

## LIFE Bible Study: Hebrews 12:1-17

**For Discussion:** What are some important lessons you've learned through experiencing difficult times that you otherwise wouldn't have learned? How was your character affected by those experiences?

### Read Hebrews 12:1-17

**For review:** In Hebrews 11:1-40, the author presented a distinguished list of men and women who had triumphed in their faith, which included both those who had overcome their trials as well as those who faithfully endured them. These accounts together illustrate four important facets of faith: its conviction, call, cost, and commendation. Those who overcame were resolutely convinced of what God had revealed to them because of their trust in Him. This certainty led them to align their lives with their beliefs, though their choices often proved to be costly. To them, the blessings promised to those who endured were worth far more than any price they could pay, even their lives. In the following section, the author addresses several issues in detail as he continues to exhort his readers to hold fast to their faith and demonstrate the same endurance in their own trying circumstances (Heb. 10:32-36).

**What image does the author use to illustrate the struggle in which all believers are engaged for their faith, and why is this an appropriate metaphor?<sup>1</sup> How did the author advise his readers to be encouraged to persevere to the end (v.1-3)?<sup>2</sup> In what areas do you struggle to cast off the impediments to your spiritual growth (v.1)?<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>The author compares the Christian life to participating in a long-distance foot race. The exhortation to run with endurance indicates that this race should be approached as a marathon rather than a sprint.

-The challenge is the race itself (i.e., the goal is not to overtake the other runners but to finish the race at all). We are exhorted to be concerned not only with our own progress but to help others in the race as well (v.12-16, Heb. 3:12-13, 10:24-25).

<sup>1</sup>The life of faith is an extended (lifelong) undertaking that requires ongoing effort and a continual striving for endurance.

<sup>1</sup>The path is set for us, rather than of our own choosing. The terrain and the obstacles we face have been determined by God.

<sup>1</sup>Only those who make it to the end receive the prize (Heb. 10:36) => There is great glory and reward in finishing.

-We need to focus on the goal rather than the momentary struggles to guard against discouragement.

<sup>2</sup>Consider the lives of those who are witnesses of God's faithfulness to us (Heb. 11:1-40), whom God brought through even more severe circumstances. The strength and abundance of their testimony give us no excuse to give up against lesser hardships.

-The readers had suffered loss of dignity, freedom, and property (Heb. 10:32-34) but had not yet faced martyrdom (v.4).

<sup>2</sup>The author invites his readers to join him ("let us") in two responses: 1) laying aside every weight and sin and 2) running the race with endurance (i.e., cast off everything that burdens, impedes, or ensnares and, together with one another, resolutely expend themselves on the task that God has called them to).

<sup>2</sup>Look to Jesus who endured extreme hostility and the *shame* of the cross (v.2-3). He was able to suffer through more rejection than anyone ever would because of the joy that was set before Him of the glory He would receive.

-As the founder and perfecter of our faith, He is both the originator and the pioneer/forerunner for those who would come after Him – He is simultaneously the example to follow and the goal to pursue.

<sup>3</sup>What are the weights and sins that make it difficult for you to take steps towards God? The race has already begun for believers, and these are already taking a toll on your life. The longer a person delays in dealing with these, the greater their cumulative detrimental effect will be.

**The author reminds his readers that the hardships they were facing for their faith are because God is treating them as sons (Deut. 8:5). What is the significance of being counted by God as a son (v.5-6, Heb. 2:10-12)?<sup>1</sup> How is the discipline of God similar to the discipline of men?<sup>2</sup> How are they different?<sup>3</sup>**

**The Father of spirits (v.9) is the model that our earthly fathers are to emulate, but they all fail to live up to His standards, sometimes in serious ways. This does not detract from who God is as He always perfectly loves and disciplines the way a father should.**

<sup>1</sup>God loves and receives those He counts as sons. As such, they become subject to His discipline => Rather than being a sign of His rejection, discipline is the proof of His acceptance (v.6).

<sup>1</sup>The sons of God are members of God's household and are brothers of Christ.

<sup>1</sup>Being a son has special meaning for Jewish readers. Likeness of character and familial association have greater bearing on sonship in Old Testament thinking than biological paternity (Rom. 4:1-25). Being brought into God's family involves being made like Him so that we can be faithful representatives of His household.

-“The true son of Abraham is the one who has Abraham's faith, not the one who has Abraham's genes.” –D.A. Carson

<sup>2</sup>Both God and men discipline their sons (v.7-8).

<sup>2</sup>Both apply discipline with the intention of doing good to their sons (v.10).

<sup>2</sup>The discipline of both is momentarily painful but can have a positive outcome for those who receive it properly (v.11).

<sup>2</sup>Discipline from both should lead to greater respect for the one in authority (v.9).

<sup>3</sup>The discipline of men lasts only for a short time before we outgrow it, but we remain subject to God's discipline throughout all our lives.

