

Faith Is Endurance

Bible Background • Hebrews 12:1–11

Printed Text • Hebrews 12:1–11 | Devotional Reading • James 5:7–11

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: DESCRIBE how to have enduring faith; BECOME CONVINCED that we can endure in faith; and DEVELOP a plan to utilize our faith to determine and reach spiritual goals.

In Focus

As Regina crossed the finish line in the Citywide 5K race she wanted to pinch herself. Was this a dream? Just one year ago, Regina was sitting on the couch binging on snacks and TV shows.

She began to gain weight and have pain in her back. She knew she should start eating healthier and exercising but she just wasn't motivated.

She cried out to God for help. "Lord, I am so tired of feeling tired all of the time and being in pain, but it is so hard to consistently do what's right. I need your help to make a change so that I can see positive results. Please help me turn things around. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Once she prayed, Regina seemed determined to do what was necessary to meet her goals. She worked hard not to snack between meals, and she joined a walking group for accountability. Over the next few months, the group progressed from walking to jogging to running and registered for the 5K race together.

As the group congratulated each other on a well-run race Regina looked up, "We did it, thank you, Lord!"

In today's lesson, we see that Jesus set the perfect example as the leader who was tempted but did not give in. He endured the pain and shame of the Cross to achieve the joy and victory of eternal life with God.

Keep In Mind

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Witnesses (Hebrews 12:1) *martus* (Gk.)— Those who can verify a particular truth based on what they know, have seen, or heard.

B. Chastening (vv. 5, 7, 11) *paideia* (Gk.)— Education or training; by implication, it also means disciplinary correction.

Say It Correctly

Beset. bih-SET

Chasten. CHEY-suhn

Exhortation. Eg-zawr-TEY-shuhn

KJV

Hebrews 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

2 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

NLT

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.

2 We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.

Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.

3 Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up.

4 After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin.

5 And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, "My child, don't make light of the Lord's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you.

6 For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child."

7 As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father?

8 If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all.

9 Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever?

10 For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness.

11 No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.

The People, Places, and Times

Rome. As the capital city of Italy, it was the center of commerce, culture, and religion. A myriad of religions dotted the social landscape at the time this letter to the Hebrews was circulated. Although there were times when Jews and Christians were expelled from Rome, there were other times when they could worship freely.

Believers in Rome. Scholars are very unsure of the intended audience, but in Hebrews 13:24, the writer sends greetings from those of Italy. The NIV Study Bible notes that the writer is passing on greetings from some Italian believers. William Barclay in his Daily Study Bible on Hebrews suggests that it was written to a group of Jewish Christians who met in a “house–church” in Rome (Barclay, 6–7). They were a subgroup of the main Christian congregation that had been formed there years earlier. Living in a climate of other religions and cults, their faith was tested constantly. When times were hard—politically, culturally, socially, and economically—the chance was greater that they would be tempted to return to Judaism. It was not easy nor politically correct to be a Christian at this time. Christians in Rome had to deal with the threat of persecution by the Roman authorities; although, none of them had become martyrs like Stephen and others. This happened later under Nero, the emperor. Because they were still alive, the writer encouraged them to continue to run their race and not give up. He reminded them that Jesus never gave up and that they shouldn’t either.

Background

Some Bible commentators believe Hebrews was written to a Jewish-Christian congregation in Rome around A.D. 67–70. Others believe it was written to Jews living in Egypt or Palestine. Traditionally, authorship was attributed to the apostle Paul, but modern scholars are unsure of the true identity of the author of this epistle. Some believe Barnabas wrote it, and still others suggest Apollos, a Jew born in Alexandria, which is located in northern Africa. The author wrote the letter in response to the threat that believers might renounce Christianity and revert to Judaism. The writer wanted to inform his vacillating readers that Jesus Christ, the object of God’s final revelation, is superior to the greatest of Judaism’s heroes. The writer also wanted to highlight, while reminding his audience of, the efficacy of Jesus’ power of salvation. He emphasizes that whereas the Jewish legal sacrificial system was powerless to remit sins, Jesus, the eternal High Priest, “is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). Furthermore, the writer explained the need for patient endurance amid the persecution and sufferings to which the heirs of eternal salvation are inevitably exposed.

