

## Hebrews 12:1-13

Last week we finished our study of the heroes of faith in Chapter 11.

No doubt the writer of Hebrews was encouraging those who were teetering on the edge of apostasy to step out by faith and claim Christ as their Saviour.

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But there was another important issue that the Hebrew Christians needed to settle, and these heroes of faith would have been an encouragement to them also.

At that time, the Hebrew believers were still very much involved with the old ways.

For instance, in Acts 21 we read that when Paul visited Jerusalem and declared to

James and the elders that God had used his ministry to convert the Gentiles, they were glad of the news, but still feared that Paul would fall into disfavour with the Christians at Jerusalem.

Acts 21:20-22 **"And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:**

**<sup>21</sup> And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.**

**<sup>22</sup> What is it therefore? the multitude**

**must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come."**

Unfortunately at that time, Paul caved in to the pressure, and sponsored a Jewish vow to defuse the situation.

Yes, it was a transitional period, but it should not last forever.

So the writer of Hebrews emphasizes the fact that it was now time, in fact, past time for the Hebrew Christians to separate themselves from Judaism.

They who had confessed Jesus Christ as their Saviour needed to take their place outside the camp with their rejected Lord.

For those who had acknowledged His Messiahship and Saviourhood, it was essential for them to disassociate themselves

from a system which had rejected and crucified their Lord.

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And also, God's judgment was coming.

It would not be long before destruction would fall upon Jerusalem and those who were linked with the temple service.

So it was time to step out by faith.

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The first part of Hebrews emphasizes the spiritual. It is a heavenly scene.

But now, as we enter the last section, we find that it emphasizes the practical.

The writer of Hebrews had carefully shown them that the Old Testament sacrifices had been completed in Christ, and the old economy was now ready to pass away.

Then, he encourages them, by the heroes of faith in their own Jewish history, to walk by faith.

Now, these spiritual truths should produce down-to-earth results.

God's truth in our heads and hearts should activate our hands and our feet.

John 13:17 says, **"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."**

The last section of this epistle, quite naturally, emphasizes the practical.

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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."**

I believe this "**great a cloud of witnesses**"  
are those Old Testament saints in  
Chapter 11 who have given witness to  
God's faithfulness.

They were the ones who were down on the  
racetrack running the race of life, and  
the Hebrew believers, and you and I  
also, are those who are sitting in the  
grandstand watching them.

They ran well, and they ran the race by  
faith.

By the world's standards, some in that race  
would have been classified as  
successful.

They won battles, stopped the mouths of  
lions, and put the enemy to flight.

But there were others whom the world would  
have considered to be failures.

They suffered at the hands of their enemies.

But, although they suffered, and some were slain by the sword, they were heroes of the faith as much as the others.

And all of them, by their example, have encouraged us to walk and run by faith.

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V 1 **"---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,"**

There are a lot of good analogies, to the Christian life found in scripture.

The Christian, as a soldier, is to stand.

As a believer, he is to walk, and as an athlete, he is to run the race.

So, we are to stand, and walk, and run, and one day when Christ returns for His own, we will fly!

However, the analogy used here is that of running a race.

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In the earlier part of the book of Hebrews, we read about the perils of drifting that led eventually into apostasy, just being hearers of the word, drifting along, and doing nothing about God's salvation.

Now, in this part of the epistle, the writer is speaking to believers about the perils of remaining stationery.

He admonishes them to *get into* the race, to get moving.

One of the greatest dangers in the Christian life is the peril of just remaining stationery, and doing nothing.

Yes, the problem with many Christians is that they do not go on with God.



They get saved, give a testimony, and that's  
all they ever do.

They never maintain a serious study of the  
Word of God, and that is essential for  
growth.

But, they just remain stationery.

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They're like the little girl who fell out of  
bed one night.

When she began to cry, her mother rushed in  
and said, "Honey, how did you fall out  
of bed?"

The little girl replied, "I think I stayed  
too close to the place where I got in."

That can be the problem with some  
Christians.