<sup>3</sup>Men can only discipline "as it seemed best to them" (i.e., as they see fit with their fallible reasoning and methods), but God objectively disciplines "for our good" (He is perfect in what He purposes and in how He achieves His will).

**What is God's goal in disciplining us (v.10-11)?<sup>1</sup> How might viewing the hard circumstances that we encounter on account of our faith as God's discipline affect our perception or experience of them?<sup>2</sup> How should we respond in these situations to receive their intended benefit (v.12-14)?<sup>3</sup> What have the trials you faced revealed to you about what the values and priorities of your heart are?<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>God's goal is our growth and sanctification, that we share in His holiness (v.10, 1 Pet. 1:14-16) and yield the fruit of righteousness and peace (v.11, Isa. 32:17, Jas. 3:17-18).

-By growing in holiness, we are better able to see God (v.14b), and by being subject to Him, we have life (v.9).

<sup>2</sup>We need to view discipline properly so that it does not weary us (v.3, 5) or lead to resentment (Eph. 6:4, Col. 3:21).

<sup>2</sup>It helps us to reframe suffering, to see it as purposeful, and to pursue what God wants to accomplish through it.

-Discipline is both corrective and instructive (**Prov. 13:24**, 22:15, 23:13-14).

-God is able to work through all things, whether it be trials to train us, rebuke to correct us, or any other form of hardship to teach us (Rom. 8:28).

<sup>2</sup>It assures us that we belong to God. How we turn out matters to Him, His discipline shows His commitment to us (Rev. 3:19).

<sup>3</sup>We are to take God's discipline seriously (i.e., not lightly – v.5) knowing that He uses it to train us to be His children => It is not random/arbitrary, meaningless, malicious, or out of indifference, but out of love.

<sup>3</sup>Receive it humbly, with patient endurance, and in recognition of the One who is ultimately giving it.

<sup>3</sup>Make straight paths (i.e., move with focus towards the goal and be an example of upright conduct – v.13) so that those who are lame (i.e., wavering in their faith – **1 Kings 18:21**) can be strengthened rather than harmed.

<sup>3</sup>Drooping hands and weak knees indicate exhaustion and discouragement => Renew your determination to press on to the goal.

<sup>3</sup>Strive to create peace within the community of believers and for holiness so that there are no divisions, but unity of purpose.

<sup>4</sup>God uses hardships both to refine and to reveal. The areas where we feel particularly hard hit by trials or where loss is especially difficult to accept may be places where God is directing our attention so that we can give these things to Him.

**The author concludes this section with a list of three types of people who are at risk of succumbing to weariness. He does this so that his readers can be watchful for them, both to care for them and for the community overall (v.15-17). What are these three categories?<sup>1</sup> How can the author's earlier exhortations to self-examination and encouragement be applied to care for others?<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Someone who fails to obtain the grace of God (v.15, **Heb. 4:1**) – Someone who makes a claim to faith but is not true to it. They miss out on God's blessings through a fault of their own (E.g., A hardened heart).

<sup>1</sup>Someone who becomes a "root of bitterness" (v.15, **Deut. 29:18**) – Someone who turns away from God, which can, in turn, negatively affect many others. This bitterness is malignant and defiling (the opposite of holy).

<sup>1</sup>Someone who becomes sexually immoral or unholy like Esau (v.16-17) – Esau is the example of someone who fails to discern things of true value. His birthright had little worth in his eyes, so it was easy for him to surrender it. He degraded the promise of God by valuing immediate bodily relief over greater spiritual blessing (Gen. 25:29-34, 27:34-40).

<sup>1</sup>In contrast to Esau who chose lasting rejection from the blessing that was his in order to alleviate his temporary discomfort, Jesus chose the temporary pain and shame of the cross for lasting joy and glory at the right hand of the throne of God (v.2).

<sup>2</sup>Be a community that is consistent in living the life that God calls us to live in order to run the race well (encourage by example).

<sup>2</sup>Point one another to Jesus and to the spiritual truths that are given to us for our edification and endurance.

## Reflection and application

In an endurance race, the runners do well to ensure that they carry nothing that will be a hindrance to their progress. Over long distances, even a minor burden can have an incremental impact and eventually become a severe detriment. Sin slows us down, trips us up, and keeps us from responding appropriately to the discipline that God uses to grow our faith and train our character. Though initially unpleasant, we can have confidence that God stands sovereignly behind each trial He employs. In His perfectly measured discipline, He does not allow us to be tempted or strained beyond what we can bear (1 Cor. 10:13), but what He does allow is done as a loving father to a son. Let us look to Christ and the faithful multitude who came before us and receive encouragement to endure so that we too can one day say with Paul that we fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:7). Let us also bear in mind that this race of faith is neither solitary nor adversarial and run alongside one another to help each other cast off the worthless burdens that remain in our lives and pursue Christ with renewed determination, vigour, and hope.