

9 The Superiority of Christ

"A Faith that Endures"

Hebrews 12

Introduction

Today, we will learn how to apply the lessons of Christ's overcoming victory to our own areas of struggle and see how we too can overcome and be victorious through the power of God's Holy Spirit.

Already, in this series, we have found Christ to be:

- Better than the Prophets
- Better than the Angels
- Better than Moses and the Law
- Better than Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood
- Better than the Old Testament Covenants
- Better than the Faith of the Old Testament Saints

In Chapter 12, the writer challenges us to develop the faith that endures. The author begins with the phrase, "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses." It's as if the author envisions these previous champions of faith as spectators from the heavens, cheering us on as we endeavor to overcome present challenges and difficulties as though we were in an athletic competition. As we reflect on the sacrifices and endurance of the saints of other ages, they become witnesses *to* us of faith and perseverance. Hebrews chapter 11 is like looking at a trophy case and recognizing the incredible achievements of past participants.

The message of chapter 12 is to lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily snares us. But it's not always sin. Sometimes it's the burden and weight of situations and circumstances that become hindrances to keep us from running the race God has for us. Choices are not always between right and wrong, but between something that may hinder us and something that may not.

Many times we choose to sin even though the sin could easily be avoided. Some sins are simply enjoyable, but they too must be set aside. Some sins are beguiling and easily ensnare us. And some sins can be especially harmful and downright dangerous. The Hebrew writer admonishes us to lay all sin aside! The Holy Spirit's appeal is for us to lay aside every weight and every sin. And let us run our race with patience and endurance. We need to finish what we have begun in Jesus Christ - a race that is set before us.

God has set before you a race, and only you can run it. It will involve your effort and commitment. God wants us to run and finish the race! In Acts 20:24, Paul pictures himself as a runner who has a race to finish, and nothing will keep him from finishing the race. Each of us has our own race to run. But God calls upon all of his followers to finish their race with joy. Victory is only achieved by those who endure.

The word "race" is the original Greek is the word *agon*, a word used for conflict or struggle of many kinds. It is a favorite word of Paul. He uses it in Philippians 1:30, Colossians 2:1, 1 Thessalonians 2:2, 1 Timothy 6:12, 2 Timothy 4:7. As followers of Christ, we are engaged in the conflict and the struggle to bring people into a relationship of faith in Jesus Christ. That is our mission! And endurance is needed to run that race.

William Barclay says, "Endurance does not mean the patience which sits down and accepts things but the patience which masters them . . . It is a determination, unhurrying and yet undelaying, which goes steadily on and refuses to be deflected."

Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of this kind of endurance, and that is where the Hebrew writer starts.

I. Look to Jesus

Verse 2 says, "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 has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." ([Hebrews 12:2 NKJV](#))

The New American Standard Version translates this beautifully as; fixing our eyes on Jesus! We run the race of life with our eyes fixed firmly on Jesus, who stands at the finish line. We look to Jesus with our eyes locked firmly on Him. He is our focus, our inspiration, and our example.

The Discovery Bible says that in the original Greek, the phrase "looking unto Jesus" uses a verb that implies a definite *looking away from all else*; to fix one's gaze upon. We turn our attention to Christ and turn away from every other distraction.

Jesus is more than just our example; He is the ultimate proof of Christian endurance. Jesus is not just the author of our faith; He is also the finisher of it.

Philippians 1:6 tells us we can "be confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;" ([Philippians 1:6 NKJV](#))

This is just the kind of encouragement we need in the day of discouragement! There is a joy that is set before us! There is a thrill of victory rather than the agony of defeat! Of course, there is no joy in facing the cross. But Jesus looked past the horror of it to see and focus upon the joy that lay beyond it.

That same attitude is what will help each of us to endure. Just like Christ, we despise the struggle and the shaming that often accompanies oppression. One of the most significant elements of the torture of the cross was its extreme shame. No one welcomes shame. Jesus despised it! But he endured it for us! Humiliation is a

stumbling block for a lot of people. Many people will do just about anything for Jesus except endure shame or embarrassment.

Spurgeon spoke boldly to Christians who couldn't bear the shame and humiliation that comes from the self-righteous crowd. He said, "Yet you are a coward. Yes, put it down in English: you are a coward. If anybody called you so, you would turn red in the face; and perhaps you are not a coward in reference to any other subject. But what a shameful thing it is that while you are bold about everything else, you are cowardly about Jesus Christ. Brave for the world and cowardly towards Christ!"

There is always persecution or ridicule that goes along with being a follower of Jesus. It is to those who overcome that God promises a reward. Jesus now sits at the right hand of the throne of God. But it's only after the struggle that the glorification comes. That's the way it was for Jesus, and that's the way it will be for us too!

God has a great blessing in store for those who endure and see things through!

II. Consider Jesus (3-4)

Verse 3 says, "For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin." ([Hebrews 12:3-4 NKJV](#))

These Jewish Christians were discouraged because they were starting to experience significant social and economic persecution. They weren't being martyred for their faith yet, but they were undoubtedly feeling the hostility.

