

A Formula for Spiritual Renewal

Hebrews 12:12-17

Hebrews 12:12-17 Introduction

- Strictly speaking spiritual renewal doesn't follow any strict formula.
- It's a work of God's grace and, as such, is entirely dependent upon Him.
- Still, if we are willing to recognize our need for spiritual renewal, or spiritual awakening, or revival – or whatever we choose to call it, then we can take conscious steps in that direction.
- God, as it happens, loves to move in the lives of people who are earnestly seeking Him.

Spiritual renewal is ultimately the work of God within us, but we still need to earnestly seek it.

- Let's read Hebrews 12:12-17.

Hebrews 12:12-17 Outline

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| I. | Defeat discouragement. | 12:12-13 |
| II. | Strive toward unity. | 12:14a |
| III. | Work toward holiness. | 12:14b |
| IV. | Lay hold of God's grace. | 12:15a |
| V. | Avoid defilement. | 12:15b-17 |

Defeat discouragement. 12:12-13

- As we're out there running the race, as we're out there in the midst of the battle, the enemy of our souls will do everything he can to discourage us.
- Have you sincerely asked God's forgiveness for the various ways you have offended Him?
- Have you given Him His rightful place as Lord?
- Have you sincerely trusted Christ and received His gift of eternal life?
- If you have done all of these things, then why allow the devil to keep you down?
- A blessed eternity in a new heaven, a new earth and a new Jerusalem is your rightful inheritance.
- The devil has no power to change any of that.
- If an eternal future of uncompromised joy is guaranteed to us already, then why let our accuser make us despondent right now?
- As usual our rabbi is pointing back to some Old Testament Scriptures:
 - Isaiah 35:3-4
 - Proverbs 4:25-27
- There is another related point to be made in conjunction with discouragement:
- Be careful where you walk – and make straight paths for your feet.
- One of the ways the devil uses to discourage us is this:
- He encourages us to think that we are spiritually stronger than we really are.
- Then we walk in places or with people that encourage us to enter into temptation.
- And then we fall.
- And then the devil takes on his usual role as our accuser and tries to discourage us because we have sinned.
- The trick is to anticipate his strategy.
- When he tells you that you are strong enough spiritually to resist temptation, admit this simple truth: You are not.

- If you make a straight path for your feet you will more easily avoid the fall – and the discouragement that comes along with it.

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Strive toward unity. 12:14a

- Whether it's with Christians or non-Christians, friends or enemies, neighbors nearby or total strangers, peace with other people should be our goal.
- This is not always easy, because human nature gravitates toward conflict.
- We naturally think of our own needs before we consider those of others.
- Then when others stand in our way, we get tweaked with them.
- Peace with other people takes effort.
- And honestly, our best efforts won't always succeed.
- Nonetheless, we should make peaceful unity our constant goal.

- See Romans 12:18.

“Our goal should be peace with all people. We certainly won't be able to reach that goal, but we should pursue it just the same ... Let any division be because of someone else's stubbornness, not yours. This is part of the holiness that God desires.”

- Chuck Smith in *The Word for Today Bible*

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Work toward holiness. 12:14b

- Work toward holiness. 12:14b
- F. B. Meyer brings up an important point in relation to this verse.
“It is the presence of God which makes holy. There is only one Being in all the universe who is really holy. Holiness is the attribute of his nature, and of his nature only. We can never be holy apart from God; but when God enters the spirit of man, he brings holiness with him.”

- F. B. Meyer, *The Way into the Holiest*

- If genuine holiness is our goal, then only the Spirit of God within us can produce it.
- The Spirit of God is also called the Holy Spirit.
- We become holy in proportion to our submission to Him.
- Jesus said, *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”* (Matthew 5:8)
- Let God's Holy Spirit purify your heart.
- Please note also, the relationship between peace with others and holiness.
- These will not always mix.
- There are those, perhaps even old friends or family members, who will only give you peace if you approve of their vices or sins – or worse yet, only if you join with them.
- Don't bother. Keep your distance.
- Holiness immediately affects and is affected by your relationship with God.
- This often – maybe even most often – results in better relationships with other people.
- If, however, your desire for holiness comes between you and others, so be it.
- God has to come first.

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Lay hold of God's grace.

12:15a

- God's grace does not fail, but we can fail to take advantage of it.
- The word for "looking carefully" is unusual.
- It conveys the idea of overseeing something, observing or examining a state of affairs.
- It is related to the word for "overseer" or "bishop," the one in the pastoral role.
"Every Christian has some pastoral responsibility for his fellow Christians. It needs to be given practical expression in warm encouragement, sensible advice, prayerful sympathy, supportive fellowship, and the regular sharing of spiritual truth, as well as in mutual correction."
 - Raymond Brown, former principal of Spurgeon's College, London
- One of the more common fears of any pastor is that there are people who listen to his preaching or teaching week by week, but who still remain unconverted.
- They are lost, unsaved, unregenerate, while still being frequent hearers of the word.
- They have yet to experience God's grace.
- Please don't be one of them.
- Another common pastoral fear has to do with those who are in fact saved.
- It is possible to receive God's grace regarding salvation while not laying hold of God's grace regarding sanctification.
- We may be converted, but fail to become holy.
- We may be born again, but fail to grow.
- Or we grow for a while and then stop.
- Regeneration is a one-time work of God's grace that gives us new life in Christ when we first trust in Him.
- Afterwards, a repeated and continuous work of God's grace imparts holiness to us and is able to transform our lives.
- Real spiritual renewal will only come to us as we diligently seek God's sustaining and sanctifying grace.
- The means by which God confers this sanctifying grace are many, but none of them are exceptionally fascinating to the untrained observer.
- We may not take them seriously due to their apparent simplicity or unexciting nature.
- Fire, smoke, loud voices from heaven or bright lights in the sky don't normally play a big part.

