

Title: One Foot in Front of the Other

Text

Hebrews 12:1-6; 11-13 NRSV

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children—

“My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
or lose heart when you are punished by him;
6 for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves,
and chastises every child whom he accepts.”

¹¹ Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

¹² Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

There are few passages more encouraging than this one, it seems to me. It tells us, in so many words, that:

Trusting God is HARD. It is a lifelong effort. There are no shortcuts. Marathon, not a sprint, and all that. (Sometimes one of the most encouraging things you can hear is: You aren't crazy or lazy. This really IS as hard you think it is.)

Others have done it, so you can too. They were just as ordinary and unremarkable as you are. (The people recalled in Hebrews 11 are often referred to as “heroes in the faith.” And they were – but only if we accept that trusting God in the face of hard, confusing, uncertain and scary times is what true heroism looks like.)

Jesus shows is the way, because he IS the Way. Jesus Christ himself got us started, will be waiting for us at the finish line, and will sustain us all along the way.

Our pain has a purpose. Just like rehab is hard, but brings healing – so does our persevering in faith.

With each church I've served, at some point I've had to explain the difference between hospice and rehab. Every church nowadays has to face this choice in one way or another.

Hospice is easy. The focus is on making the person comfortable. It's about finishing well.

Rehab is hard. It means relearning how to do things that were once really easy to do. Rehab is uncomfortable. Rehab is hard work.

Core

Just as rehab is hard but brings healing, so does persevering in faith.

Yes, West Valley is going to close down. But I need to be clear with you: You all did not choose hospice. You have chosen rehab. And it has indeed been hard. And I am very proud of you!

I got an important reminder about how hard rehab is yesterday, and the importance of helping each other through it. Let me tell you about my new friend Garrett, who got me through my second-ever Crossfit Class yesterday. Saturday is "partner day" apparently. So Garrett led the way as we did a 400m run, 10 power cleans with a bar bell, and 20 walking lunges. And then we repeated that. Four more times.

A few months ago, this would probably not have been a big deal for me. I hadn't packed up all my exercise equipment. I hadn't gotten out my workout routine. I hadn't been managing the stress of selling my house and moving with "comfort food."

It was at about the third go-around that I remembered: Exercising is hard. But it brings health and healing. And I was so grateful to Garrett for helping me along. He was doing it. And I just followed him. One foot in front of the other. At the end, one of the other class members asked me, "So will you come back?" Without a person like Garrett to help, the answer would have been a hard NO.

Who has helped you keep going through the hard things? Who has helped you put one foot in front of the other?

And then I have to ask:

Who are you helping? Who are you encouraging to keep going, to keep putting one foot in front of the other?

Who has God put into your life so that you can do the simple-but-profound work of saying, "I see you! I see you doing your best, hanging on to God, pushing forward. Way to go!" Let's remember: **We are saints too.**