The Hebrew writer tells them they should consider Jesus. Why? Because He endured such hostility from sinners against Himself. These Jewish Christians should be encouraged, rather than discouraged, knowing that they are following in the footsteps of Jesus. Paul wrote, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together." ([Romans 8:16-17 NKJV](#))

Don't become weary and discouraged in your souls. Jesus doesn't ask more of us than what He has experienced, and He knows what we are going through and can keep us from becoming weary and discouraged.

Why does God allow difficult times? The Hebrew writer suggests that at least one reason is "the chastening of God." Verses 5-11 deal with the question, "Why does God allow us to face such difficult times. It's a question commonly asked when we face difficult times. Since God created man with free will and the ability to make choices, you must accept that God sees and allows everything that happens. That doesn't mean He approves of it or is the cause of it, but He does allow it.

God can *never* be the author of evil. But He does allow people to choose evil. You might wonder why until you also realize that He can even use the evil choices others make to work out His ultimate good purpose, even if only to demonstrate His justice and righteousness in contrast to evil.

Chastening is not the only reason God allows difficult times, but it is an important one. We also know that God allows difficult times so that we can, later, comfort someone else with the same comfort God shows towards us in our crisis (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

In verses 5-6, it says to "Remember the exhortation regarding the discipline of the Lord."

He says, "And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: **"MY SON, DO NOT DESPISE THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD, NOR BE DISCOURAGED WHEN YOU ARE REBUKED BY HIM; FOR WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE CHASTENS, AND SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."** ([Hebrews 12:5-6 NKJV](#))

One reason for the discouragement among these Jewish Christians was that they saw no reason for God to allow difficult times to arise. They had forgotten the principles regarding the chastening of the Lord. How much of the difficulty in your own Christian life could be traced back to those three words: you have forgotten! The principles of God may be stored somewhere in our minds, but our hearts have forgotten them. God chastens us so we will remember them again!

The quotation the writer uses here is from Proverbs 3:11-12, which reminds us that God's chastening should never be taken as a sign of His rejection. It is a sign that He treats us as His children.

God's chastening can come in many forms. But what may be God's chastening in the life of one believer may be an outright attack by Satan in the life of another. James recommends a prayer for wisdom for those enduring trials in his letter. He writes, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." ([James 1:2-5 NKJV](#))

He also suggests in verses 7-8 that chastening is a sign of sonship. "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons." ([Hebrews 12:7-8 NKJV](#))

Some people can't relate to God as a loving Father because they have never known a loving human father in their own experience. You may not know by experience what a model father is, but we all know by intuition what a good father is. God is

that perfect Father, and He has given us that intuition. God's correction is never to punish us or make us *pay* for our sins. That was done once and for all at the cross. His correction is motivated only by His love, not by His justice; God chastens us without anger.

In verses 9-10, we learn that God's chastening is superior to that of human fathers. He says, "Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness."

(Hebrews 12:9-10 NKJV)

It is because he loves us that he corrects us! Even with the best of intentions, human fathers can only chasten imperfectly because they lack perfect knowledge. But the all-knowing God can chasten us perfectly, with better and more lasting results than even the best earthly father.

III. Expect Results

Verse 11 challenges us to look at the results of chastening more than the process of chastening. He writes, "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

(Hebrews 12:11 NKJV)

No chastening seems to be joyful for the present. But God wants you to look beyond the process to the result to see if the fruit of chastening is evident in your life? Some believers live from "one-crisis-to-another" because they are either blind to God's chastening or are resisting it. If the Lord's chastening does not properly train us, the peaceful fruit of righteousness is not evident. Some never experience the peaceable fruit of righteousness because God's chastening has never trained them.

The word "trained" in the ancient Greek is a word from the world of athletics. An athlete's training includes some pain and agony. The same is true for God's "spiritual athletes."

God has a purpose for training you. A lion attacked David when he was just a boy tending the sheep. Why did God allow such a terrible thing to happen to him? He might have thought. "I barely escaped!" But if David could have seen ahead, he would have realized facing a giant named Goliath was in his future. God prepared him to face Goliath by allowing him to face a lion and a bear.

God always has a purpose in mind, and we have to learn to trust Him.

Conclusion

The challenge to us comes in verses 12 and 13, "Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be *dislocated*, but rather be healed."

The author tells the "troops" to get with it, almost like a coach or a military officer. The Hebrew writer gives us an extensive list of reasons to be strong in the Lord. He counsels us to put off discouragement and says now is the time to do it. The picture of strengthened hands and knees and straight-ahead feet challenge us to work and move forward for the Lord. Rather than give in to discouragement, God encourages us to step out in faith and trust his guidance. His leadership will always see us through the conflicts and storms of life.

When the storms and trials of life come, be bold, confident, and persevering in faith, for the Lord your God is with you. You will fail if you give in to fear and relinquish your hold on faith. But if you persevere and endure, your faith will produce positive results, and you will claim the victory.