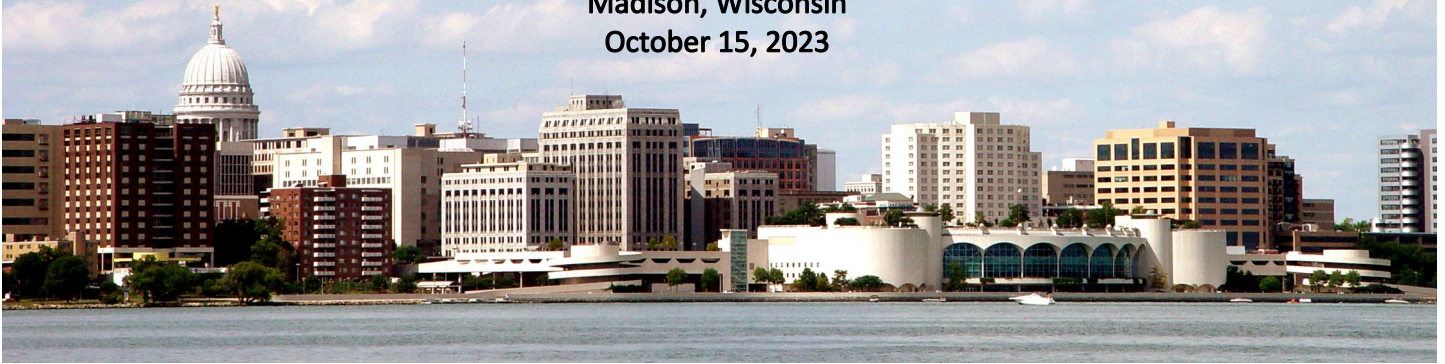


# Strength and Healing

Hebrews 12:12-13

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Four Lakes Church of Christ  
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Good morning, and welcome to the Four Lakes congregation! If you are visiting this morning, we are glad to have you with us. We'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card online if you can, or you can use one of the cards from the pew in front of you. Whatever works for you, we would love to hear from you, and we invite you to pass along any questions or prayer concerns.

Before we return to our study of Hebrews 12, we'd like to give just a brief overview of what God has done to save us. He sent his only Son to die in our place, to shed his blood for our forgiveness. He died on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up alive on the first day of the week. We respond to this good news through faith, repentance, confession, and baptism (a burial in water for the forgiveness of sins). And we have two examples to share this morning, with the first one coming to us from Paul Delgado, a friend and brother who preaches at the Westside congregation down in Elgin, Illinois. I actually baptized Paul's mother-in-law nearly 30 years ago, down in Janesville. And Paul has helped us at Beaver Creek Bible Camp a time or two. But Paul posted a few days ago, and he says, "This evening, we rejoice with our new sister in Christ, Patrice, who decided to commit her life to Jesus and obey him in baptism!" So good to see this! Paul seems to be doing a great job preaching down in the Chicagoland area.

And the other example comes to us (once again) from the Lord's church in Honolulu, Hawaii. We are looking forward to worshipping with these people again next summer, if the Lord wills. But they posted a few days ago, and they say, "Rejoice church! Another soul has come home to Jesus. Peter made the decision to put on Christ in baptism. Praise the Lord!" And I love that they shared the hand-drawn diagram that they must have used in their study together before Peter's baptism. I'm hoping you can see how they define "gospel" as being the "death, burial, and resurrection," they have the reference to Romans 6 where Paul describes being buried with Christ in baptism, and then they have the diagram of the death, burial, and resurrection, and the comparison to baptism. But we share this today as encouragement to those of you who have not yet obeyed the gospel. This is what it looks like, and if we can help in some way, we would love to help in any way possible, and we invite you to get in touch.

