get out of fellowship with Him, you have gotten off track—you have run off the road that goes to God’s house and you need to get back on.
  2. You need to cast off, as it says in verse 1, every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares you—those selfish desires, those things (even good things) that have taken too big a place in your life—they must be cast off so that you can keep going to God.
    - It may be that you are weary of serving Him, that you are bitter toward Him, that you have lost your hope, that you have your eye on something unworthy.
    - You have been put out of sorts with God and cannot joyfully go on for Him.
  3. What should you have to do when this happens?
    - You have to get back in fellowship with God.
      - You have to confess your sin. You have to repent of your sin and ask Him to forgive you and to renew your heart.
      - You look to Jesus whose blood cleanses you from all sin.
        - He secures our pardon and at the same time enables us to turn away from whatever has stolen away our heart from God.
        - By His grace, you are able to get back on track.
- B. It is your duty as a parent to see that your children continue in fellowship with God.
1. It is very easy with little children to see when they are not in fellowship with Him.
    - They whine and complain, they become defiant and wilful. They refuse to obey.
  2. If you leave them in such a state, you are not doing right as a parent.
    - Some Christian parents will let their children remain out of fellowship with God for days and even weeks until it simply becomes a permanent condition.
      - Such children are not on the road to God’s glorious house!
      - They have not endured and unless they repent, they will perish without Christ because they have rejected Him.
- C. God has given you special tools as a parent to help your child continue in fellowship with God.
1. First, He has given you the means of grace to fortify them that they might stay in fellowship.
    - Bring them to word—they need to hear from God each day—to hear of what He has done and of how He wants us to live—but the word not only informs, it also has power to transform by the working of God’s grace and Spirit.
    - Bring them to the throne of grace to find help. When they are babes, pray for them, and when they get older, lead them in prayer and then coach them to pray on their own.

- And remember their baptism—remind them of how Christ has cleansed us by His blood and opened the way to God. Encourage them to rest in His saving work and to rejoice in it.
  - And then there is song—teach them to sing praises to our great God.
2. Second, He has given you warnings and admonition (to *admonish* to put them in mind of things—of danger and of their calling).
- These tools are useful when you see indications that they are under temptation—that they are starting to slide out of fellowship.
    - Call them aside and ask them if they are struggling, or if they are too little to talk, tell them that you can see that they are.
    - Then ask them if they want to be that way? Remind them of how miserable it is to fall out of fellowship with God and how sweet it is to remain in fellowship with Him.
    - Then pray with them for grace and rejoice with them if God hears.
  - Parents, I cannot stress this enough: if you are consistent to do this with your children, even before they can speak, you will hardly ever have to chasten them.
    - If you think about a driving down a road—it is so much easier to nudge them back to the centre of the road than it is to pull them out of the ditch.
    - It builds a sweet bond between you and them because you are helping them.
3. Third, God has given you the rod and reproof.
- These are to be used whenever your child has fallen out of fellowship—when they are whining, when they directly disobey, when they speak disrespectfully, when they are cruel to their siblings.
  - It is then that you need to call them away, rebuke them, and use the rod of reproof.
    - These are never to be used for vengeance, but for correction in love.
    - You need to be very firm, but poised and under control.
    - You need to show them what they have done contrary to God and call them to repent. Remind them they belong to God and how much better it is to live for Him than to go away. Call them back.
  - And once they repent, pray with them and assure them of God’s forgiveness in Christ—have them give thanks for that and then assure them of your love and God’s love.

TRANS> These tools are all given to us by our Lord, and the only way to use them is with prayer that He will make them effective to keep our children on the road.

**Conclusion:** The bottom line is, teach your children to live in fellowship with God looking unto Jesus as they make their way to His glorious house.

- Proverbs 22:6 says: **Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.**
  - Training speaks of giving him a taste of walking in the way he should go...
  - It is very sweet to be on the road to glory, and if you train him to live in that way of fellowship with our Savior, your child will not want to go anywhere else.