

SERMON NOTES: Hebrews 12:3-17

Question: “How can we overcome the desire to quit the race?”

Hebrews 12:1–17 (NIV84)

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. 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. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

FOCUS ON THE RACE

- LIGHTEN THE LOAD
- RUN WITH PERSEVERANCE
- FOLLOW THE LEADER

4 In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 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,
6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves,
and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

7 Endure hardship as discipline; **God is treating you as sons.** For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 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! 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. 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.**

EMBRACE THE DISCIPLINE

- GOD IS TREATING US AS HIS CHILDREN
- GOD HAS OUR GOOD IN MIND
- GOD’S DISCIPLINE IS WORTH THE PAIN

12 Therefore, **strengthen** your feeble arms and weak knees. **13** “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

14 Make every effort to **live in peace with all men and to be holy**; without holiness no one will see the Lord. **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**. **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. **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.

WORK THE PROGRAM

- **EXCHANGE WEAKNESS FOR STRENGTH**
- **WATCH YOUR FORM**
- **KEEP TRACK OF YOUR PROGRESS**

CONNECT GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE: Hebrews 12:3 - 17

OPENING

- In your group, can you recall a few examples of how a disadvantage actually proved to be a decisive advantage?
- *(Leader's note: Bruce's point here is that the Hebrews thought they were severely disadvantaged due to life's circumstances—it was getting harder to live as a believer in Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews wants to remind them that the struggle is worth it! Don't give up! He even goes on to say that the hardship they are enduring "produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it," referring to it as discipline and strengthening instead of difficulty.)*
- *(Example: In the movie, The Lord Of The Rings, Frodo Baggins is entrusted with the responsibility of destroying the Ring, which has incredible destructive powers over Middle Earth. Frodo is a Hobbit, a much smaller being than most in Middle Earth. However, though smallness is usually considered a hindrance, it works to his advantage often, as he alludes enemies undetected due to his size. Joni Eareckson Tada is a well-known Christian author, speaker, artist, and charitable giver among many other things. She is also a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the shoulders down from a swimming accident around the 4th grade. Though all would consider this as a huge disadvantage, God has used her disabilities to change thousands of lives around the world. Could this be an example of how God uses the weak things of this world to shame the strong, and the foolish things to shame the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27)? The writer of Hebrews wants his readers to understand this truth to transform their challenging circumstances into opportunities for God's power.)*

GOING DEEPER

- Why does the author want his readers to see hardship as discipline? What reasons does he provide in this week's verses?
 - For leaders: 1) discipline reveals we're a part of the family (vs. 7), 2) discipline is done by a loving father (vs. 9), 3) discipline is for our good (vs. 10), 4) discipline produces long term results (vs. 11)
- What are the possible positive outcomes of discipline in our lives? In what ways has discipline proved vital for your life?
 - *(Leaders: Perhaps it is waking up at a certain time, or devoting certain parts of your day to reading God's words, stimulating your brain by additional literature, or taking care of your body with healthy food and good physical exercise. How have these things proven helpful in your life? Were they always pleasant in the moment? How did you keep the discipline going?)*
 - *According to verses 14-17, living in peace with everyone, ridding our lives of bitterness, sexual immorality, and godlessness are also actions of discipline that will help us develop perseverance in our faith and fruit in the community of believers. All good discipline involves saying "no" to some things in order to say "yes" to others. What things do we need to say "no" to, in order to say "yes" to God's purposes?*
- What is the link between being strengthened through discipline and healing (see verse 12-13)?

- *(Leaders: Unless we are strengthened and refined, we cannot expect to be healed from the bad habits that can destroy our lives. God, contrary to the American dream, is not as concerned with our happiness (though He longs for us to have joy), as much as He is concerned with our holiness—to be made like Him! Only when we are like Him are we both ultimately satisfied and complete, and also useful in His redemptive purposes in this world!)*
- In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell tells the strange story of Christopher Langan, a genius with a staggering IQ of 195. (For some perspective, Einstein's IQ was 150). During high school, Langan could ace any foreign language test by skimming the textbook 2-3 minutes before the exam. He got a perfect score on his SAT, even though at one point he fell asleep. But Langan failed to use his exceptional gifts and ended up working on a horse farm in rural Missouri. According to Gladwell, Langan never had a community to help him capitalize on his gifts. Gladwell summarizes the story of Langan in one sentence: "*[Langan] had to make his way alone, and no one—not rock stars, not professional athletes, not software billionaires, and not even geniuses—ever makes it alone.*"
 - *Malcolm Gladwell, Outliers (Little, Brown and Company, 2008), p. 115*
- In Hebrews 12:1-17, what help does God provide that will keep us in the race?

CHALLENGE

- What are some things that are weighing you down in your life of faith? How does the teaching we received in Hebrews address these issues?
 - *(Leader's guidance: Be exceptionally sensitive to these issues. Make sure no one tries to either provide easy answers to complex issues people could share, or tries to one-up someone else's problems with their own circumstances. We do not want anyone to feel that what they are going through is illegitimate or unimportant. Help them know, more than anything, that you care and that you are with them. Give them encouragement and support)*
- Discuss a few ways to build our endurance to run the race of faith?
 - *Examples of spiritual disciplines: Prayer, Scripture reading and reflection, journaling, service, meeting with other believers regularly, singing praises to God together with other believers, fasting from food or others consumption, even taking moments to sit in silence and solitude to hear God's voice more clearly.*
- What was the primary reason Jesus persevered? How does your answer relate to Hebrews 11:1?
 - *Jesus persevered in order to achieve the joy of authoring and perfecting our faith, by "enduring the cross, scorning its shame" (12:2). His mission was to do the will of His Father and accomplish our salvation. This is what motivated His perseverance. Are we so satisfied with pleasing God? Are we so selflessly motivated for the sake of others?*