This morning, we return to our study of Hebrews, a book written to encourage the early Christians to keep on keeping on, and today we come to two verses in Hebrews 12, where the author gives some encouragement concerning overcoming injuries that may happen as we run the Christian race. He starts the passage with a

*“therefore,”* referring back to the discipline we endure as we *“run with endurance the race that is set before us.”* Most of us know that whenever we get moving, whenever we exercise in some way, whenever we participate in a sport, we always face at least some chance of getting hurt. I did a quick search a few days ago, looking for the most famous sports injuries of all time, and as you can imagine, it got pretty graphic in a hurry! We have the situation with Damar Hamlin not too long ago, but then we have a number of athletes paralyzed playing football, compound fractures, knees bending the wrong way, all kinds of horrific foot and ankle injuries in basketball, necks being sliced open by hockey skates, and on and on. But we also know this from personal experience. Several years ago, I attended a lecture for youth camp directors, and the presenter, a camp director himself for the past 30 years, shared something from the insurance industry, indicating that the most common injury resulting in a claim at a summer camp is tied to ankles – breaks and strains. And when he said that, faces and trips to the ER came to mind! I think back over my 30 years working with children, and I think of the girl who suffered a hairline fracture in her ankle on the ball field. I think of the young man who thought it would be cool to hide in a tree at night and jump out to scare his friend, only to jump and pretty much leave his ankle behind in a crook of that tree. When we are active, sometimes we get hurt.

And today, we come to a passage where the author explains that the same thing can happen spiritually. As we are running the Christian race, sometimes we get hurt. And sometime we get to a point where we can't go on due to complete and absolute exhaustion. And when that happens, as with injured athletes, we may need some help (or, as we are about to discover, we may be the ones who are called on to provide some help). This morning, then, as we continue in Hebrews 12, let's take a look at how to handle exhaustion (or even injuries) as we run. The passage is Hebrews 12:12-13,

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, <sup>13</sup> and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.*

This morning, as we think about this message from God, I'd like to take it one verse at a time, as the author of Hebrews either alludes to or directly quotes two different passages from the Old Testament. And in each verse, I'm hoping we pay attention to the DANGER, and then I'm hoping we can learn something from the COMMAND or the DUTY that's described for us in each of these two circumstances.

I. **First of all, though, let's go back to verse 12, and let's notice how he starts, with this encouragement to STRENGTHEN THE HANDS THAT ARE WEAK AND THE KNEES THAT ARE FEEBLE.**

And the first thing I'd like for us to notice in verse 12 is that it is possible for any of us at any moment to come down with a case of weak hands and/or feeble knees! So, this is the danger addressed in this passage. Runners will sometimes refer to “hitting the wall,” running and running, and getting to the point where it is simply not possible to run any more. The reference to *“hands that are weak”* refers to hands that are hanging down at your side, “noodle arms,” we might say. And the reference to *“knees that are feeble”* is similar, and the word he uses here is used elsewhere in scripture and sometimes refers to being paralyzed.

Well, I don't think he's speaking literally here, but he's continuing this picture of running the Christian race. Sometimes, spiritually speaking, we may get to the point where we may think that we are too tired to go on. Sometimes, we “hit the wall.” In this case, maybe it's persecution. Back in Chapter 10, we read about their property being seized. Imagine losing your house because you have obeyed the gospel. That's a big deal. Or maybe there's some other challenge: Losing a spouse, being diagnosed with an incurable illness, falling into temptation, being overtaken by sin, giving in when we never thought we would give in, any number of things. Sometimes, we get overwhelmed, and we get to the point where it seems impossible to continue. And we

almost hate to even think like this, but the word of God acknowledges reality. Sometimes, godly people get to the point of giving up. If your hands give up and your knees give up, it's pretty hard to keep on running, isn't it? Well, this is the danger: Sometimes, hands get weak and knees become feeble.

This, however, brings us to the duty or the command aspect of this passage. What do we do about this? We **"strengthen"** the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble. God doesn't want us to give up, but he wants us to recover, he wants us to get well. When great athletes get injured, they have surgery, they go through physical therapy, and so on. In the same way, there is also a spiritual solution to weak hands and feeble knees. And we have a translation issue here. If you are reading from the NIV, you might notice how it says, **"Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees."** That's a bit different from what we read here, isn't it? The NIV makes it sound like "You weak people need to make yourselves stronger!" The word "your," though, is not in the original text. And so, in this case, most of the other translations are more accurate here, **"Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble."** Do we see the difference? Verse 12 is actually telling us to strengthen OTHERS. If I'm weak, I might need some help with that.