They stumble and falter and fail because  
they are staying too close to the place  
where they got in.

The Christian life should be a race. We  
need to make progress.

We should not remain stationery.

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When the children of Israel left Egypt and  
walked through the Red Sea, and came  
out on the other side, they were no  
longer slaves.

Not only did the Red Sea separate them from  
their place of slavery, but it also  
destroyed their masters.

By the time they got to the other side,  
Pharaoh and his host were dead.

But Israel still needed to keep going.

They needed to progress. They needed to get  
to the Promised Land.

And they needed to get there as soon as  
possible.

Most of them never made it.

The wilderness journey should have only taken a short time, and during that time God would have made slaves into soldiers.

Yes, they needed to run the race, and they needed to progress, not go around in circles.

But they remained in the wilderness because of unbelief.

Now there was no longer any danger that they would be forced back into slavery. Their slave masters were dead.

The danger was not that they would be forced back into Egypt. The danger was that they would *desire* to go back into Egypt.

And they *did* desire that very thing.

Numbers 11:5 **"We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the**

**cucumbers, and the melons, and the  
leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:**

**6 But now our soul is dried away:  
there is nothing at all, beside this  
manna, before our eyes."**

So Christians cannot be lost. They cannot  
be made slaves again.

But, if they do not progress, if they do not  
run the race, if they "stay too close  
to the place where they got in," they  
will stumble and falter and fail.

They will not be lost, but they will lose  
the race.

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When Hebrews was written, the Greek Olympics  
were popular, as they still are today.  
It is a well-known fact that in any race you  
don't carry extra weight if you want to  
win.

V 1 "---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."

Here in this verse, the weight referred to  
is not necessarily sin, but anything  
that will hinder us.

There are a lot of things that can take up  
our time, our affections, and our  
energy that are not sin.

So, can we engage in these things?

Can we allow them to take over our life?

Sure we can, if we don't want to win.

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Let's go on.

Verse 1 not only speaks of weights, but also

**"the sin which doth so easily beset  
us."**

You will notice that it does not say sin but  
**"the sin."**

Now there are besetting sins that are  
particular to each one of us, and these  
need to be laid aside. There's no  
doubt about that.

However, this verse begins with the word  
**"Wherefore,"** which ties it into the  
previous chapter.

So the sin referred to here could easily  
have been the sin of unbelief.

The Old Testament saints in Chapter 11 won  
the victory by faith, but the sin that  
will lose the victory every time is the  
sin of unbelief.

And when it concerns God, unbelief is just  
the lack of faith.

There is nothing that will hold us back in  
the race of life more than unbelief.

Do you remember a race we used to run called  
the bag race?

We would try to race each other with our  
feet and legs inside a sack.

It was hilarious, wasn't it, because we were  
so awkward?

Unbelief is the sack around our feet that  
holds us back in the race of life.

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The last part of verse 1 says, "**and let us  
run with patience the race that is set  
before us.**"

The Christian race is not usually a 100-yard  
dash.

It is a long-distance run, and quite often  
it is also an obstacle course.

We need patience to go the distance, and we  
need faith in our Lord Jesus Christ to  
overcome the obstacles.

Faith and patience are the conquering  
graces, and by God's grace, we need to  
cultivate them.

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Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:24, "**Know ye  
not that they which run in a race run  
all, but one receiveth the prize? So  
run, that ye may obtain.**"

He also rebuked some Christians for getting  
out of the race, by saying, "**Ye did run  
well; who did hinder you that ye should  
not obey the truth?**" Galatians 5:7

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So the Christian life is a race, and all the  
faithful in Chapter 11 are our  
encouragers.

But there is One Person who is a greater  
example and a greater encourager than  
all of them put together.



It is our Lord Jesus Christ.

He does not encourage us with far-off theoretical theories, but has run the race Himself on the dusty roads where we dwell.

As we run and feel the effects of fatigue and adversity like a strong headwind blowing against us, we need to look ahead on the path to see our Lord.