The writer suggests that all Christians emulate Jesus’ suffering and patience in anticipation of an eternal reward. One cannot help but notice the metaphors of Greek athletic terms such as “run with perseverance the race” and “a great cloud of witnesses [spectators]” (Hebrews 12:1, NIV). These Christians were to think of themselves as athletes who possessed endurance in order to ensure victory over the forces of evil. The writer also made it clear that the Christians’ secret weapon, needed for victory in spite of trials and tribulations, was unwavering faith.

At-A-Glance

1. Believers Must Run the Race (Hebrews 12:1–2)
2. Believers Must Develop Endurance (vv. 3–6)
3. Believers Must Learn to Accept the Discipline of the Lord (vv. 7–11)

In Depth

1. Believers Must Run the Race (Hebrews 12:1–2)

The writer encourages the Christian readers to continue to “run their race” of discipleship no matter what tries to hinder them. He tells them not to get distracted by burdens or sins that are present in their lives.

Being a Christian was not an easy thing back then, and it still isn't today. It is a lifelong commitment that involves peaks and valleys, good times and bad times, and sunshine and rain. Christian discipleship is not akin to a sprint; it is a marathon. That is why the author tells his audience to use “perseverance” (v. 1, NIV). Perseverance is an inner quality that allows one to continue in some course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition. To persevere is to be steadfast in a particular purpose.

Disciples of Jesus Christ must always look to Jesus as the ultimate model of perseverance. In His ministry, He suffered insults and attempts on His life. He persisted even though His hometown and relatives rejected Him. He overcame the obstinacy of His followers and betrayal by one of His own. He never faltered during the unjust criminal trial that accused Him of sedition and heresy or the beating by the Roman police force. Finally, He did not waver on the Cross at Calvary. He did all of that not only so future generations of believers would have access to a spiritual power potent enough to change the world but also to set an example of the perfect leader who was tempted but did not give in. And most importantly, He endured the Cross to carry our sins and provide the way of salvation for us.

We must also remember that we have an inspiration. We are surrounded by a “great ... cloud of witnesses,” credible leaders who have fought a good fight, finished their course, kept the faith, and earned their crowns of righteousness. They are our inspiration. Our heroes of faith should inspire us to keep our faith so we can pursue a life of complete holiness and participate in kingdom work that can change our world and be a witness of the world to come. Today, we look at heroes of faith such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mary McLeod Bethune, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Rosa Parks.

Therefore, as we continue to live as ambassadors of Christ, let us persevere on our jobs, in our homes, and in our communities. God demands our best in this life. No matter what hardships we go through, our history is peppered with credible leaders who have overcome greater hardships than we have ever had to imagine. We can learn from them. If they made it, surely we can make it. With God on our side and a “great . . . cloud of witnesses” cheering us on, we can get through any adverse situation we face.

2. Believers Must Develop Endurance (vv. 3–6)

When life becomes unbearable and we get discouraged by some temporal circumstances, we ought to have enough of a spiritual sense to look to Jesus as our source of strength. If we think of all that Jesus endured, giving His life so we might have life, we have to thank God for the character and integrity of His Son Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews encouraged the vacillating Jewish Christians, when they began to complain about the adversity they had to face, to consider Jesus' suffering. He supported his argument by testifying that they had not faced persecution to the degree that they had shed their own blood. He also let them know that trials suffered for righteousness' sake could be

theologically viewed as the “chastening of the Lord,” God’s “disciplinary correction, instruction, and nurture.”