Often, when an animal is injured, that animal will head off into the wilderness to suffer and die all alone. We have the same tendency sometimes, don't we? If I'm hurting spiritually, there's a part of me that wants to go hide somewhere. Leave me alone! God, though, explains in scripture that we as his people are part of a body. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:25-27, God designed the church **"...so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it."** Or, as Paul commands in 1 Thessalonians 5:14, **"We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone."** In other words, we are together in this, we share with each other, we walk together, we forgive each other, we encourage each other – at least we should! And when we're weak, we strengthen each other. We do what needs to be done.

And to really understand this passage, it might help to go back to the passage he seems to be alluding to (from the book of Isaiah). Back in Isaiah 35, the people had suffered through a series of evil kings, some enemy nations had come in and attacked and had taken some of their people captive, and they were on the verge of giving up, when Isaiah comes in and says (in Isaiah 35:3-4), **"Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those with anxious heart, 'Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; the recompense of God will come, but He will save you.'"** Isaiah, then, wasn't just saying, "You people need to suck it up and snap out of this," but he was saying, "Hang in there! Help is on the way! And in the meantime, strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees." Aren't you glad that we're not living in a time of political chaos? Aren't you glad we aren't living in a time when it seems like almost everybody is compromising the faith like they were back in Isaiah's time? Of course we are! So what do we do? We **"strengthen the weak hands,"** and we **"make firm the feeble knees."** Over the past 20 years, I've become friends with a guy who now works as a cashier at Home Depot. He knows I'm a gospel preacher. We've had some good conversations through the years. And I saw him again a few days ago, and he said, "Oh, it's not looking good out there!" And his attitude was, "This is it! The end is near! All this stuff going on in Israel, this is what John warns about in Revelation!" And I didn't have time to have a full-blown Bible study right there in the checkout line, but when he asked me, "What do we do?" my reply was, "We can keep on doing what is right." Am I mad about some things happening in the world right now? Yes. Am I worried? No. There's nothing I can do about it. But what I can do is **"strengthen the hands that are weak and make firm the knees that are feeble."**

And this is so close to another passage in Isaiah, Isaiah 40:28-31, a passage that was a favorite of one of our former members, Katherine Bordson. There's a reference on the sign out front that was donated in her memory, and it's also on the artwork (also donated in her memory), hanging over our drinking fountain back there,

*Do you not know? Have you not heard?  
The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth  
Does not become weary or tired.  
His understanding is inscrutable.  
He gives strength to the weary,  
And to him who lacks might He increases power.  
Though youths grow weary and tired,  
And vigorous young men stumble badly,  
Yet those who wait for the LORD  
Will gain new strength;  
They will mount up with wings like eagles,  
They will run and not get tired,  
They will walk and not become weary.*

By the way, I was over here doing some yard work in the middle of the week back in July, I looked at that painting that's been hanging there for close to 20 years, and the lighthouse looked a bit familiar! I took a picture of it and sent it to Josh and Amanda to confirm (these two are our experts on the north shore of Lake Superior), and Amanda confirmed that this is indeed the Split Rock Lighthouse on Lake Superior, about an hour north of Duluth. I did some hiking there in February 2021 (I took the picture on the wall up here), and then I even found a picture of me and my sister standing on the backside of this lighthouse back in the early 1980's. It just didn't hit me until this past July, that we have a painting of this lighthouse right here in our building with this quote from Isaiah on it. But going back to Isaiah, this is what the author of Hebrews is saying: Look out for each other! And when you see someone having a hard time, ***"strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble."***