V 1-2    **"--and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,**

**<sup>2</sup> 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."**

He is **"the author and finisher of our faith."** He is the **"Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end."**

When Christ was on the cross, they mocked him by saying, **"He trusted in God; let Him deliver him now, if He will have him."**

It was a cruel derision, but in it they uttered a profound truth--**"He trusted in God."**

Yes, His earthly pilgrimage was a walk of faith, not depending on His own powers, but trusting in His Heavenly Father.

Can we not trust in God also?

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And He is the **"finisher of our faith."**

He is the fulfillment of all scriptural promises and prophecies.

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And He makes the rules of the race we run  
in.

He is the Judge and the Rewarder of our  
faith.

He determines who has reached the mark, and  
from Him, and in Him, we have our  
reward.

Can there be any reward, can there be any  
trophy that surpasses His "**Well done,  
thou good and faithful servant**"?

Can there be any joy greater than receiving  
a crown, and then having the privilege  
of casting it at His feet?

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As we look at Jesus, we are conscious of the  
fact that He also ran for a reward.

"-- **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."**

He ran the race for the joy of having His  
own redeemed ones with Him in glory.  
His joy was the Shepherd's joy.

**"Those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and  
none of them is lost."**

He went through the bitter anguish of the  
cross, despising the shame (for the  
cross was a shameful death) and won the  
prize.

In response to all that He has done, the  
Father has seated Him, the only God-man  
in heaven, at His own right hand.

He has run the race, He has won the prize,  
and He has gained the victory.

And you know what? His victory is ours also  
as we recognize our union with Him!

Our race may be long, but not as long as  
His.

Our race may be hard, but not as hard as  
His, and we are already on the victory  
side.

So, **"let us run with patience the race that  
is set before us,**

<sup>2</sup> **Looking unto Jesus the author and  
finisher of our faith."**

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

The whole object of scripture, from Genesis  
to Revelation, is to **"consider him."**

The Old Testament types and prophecies were  
all about Him.

The New Testament is all about Him, His work, His bride, His kingdom, and His coming again.

We need to read and meditate on God's Word if we want to **"grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."**

So in this verse, we are admonished to **"consider him"** as we run the race.

And what is the reason for doing so?

It is a sustaining force **"lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."**

In the hour of discouragement when we feel like crying out with Jacob--**"all these things are again me"**--we need to **"consider him"** who knew such grief as we shall never know.

But we also need to consider the fact that Jesus now sits as the Victor in glory.

So as we run the race, we need to "**consider him,**" to make Him our heart's delight, and these meditations will lift us up above the cares and griefs of this present moment.

Paul said, "**For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.**"

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At times we may be tempted to think that no one else has suffered such grief as we have.

But for most of us, that is not true.

And it was not true of the Hebrews who received this epistle.

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

Verse 3 asked us to consider Christ, but now in verse 4, we are to consider those who chose martyrdom rather than compromise with iniquity.

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And then the Hebrew believers were reminded that in the long run, chastening was for their good.

V 5-6 **"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:**

**<sup>6</sup> For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."**

**---"And ye have forgotten."**



The writer of Hebrews wasn't giving them new information, but simply reminding them of a lesson that they had forgotten. Yes, at one time they knew that chastening was profitable, because that lesson was taught in their own Old Testament scriptures.

Proverbs 3:11-12 **"My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction:**

**<sup>12</sup> For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."**

Also, Psalm 94:12 teaches the same principle, that proper chastening is for our good.

**"Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law."**

But watch out if you chasten your children  
today.

In our present mixed up society, you can end  
up in court for spanking your children.  
But the Lord still does it His way, and it's  
the right way.

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

You see, chastening is not necessarily  
punishment.

It is rather instruction by discipline.

It is the divine method used for our  
education.

And by the way, instruction by discipline is  
a method that is rejected by our halls  
of learning today.

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Now, education can only happen when there is learning.

So in the final analysis, education is the responsibility of the student.

The Christian's attitude in regard to the Lord's chastening will determine the success of his *education*.