The Lord’s chastening is not arbitrary or without direction—it always has a purpose. The writer suggests that trials could be disciplinary correction and a part of God’s overall plan to edify His children. Corrective discipline is always a good thing that symbolizes love. When an earthly father exercises discipline on his child, in most cases it’s meant to be beneficial to the child so that the same wrong actions will not be repeated. Our Heavenly Father operates in the same way. Because God loves us, He disciplines us so we will not commit the same sins or something worse.

Even when seemingly unprovoked trials and tribulations come into our lives, we can benefit from them. Romans 8:28 reads, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Truly, when we try to compare what we have to go through to what Jesus endured, we see there is no comparison. He suffered much for us. The question is: What will we suffer through for Him? It is hard for us to lose, to mourn the death of a loved one, to feel the pain of a broken relationship or the discomfort of owing insurmountable debt. Trials will come in this life. Pain will be a part of our pilgrimage. But the good news is that enduring the suffering brings us into new levels of God’s consciousness.

3. Believers Must Learn to Accept the Discipline of the Lord (vv. 7–11)

The writer of Hebrews presents yet another reason that believers should cheerfully bear affliction when it comes. Christians are encouraged to endure the discipline of the Lord because it is the mark of the sonship of Christ as well as the way to become more holy and righteous.

The Bible is clear that those who suffer for righteousness’ sake glorify God: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12–13, KJV). Second Timothy 2:12 says, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.” The writers insist that we must look on all the hardships of life as the discipline of God sent to work, not for our harm, but for our ultimate and highest good.

It is never pleasant to be corrected and disciplined by God, but His discipline is a sign of His deep love for us. When God corrects you, see it as proof of His love and His ability to lead you in the right direction. Then pray and ask Him what He is working to teach you. We may respond to the Lord’s discipline in several ways. First, we can accept it with resignation. Second, we can accept it with self-pity, thinking we really don’t deserve it. Third, we can be angry and resentful toward God. Or, fourth, we can accept it gratefully, which is the appropriate response we owe a loving Father who cares enough about us to point us in the right direction.

Search the Scriptures

1. What should inspire Christians to hold on to their faith (Hebrews 12:1)?
2. Why is our Christianity never to be stationary or stagnant (v. 1)?
3. Fill in your answer.
4. Who should we model ourselves after (v. 2)?
5. What is the end result of God’s chastening (vv. 10–11)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What makes Jesus a credible leader? How would you have turned out if the Lord had not chastised you? Think about your children or children you know. Imagine how they would grow up without someone to discipline them.
2. Why is it so hard for Christians to adjust to suffering? Have you been told that once you give your life to Jesus, everything will be all right? How have we been anesthetized into believing that children of God are exempt from suffering?

Liberating Lesson

Before a professional sports team takes the field, it goes through training camp. Training camp is a fiery trial that most players hate. However, veterans and rookies alike must endure training camp in order to learn new plays, to get into shape, and, most importantly, to learn how to become a disciplined and victorious team. If we Christians are going to be victorious, we have to endure our own version of training camp. God, our coach (leader), wants to turn us into a well-trained and well-disciplined body of believers. To do that, God allows some adversity into our lives. Christians are like tea bags. In order for our rich and robust flavor to come out, we have to be placed in hot water. The Christians in our text were being tested so that their “flavor” would come out.

Application for Activation

Many great biblical and historical characters had to endure much suffering for the causes they supported, whether it was for the spread of Christianity or in the fight for civil rights. Life is a marathon, not a sprint. If we are going to be successful, individually and collectively, we have to keep our eyes on the prize. Individually, that prize is to become like Jesus Christ; collectively, the prize is to make the kingdom of God a reality in our midst. Commit to following Jesus’ example of godly discipline even when times are tough and temptation to sin is great. Continue working toward your goals, never giving up and keeping your eyes on the prize.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Hebrews 12:1–11

1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

In this verse, the “great cloud of witnesses” is referring to those persons mentioned in chapter 11. Here, the writer is saying that those who have gone before are examples to others of living the life of faith. God has confirmed their faithfulness, and they can be seen as examples of those who endured. Therefore, in light of our inspiring audience, we must rid ourselves of “every weight” and “run with patience.”

