

Hebrews

Lesson 8 Chapter 12

Leader Guide

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Lesson 8

Hebrews 12

Fix your eyes on Jesus

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2

Prayers

Introduction

Chapter 12 follows the groundwork the author laid in chapter 11. The theme of chapter 11 was the great faith of the patriarchs. By faith, they left all they had to pursue God's promises and gained an eternal inheritance. By faith, they endured all manner of hardship but gained salvation. In chapter 12, the author turns his attention back to the Hebrews and poses the question – what about your faith in the face of the hardship you are suffering? He encourages them to look at their suffering as the Lord's discipline. They should be joyful to suffer for Christ. This is a topic that requires great discernment.

Read Hebrews 12:1-6

^{Heb 12:1} Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

^{Heb 12:2} Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ^{Heb 12:3} Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. ^{Heb 12:4} In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ^{Heb 12:5} And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:

“My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ^{Heb 12:6} because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.” [Proverbs 3:11-12,

Discuss

1. Verse 1 uses the allegory of the race for life in Christ. Sport was a major part of Greco-Roman life. Olympics games began in 776 BC, and the largest Roman sports arenas were 437 yards long (think Ben Hur) – 138 yards longer than Houston's NRG Stadium! What comes to your mind in the picture of the successful runner and the runner entangled with hindrances (ESV translates “hindrances” as “weights”)?

The successful runner is fit and trim, in excellent condition, running with power and form joyfully.

The entangled runner is falling over other runners or is somehow caught in vines and is tied up; he will not finish the race

2. The race requires preparation, participation and perseverance. What do each of these activities look like in Christian life?

a. Preparation

Preparation is in two parts

- 1. Laying aside every weight to things that bind – discontinuing sinful habits**
- 2. Worship, Bible study – personal and corporate, prayer**

b. Participation (service and action)

Visiting the sick, prison ministry, helping neighbors, mission trips, meeting the needs of others in the love of Christ

Luther – the holiness of work and the priesthood of all believers – all believers are called to God’s mediators of his love and grace in whatever place of responsibility they are given. (Holiness is not the work of the clergy)

c. Perseverance

Perseverance is continuing to prepare and participate in the face of weariness or criticism, perhaps worse.

d. Compare a runner’s perseverance to yours.

After a few laughs about being out of shape, steer the conversation to a runner’s perseverance through the pain of training and disappointment of defeat. Our pain is more likely to be emotional as we see friends and family lost, not receptive, or hostile to the gospel

Sometimes, sin defeats us. Sin has a moment in our lives. We confess and begin again with the assurance that God forgives us through Christ’s reconciliation. In his devotional “Abide in Christ,” Andrew Murray had great insight into being defeated by sin: Sometimes we abide in Christ day by day. Other times when pressed hard by sin’s temptation, we can only abide hour by hour. In the darkest times, we abide moment by moment

3. In verses 2-3, the author focuses on the suffering of Jesus at the hands of sinful men and compares it to their suffering. How was this a powerful comparison for the Hebrews?

Christ suffered at the hands of religious Jews – the same people who urged the Jewish communities to persecute their neighbors who had become Christian. Persecution began in Jerusalem. People fled, bringing the gospel into an ever-widening circle.

4. Verses 5-6 refer to the Lord's discipline, rebuke and punishment. It would be easy to view any hardship as punishment for sin, so how do you discern between the Lord's guidance and any kind of hardship?

I don't think I can distinguish between discipline, rebuke, and punishment. Sometimes it is clear that something bad happened due to sin – I got a speeding ticket, or someone got angry with me because I said something inconsiderate. But sometimes bad things - illness, loss, random violence - happen because of bacteria or a virus, and the evil in people, but are not the act of God. I have an easier time seeing God's providence and guidance directing me in the middle of loss and failure. His provision during my loss is the theme of my life, whether in my career path, personal relationships, or health. God has been faithful and provided abundantly in my failures, opening ever better opportunities.

In Jesus' day, people believed that wealth, health, and good fortune resulted from holy living and God's favor. Sickness and poverty were God's curse for sin. This attitude made people judgmental rather than loving toward the poor or needy. Jesus continually taught against the perils of wealth and ministered to the poor and sick.

5. What is the goal of the Lord's discipline and any manner of suffering? See 1 Peter 1:6-7

^{1Pe 1:6} In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ^{1Pe 1:7} These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

God's discipline is always good and for our benefit. God does not test us with evil but can use the evil of others to strengthen our faith. Reference Romans 8:15–18.