The ways we lay hold of God's grace:

- We get to know God through His word, the Bible, by daily reading or listening to it and then studying it with others. This gets us acquainted with God's mind and heart.
- It is not humility, as a Christian, to admit that you don't know the Bible well, unless you have a sincere desire to change that.
- No Christian should ever be content with their own ignorance of God's word.
- We develop or deepen our connection with God through prayer – which should also become a regular discipline.
- We need not understand how prayer works in order to take advantage of it.
- A good way to think of prayer is simply talking to someone a great deal older, wiser, more important and powerful, and with more integrity than you.

- God is all of those and still craves your attention.
- Next, make friends with other committed Christians. You will be able to encourage one another in your shared faith.
- Similarly, commit to a visible group of believers – a church. We live in a very individualized culture, but Christianity is intended to be lived out in conjunction with others.
- A Christian without a church is like a hand, foot, ear, eye or nose without a body attached.
- Get baptized ASAP if you have not done so. Christianity demands a public acknowledgment of your conversion. Baptism is the biblical way to express that.
- Take communion – the Lord’s Supper – with other believers. Jesus said, “Do this in memory of Me.”
- Tell others about Jesus.
- Serve Him in any way you can.
- Finally, pray for God’s Holy Spirit to empower you. You will need God’s power to be obedient to God’s will as you gradually learn what that is.
- Much of it is quite simple and you may know it already.
- Growth comes as we submit our will to His. This will become evident in numerous conscious choices throughout the course of every day.

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Avoid defilement. 12:15b-17

- 12:15b Our rabbi is here alluding to Deuteronomy 29:18, which is a warning against idolatry.
- The original readers of this letter were tempted to fall back into a purely ritual form of Judaism – falling away from the living God.
- Such defilement tends to be contagious.
- When one person refuses to submit to God, others almost certainly follow.
- 12:16a A fornicator or “sexually immoral” person (Greek, *pornos*), referred initially to a male prostitute, but became a catchall term for a person involved in any sexual sin.
- As we live in a sex-crazed society, this warning is especially applicable to us.
- Avoiding sexual defilement is a key way that we Christians should stand out as holy – different from the world around us.
- 12:16a The Greco-Roman world was much like ours, therefore, every NT author touches on this topic at least once.
- In Acts 15, when the early church had to decide how much of Old Testament Judaism the non-Jews had to adopt in order to live as Christians, abstaining from sexual immorality made the shortest possible list.
- See also 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 for God’s will.
- 12:16a All the direct biblical teaching on sexual issues can be summed up as follows:
- The recommended setting for sex is between one man and one woman in one marriage for life. Sex in such a context is simply good.

- Outside of that lone context, well, sorry. There is no other positive biblical model. So yes, you may well have sinned in this area. Sad, but true.
 - Any questions? I'll happily address them afterwards.
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- 12:16b-17 Esau, the brother of Jacob was a profane person.
 - He was unholy, lacking all relationship or affinity to God.
 - His descendants, the Edomites, became chronic idolaters and persistent enemies of Israel. Their last known remnants died out with the Herodian kings.
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- 12:16b-17 Esau was Jacob's older twin brother. His birthright entitled him to the spiritual leadership of the family.
 - He didn't value that honorable position at all.
 - But later, when his father Isaac was old, he wanted the blessing that accompanied the position.
 - It was too late.
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- 12:17 The structure of this verse is a bit odd to us. It may lead us to believe that Esau sought repentance but couldn't find it.
 - It's as if God wouldn't accept him though he genuinely wanted to repent.
 - Personally, I agree with both John Wesley and John Calvin, that it was not repentance that Esau sought with tears, but the blessing.
 - See Genesis 27:38.
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- 12:16b-17 Your birthright as a child of God is a holy life that will honor Jesus and set an example to the world.
 - Don't despise it.
 - Furthermore, don't think you can live in chronic, conscious ungodliness and expect continuous blessing from God.
 - A sincere desire for holiness is more effective than many tears in obtaining God's blessings.

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Hebrews 12:12-17 Conclusions

- Our formula for spiritual renewal can be summed up as follows.
 - Defeat discouragement.
 - Strive toward unity.
 - Work toward holiness.
 - Lay hold of God's grace.
 - Avoid defilement.
- Defeat discouragement:
 - Drooping hands and feeble spiritual knees can have an adverse effect on others.
 - Don't be a spiritual Eeyore.
 - Understand that one of the enemy's tactics is to try to get you down.
 - One way he will try to do this through temptation, sin and the sense of condemnation which follows.

- Strive toward unity:
 - Peace with everyone is not always possible, but it becomes more likely when you work at it.
 - Let others be the cause of division.
 - Also, don't accept peace at the cost of compromising your own holiness.
 - Peace with God takes precedence over peace with others when the choice is really that stark.

- Work toward holiness:
 - Holiness is something we lack naturally.
 - It something God must impart to us.
 - Ask for it.
 - Work toward it.
 - Earnestly desire to be made pure.
 - An effective process of sanctification is sure to follow – but this process will take time.

- Lay hold of God's grace.
 - God's grace saves us when we trust in Jesus.
 - God's grace sustains us and helps us to grow as we continue to trust in Him.
 - It is our job, not only to look out for ourselves in this area, but also to look out for others.
 - Do your part. See to it that we are all taking the maximum possible advantage of the grace of God.

- Avoid defilement.
 - Surrounded by a coarse and depraved society, the early church soon began to stand out as people who were different.
 - Humble, honest, hard-working people who manage to avoid the widespread debauchery of our times are sorely needed again today.
 - Decide to be one of them. Avoid defilement.

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