First of all, there is the possibility that he will despise it.

That is, he might harden himself against God and refuse to learn the lessons which the Lord's chastening was designed to teach him.

Before we contemplate that attitude, we need to answer Job's question in Job 9: 4--  
**"Who hath hardened himself against him,  
and hath prospered?"**

Secondly, one may faint under the chastening.

That is, the person may feel sorry for himself.

This type of attitude will also miss the blessing.

So our attitude towards God's chastening is very important.

V 7-10 **"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?**

**<sup>8</sup> But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.**

**<sup>9</sup> 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?**

**<sup>10</sup> 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."**

Here we see a comparison between the chastening of our Heavenly Father and that of our earthly parents.

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

Then verse 8 goes on to say that if there is no chastening, it is a sign that we are not really in God's family at all.

You see, God disciplines His own children on a daily basis, but He often reserves the judgment of the unjust until the Day of Judgment.

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Then in verses 9 and 10, we see an example of parental discipline on the human level.

When our fathers disciplined us, we paid attention and obeyed, and yet our earthly fathers were not perfect.

They corrected us because they thought it was best at the time, or because we were irritating them, and in most cases they were right.

How much more should we respect God's discipline, for He only chastens us for our profit, and He is never arbitrary in His dealings with us?

His ways are perfect.

Verse 11 tells us that God, in His wisdom, is willing to expose us to trials.

These can be very distressing at the time, but **"nevertheless afterwards"** His chastening will yield **"the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."**

We have talked about two attitudes towards discipline that are unprofitable.

Here in verse 11, we see the proper attitude towards God's chastening.

V 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."**

If we are **"exercised thereby,"** if we honestly take heed and judge ourselves in the presence of God, we will develop rich fruit in our lives, fruit that will be to the praise and glory of God. So our attitude is the determining factor in the outcome of God's chastening.

V 12 **"Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees."**

In verse 12, the writer is returning to the second attitude toward chastening, which is the *I'm feeling sorry for myself* attitude.

In this verse, I can just see a little boy standing in front of his mother.

His parent is trying to correct him, but he is not learning.

Instead, he is standing there with his hands drooping down, his knees sagging, and with a sad expression on his face.

He is not repenting. He is not feeling sorry for his sin. He is feeling sorry for himself.

I think as a little boy, I was like that sometimes.

And I guess I must have also pouted, for I distinctly remember my mother saying,



"I could hang a teakettle on that lip."  
Not exactly what I wanted to hear.

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Verse 13 says, **"And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed."**

There are two ways you could take this verse, and I'm not sure which one is right.

If you have twisted your knee going down a rough path, you should keep away from that path until your knee is healed.

So the lesson is, if you have a besetting sin, stay away from that temptation.

But this verse could also teach us that you should walk a straight course lest you tempt a weaker brother to get off of the path.

I suppose they both teach a good lesson.

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So what have we learned about the Lord's chastening?

What should our attitude be?

Many Christians take what I call the scientific view, the view that the world takes: All troubles have natural causes and have no message for us.

*That's just how the little ball bounces,* we say.

With that attitude, we often fail to learn the lessons that our Heavenly Father is trying to teach us.

Of course, we can take the other extreme that says *everything that is troublesome is a divine punishment.*

Actually, neither of these views is correct.

The correct one, for the man of faith, is the view that everything that happens in his life is from the hand of God, even when he shares the normal afflictions of mankind.

God does chasten us for our disobedience, but all afflictions are not necessarily punishment.

He does not always save us *from* our troubles, but He desires to save us *in* our troubles, and by the experience, we are made aware of our own weakness and His sustaining power.

We may not understand it all now, but when we stand at last in His presence, we will thank Him for the path He has chosen for us.

We will trust and thank Him then, but how much better it would be if we could do

that now. We would have more peace in our lives, and we could sympathize so much better with our brethren who are going through deep trials.

Our mountaintop experiences are a blessing, but it is often in the valley that we learn and grow.

**"My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him."**