The Greek word for “patience” is hupomone (hoo-po-mo-NAY), derived from two Greek words: hupo (hoo-PO), meaning “under,” and meno (MEN-oh), meaning “to remain.” In other words, the Greek root indicates that by remaining under some trial, we may be molded to fit God’s purposes.

2 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

To run the race, one must stay focused on Jesus, as implied here by the use of the Greek word aphorao (ah-for-AH-oh), translated as “looking.” To aphorao means “to turn the eyes away from other things and fix them on something else”—namely Jesus. We do so because Jesus is the “author” (Gk. archehos, ar-khay-GOSS), meaning chief leader, and the “finisher” (Gk. teleiotes, tel-i-OT-ace), which means “perfecter” of faith. In other words, Jesus’ life is the perfect example of faith.

The word “endured” comes from hupomeno (Gk. hoop-om-EN-oh), meaning “to remain or tarry.” Jesus chose to remain on the Cross and bear the cost of sin to save humanity. Jesus focused on the future and finished the work of our redemption, bringing many to glory (Hebrews 2:10).

4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

Here, the readers are reminded that although they may have suffered great persecution (Hebrews 10:32–34), none have shed blood and died as Jesus did. None had yet become martyrs because of their confession of Jesus as their Messiah or Savior.

5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation that speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son he receiveth.

In verses 5 and 6, the author quotes Proverbs 3:11–12. The Lord disciplines those He loves. In these verses, the reader is reminded of the parent-child relationship. Undisciplined children are unloved children. The use of the Greek word paideia (pahee-DI-ah) means “to nurture” or “give instruction.” The writer is saying that one should not make light of God’s instruction but welcome it as a means of spiritual growth.

7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

Christians should view trials as a form of divine discipline. Just as a parent would discipline a child so would God deal with the sinner. No wise father or mother would allow his or her children to continue exhibiting bad behavior and not correct it. Therefore, receiving discipline can be viewed as a sign of God's fatherly love.

9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

God, here, is called "the Father of spirits" (an expression that occurs only here in the New Testament) in contrast to the human "fathers of our flesh." The writer makes a comparison between an earthly father and the Heavenly Father. The argument is that if earthly parents discipline us and we respect them for it over the long run, then we should respect our Heavenly Father even more.

10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

Verse 10 points out the difference between human and heavenly discipline. The Greek word for "profit" is *sumphero* (soom-FEHR-oh), which means "to help, to be profitable or to be expedient." Our earthly parents discipline us "for a few days," whereas God's discipline gives us an eternal benefit. Human discipline is often inconsistent and sometimes provides a temporary benefit. However, the long-term goal in God's discipline is that we might be "partakers" (Gk. *metalambano*, me-ta-lahm-BAHN-oh) of His holiness. Nothing pleases God more than children who grow to emulate Him.

11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

Present discipline seems painful because it is! The purpose of our pain is to produce Christ-like behavior. Sometimes we have to endure painful discipline. The Greek word for "exercised" is *gumnazo* (goom-NAHD-zoh), and here it implies exercise of the mind in order to endure persecution. God desires for His children to have fruitful lives, and often, that requires pain and sacrifice.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

The Discipline of the Lord
(Job 5:8-18)

TUESDAY

The Death of Sin
(Romans 6:1-11)

WEDNESDAY

The Race for the Prize
(1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

THURSDAY

The Training for Godliness
(1 Timothy 4:6-10)

FRIDAY

The Endurance of the Faithful
(James 5:7-11)

SATURDAY

The Example of Faithfulness
(1 Peter 2:18-25)

SUNDAY

The Pioneer of Faith
(Hebrews 12:1-11)