To ***"strengthen"*** is to set straight, or to set upright. And when we think of lifting up hands that are weak, I hope we're thinking of that passage Silas read for us earlier. In Exodus 17, God's people were attacked by the Amalekites. Moses sends Joshua out to lead the people in battle, and while Moses is looking down on the battlefield, he realizes that when his staff is raised over his head, the Israelites prevail, but when he lowers his staff, the Amalekites prevail. Well, as the day goes on, his hands get tired. But when he lowers his hands, God's people start losing the battle, and he can see this from up above. The text tells us that his hands were ***"heavy."*** This is a matter of life and death, so Hur and Aaron his brother step in, they gave him a rock to sit on, and these two men hold up his hands, one man on each side, until the sun sets, allowing Joshua and the men of Israel to overwhelm the Amalakites. Aaron and Hur literally ***"strengthened the hands that were weak."*** They saw a need, and they stepped in to do something about it. What they did wasn't necessarily heroic, it wasn't necessarily glamorous, but they did what needed to be done. Now, think for just a moment about what these two men could have done. If they had been angling for this leadership position themselves, they could have gone back down the mountain to start spreading the news that their leader had been skipping arm day at the gym. They could have whined, they could have complained, but as it is, they stepped in and strengthened the hands that were weak. They did what needed to be done at that moment.

Most of you know that my brother-in-law has had a tough time lately. He's had some awful side effects from the chemo as well as some other stuff going on, and he actually had to be rushed by ambulance from their

local hospital to another hospital several hours away. And in the middle of that, my sister had hardly been home, so she stopped by the house to get a shower, hoping to catch up with the ambulance along the way. Right at that moment, a couple from church stopped by, "What can we do?" "Well, how about while I'm in the shower you guys dig through the kitchen and pack me some food for the road?" And that's exactly what they did. They even made coffee in a thermos and sent her out the door, because that's what God's people do. We *"strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble."*

- II. **As we come to the second verse in this passage, let's close by noting the second scenario here, as he says, "...AND MAKE STRAIGHT PATHS FOR YOUR FEET, SO THAT THE LIMB WHICH IS LAME MAY NOT BE PUT OUT OF JOINT, BUT RATHER BE HEALED."**

So, not only may God's people sometimes be afflicted with weak hands and knees, but sometimes we may be described as having limbs that are *"lame"* and in danger of being *"put out of joint."* And this seems to be more of an injury (as opposed to just getting tired). In fact, the word *"lame"* sometimes carries the idea of being "maimed" or "disfigured" in some way. It's sometimes translated elsewhere as "halting," perhaps the idea of walking in an unsteady or lopsided manner. You might remember the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel in 1 Kings 18. During that showdown, Elijah confronts the people who are watching this, and he says (in 1 Kings 18:21), *"How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him."* That word translated *"hesitate"* is a word meaning "to limp" or perhaps to teeter back and forth, to be unsteady on the feet. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it's the same word translated here in Hebrews 12:13 as *"lame."* And that's the idea here in Hebrews 12:13. Sometimes, we as God's people might limp! There are times when we may come pretty close to being spiritually disabled. And so we teeter back and forth, we hesitate, we limp along, sometimes due to some kind of injury.

And this is where we have to realize that the Christian race is hard sometimes. Sometimes the way is narrow, and dark, and rocky, and there's a very real danger that we may trip and fall. I think about running over the past few years. I have tripped and fallen two times. Once while running downhill on a dirt path in the dark at Blue Mound State Park, and as I fell I rolled and actually got a bit of trail rash on the back of my shoulder. The other time I was also running in the dark, about 4:30 in the morning, along Highway PD on the southwest side of Madison, when I hit a crack in the sidewalk somewhere near Maple Grove. And I don't think I actually hit the ground that time, but I wish that I had. Have you ever had a fall like that? Sometimes, especially on the ice, you may get more injured by twisting and flailing trying not to fall than by actually falling! But I think of both of those times, and they have a few things in common: Darkness and obstacles. So also in the Christian race. We get hurt, not necessarily when the path is wide, and well-lit, when we are surrounded by others; no, we get hurt when life is dark and tough. We get hurt when we go off on our own.