Ro 8:15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

Ro 8:16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Ro 8:17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs —heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Ro 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

6. An athlete learns the benefits of discipline through the coach's training plan and encouragement.

a. How does your view of discipline change from childhood to adulthood?

As a child, discipline is usually associated with punishment. Not always. My one-year-old nephew, Joseph, has already learned to fold his hands and close his eyes to pray after the evening meal due to the good discipline of his parents and siblings. As an adult, we recognize the benefits of discipline.

b. What are some spiritual disciplines you desire

As an adult, I wish I had more discipline to do the things that are good for me and avoid the things that are bad for me! There are many areas in my life I desire greater discipline and maturity. Here are just a few disciplines to grow in:

Discipline in my mind and purity

Discipline in prayer and bible meditation

Discipline in speech

Discipline as a husband, father, and son

Discipline in fellowship with others

Discipline of work

Discipline in the stewardship of time, talents, and finances.

Read Hebrews 12: 7-17

Heb 12:7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?

Heb 12:8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

Heb 12:9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!

Heb 12:10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.

Heb 12:11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Heb 12:12 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.

Heb 12:13 "Make level paths for your feet,"^{54z} so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

Heb 12:14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. Heb 12:15 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

Heb 12:16 See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Heb 12:17 Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.

7. In verses 7-17, the writer compares and contrasts God's discipline to a respected father.
 - a. How are they similar?

Both discipline us for our benefit – and we probably didn't like it at the time!

- b. How are they different?

God's discipline is perfect, whereas human fathers must rely on their judgment, which is often faulty. Our earthly fathers' goals are not necessarily directed to our eternal salvation. Sometimes they merely want to keep peace in the home and help us grow up to be good people. But God's discipline always has an eternal goal in mind.

8. The link between sexual immorality and Esau is not apparent but is referenced because Esau married Canaanite women who were a source of grief to Isaac (Ge 26:35). He later repented and married wives from Ishmael's (Abraham's son of the maidservant) tribe. The story of Esau and Jacob is found in Genesis 25-36. The story is complex and entails Jacob's deception to rob Esau of his birthright and blessing from their father, Isaac, who loved Esau. Even though Jacob secured his blessing by deception, God's covenant remained with him, not with Esau. What was the point of the author's example of Esau?

Esau gave up his rights and blessings for a meal – short-term comfort and was later filled with regret. Likewise, the Hebrews are considering giving up their eternal blessing through Christ so they might be more comfortable in the present.

9. Given the background of Hebrews, what difficulties did the Hebrews face to be holy and live at peace with all people?
 - a. Fellow Jews

Their fellow Jews persecuting them were likely highly religious but filled with hate toward Christians and likely to stone them if encouraged by Jewish leadership (Saul/Paul).

- b. Greeks / Gentiles

If the Hebrews wanted acceptance, they could easily turn to the Gentiles. The Gentiles posed the threat of idolatry and sexual immorality associated with pagan idols and temple prostitutes. They would gladly let the Hebrews into their company and their lifestyle.

10. Discuss how the story of Esau illustrates how God's covenant in the OT was both similar and dissimilar to God's promise of the new covenant made with the Hebrews and us.
 - a. Similar

God chooses

Covenant by faith

Decisions have eternal consequences

b. Dissimilar

Esau did not receive his birthright after repentance, God's eternal covenant remained with Isaac. Unlike with Esau, God promises to forgive and forget our sins.

Read Hebrews 12:18-28

Heb 12:18 You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; ¹⁹ to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, ²⁰ because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned."

Heb 12:21 The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

Heb 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Heb 12:25 See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?

Heb 12:26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." [Haggai 2:6, speaking of the glory to be returned to the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem during Persian rule]

Heb 12:27 The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

Heb 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our "God is a consuming fire." [Deuteronomy 4:24, from the 10 commandments]

11. In verses 22-14, what is the spiritual inheritance the Hebrews have through their faith in Christ?

Eternal life with the living God in Mount Zion. The very thing they sought as Jews.

Forgiveness – made perfect before God through Jesus' blood

12. What qualities of God does the writer mention that we should remember, so we worship him with reverence and awe?

Verses 18-21 **God's majesty and awe – Moses shaking with fear**

Verse 22 **God's glory – heavenly Jerusalem**

Verse 23 **God's as judge**

Verse 24 **Jesus as our mediator**

Verse 26 **God power – shaking heavens and earth**

Verse 29 **God's jealousy for Israel's holiness – no other gods, he is consuming fire that burns away anything unholy**

Closing Prayer and Blessing