And some people may be more susceptible to this than others. In any flock of sheep, for example, I'm guessing some sheep may be more likely to get injured than others. Teachers, you may have students who are more likely than others to get tripped up. Something happens, and you are able to say, "Yep, I knew it. I could see it coming." So also in the Lord's church – maybe this sheep over here is malnourished for some reason, maybe this sheep over here has an extra dose of drama going on at work or at home, and if there's quicksand, this guy's gonna find it, if there are any thorns or thistles within a hundred miles, this sheep over here will be the one get caught up in that. But it may also happen to any of us, and it may take us by complete surprise, like the sidewalk coming up to meet us in the dark. There may be other times when we are actually injured by God's own people. I hate to say it, but God's people can sometimes say the most stupid things that hurt other people. And that goes for me and probably all of us. Sometimes we hurt each other.

So, this is the danger: We may get injured running the Christian race. But what do we do about it? What is our duty? What is the demand in this passage? Notice, the author of Hebrews says that we are to ***“...make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.”*** To most who read or heard this for the first time, this statement would have been familiar, because it’s extremely close to Proverbs 4:26-27, where King Solomon warned his sons and said, ***“Watch the path of your feet and all your ways will be established. Do not turn to the right nor to the left; turn your foot from evil.”*** So, the command is: When you’ve got a messed up foot or a limb that’s out of whack, get yourself back on a smooth and level path! Get yourself some physical therapy! Take care of yourself! Get back to the basics.

And as with what we saw in verse 12, it seems the emphasis here is on helping others. In the first part of verse 13, yes, you are to ***“make straight the paths for YOUR feet,”*** but the reason is ***“so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.”*** And from what I’ve been reading this week, there’s a grammatical shift in this verse, suggesting: Take care of your own feet, so that you can help heal others who struggling spiritually. And to me, that sounds pretty close to Galatians 6:1-2, where Paul says, ***“Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.”*** When Paul says that we need to ***“restore”*** someone, he uses a word that was used in the ancient world to refer to the mending of fishing nets or to the setting of a broken bone. Those who are spiritual are to watch their own feet so that they will be in a position to help others who are truly in danger of losing a limb.

So what do we do? We clear the way. We accommodate. We remove any stumbling blocks that may be in the way. I need to make it as easy as possible for you to stay faithful to the Lord, and you need to do the same for me. I need to make the calls and make the visits. As I was updating my “to-do” list several weeks ago, I added “Make the calls,” and then I added in parentheses, “for real.” Maybe it’s just me, but there are certain things I know I need to be doing to encourage people, but stuff happens, and what really needs to be done gets pushed down the list. We need to encourage each other, “for real.” I may not be able to give somebody a new foot or a new leg, but maybe I can kick some stones out of his path. By the way, do you remember Leviticus 19:14? In the Old Law, God said, ***“You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD.”*** Do you remember that being in the Old Law? I think Hebrews 12:13 is the New Testament version of that! But not only are we not to trip the blind, but we are to go out of our way (spiritually speaking) to make their path straight. As a civilized society, think about what we do for those with mobility issues or other disabilities these days: We provide special parking, we install ramps and elevators, we provide text-to-speech supports, we provide closed captioning on our videos, and on and on. Isn’t the author of Hebrews suggesting that we do something like this spiritually? That we make the path straight? That we take care of each other? That we go out of our way to check in with each other?

### **Conclusion:**

This morning, we’ve looked at what happens when we get injured as we run with endurance the race that’s been set before us. Weak hands and feeble knees are a very real danger, but we’re aware of it, so we help. But then there’s also a danger in tripping and falling along the way, but those who are strong make sure their own feet are on the path, and then they work to straighten the path for those who struggle. I want to be part of a church that does this. How awesome to look out for each other! How awesome to encourage each other! But on the other hand, think of how disgusting it would be to be a part of a family where this doesn’t happen. We need to be taking care of each other.

Let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

We are thankful for your word this morning, and we ask for your help as we take this passage to heart. We want to strengthen those who are weak, we want to straighten the paths for those who stumble, for all of us need this help from time to time. Bless us as we rededicate ourselves to looking out for each other.

Thank you, Father, for Jesus. We come to you in his name. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)