
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Hebrews

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Hebrews 12:1-3: *Jesus; the Perfecter of our Faith!*

General idea: We are not alone in this journey of faith; we have a great multitude of witnesses in those who have gone before us, upon whose shoulders we stand. The point is that Christ can be trusted; we can have a thriving faith in Him regardless of what we have been through or will face. Others have trusted in Christ and so can we. We are able to throw off whatever hinders and slows us down, have our sins removed so we can not only enter the race and run it but, keep running it, even finish it, and even win it! To do this is really simple; we keep our focus on the prize and reason, our purpose who goes before us—Christ as Lord—as all that we have and are, faith, and our lives depend on Him. Jesus proved Himself by being willing to die for us, so we can live for Him. This gives us great joy and purpose for living. Just think about all that Christ did and endured for you. Now think about how you will live in response, your gratitude, so you do not become weary and give up with life or the fight against sin.

Contexts and Background:

The images used here are of an athlete training, entering, competing, continuing in, and winning the race. This race takes place in front of a great crowd of encouragers and supporters who have “been there and done that” and won, saying *we did it! You can too!* Yet, to be in this race does not happen just by a wish and a sit; it takes training, perseverance, and commitment to put our faith into action, just as a runner hangs in there, no matter what. This would have been a well known illustration like using football during the super bowl. But here, it refers to keeping at it with the race of faith while leaping over the hurdles of sin—keeping in the race and not giving up when we feel exhausted. This is what the heroes of the faith in chapter eleven did and what we can do too. It was a call to those early Hebrew Christians for faith not to drop out of the race. This is also a call for us to persevere and draw closer to God’s heart, not questioning our faith when times are bad. Rather, we are to move forward, embrace the call, and learn from it to be better.

Commentary; Word and Phrase Meanings

- *Cloud.* Meaning judging an event. The word “cloud” is a judgment metaphor that refers to a magnificent event, testifying to God’s glory. The context and syntax indicates an athletic metaphor referring to a crowd in a vast amphitheater that are like spectators, but do not just sit and do nothing. They are like referees and scorekeepers as this use of the word “cloud” would also mean judging. But the emphasis is positive, their being inspiring examples, like the encouragement from a “home court advantage” and personal trainers because these witnesses are not “armchair athletes.” (Ezek. 30:3; Dan. 7:13; Zech. 12:10; Matt. 16:28; 24:24-30, 34; 26:64; Rev. 14:14-20).

- *Witnesses.* Here, it is a heavenly “pep squad” who have already received and practiced their faith and are supporting us to do so too. The Greek word here is the same one translated as “martyr” and means “one who testifies.” Those who are righteous are looking upon us, not necessarily literally, but perhaps figuratively, for we have God looking over us as the main, involved spectator. Here, it is more of a metaphor of the previous hall of fame of heroes looking upon us like the spectators watching a race, but who have gone before us, who have “been there and done that” and are encouraging us to spur on. They also admonish us for giving up too soon or not putting the good effort into our faith formation. And, if we stumble, they encourage us to get up rather than give up—just as they did before us. By the way, this is the role of the church today (Acts 20:24; Rom. 15:4; Gal 2:2; 5:7; Rev. 7:9-17).
- *Throw off everything/laying off weights.* Referring to removing the training weights used by runners, so they can go faster and stronger and/or using weights to build muscles, and then stripping them off and running as fast as you can. This means removing anything that may cause us to fail or fall or that would be a burden such as fear, lack of focus, or vices that hinder one from his or her training, such as drinking alcohol or apathy, which are both bad for athletics. Here, sin is our main enemy, with discouragement and/or fear following close behind. Thus, the context seems to say both to train hard and also to remove what hinders us or causes others to be discouraged. A big distraction is thinking we can get it all, deserve it all now, and do not need to work for it—sensuality and immediate gratification. The reality in the building up of faith is that we must be in motion and work at it to make it happen. To sit as just a spectator accomplishes us nothing, and does not honor or glorify our Lord (1 Cor. 9:24-27; Heb. 10:28, 38).
- *Perseverance.* Here, refers that real Christianity is more of a long-distance marathon than a mere short sprint. Thus, we have a call to keep on at the efforts and virtue of faith—no matter what. This means endurance to persist in an idea, purpose, or task despite obstacles. With faith and encouragement from others, we have *staying power*, as in “you can do it too!” When we are in tough times, God may seem far away and no one seems to care about our plight or our concerns, But God is still there, caring! He will support you and care for you! We are to be focused on the goal ahead and be able to carry the task and ourselves through both the tough times and the joyous ones (James 5:7-12).
- *The race marked out for us.* Here, Jesus is the start and the finish line of the race of life and faith. The Christian life is allegorized to an athletic competition to show that in order to win, one must work, train, persevere, and run against opposition and hurdles. It requires our constant discipline and effort to take what Christ gives and work it out (1 Cor. 9:24-27; Phil. 1:6; 2:16, 23; 2 Tim. 2:5; 4:7-8).
- *Fix our eyes on/looking to Jesus.* We are to concentrate on Jesus and not wander. He is our goal and Reason. An athletic metaphor, it means to keep your eyes on the

ball, on the target, to persevere toward the goal of Jesus Christ. This also means allowing Christ to empower and inspire you as He is your main trainer and equipper. He is far greater than any mere encouragement from either outside or inside the church. We are to look to Him as our motivation, not circumstances or obstacles (Isa. 53: 10-12; Phil. 3:10-14; Heb. 1:3; 2:10).

- *The author/founder.* Christ is the Object, Originator, Source, and Creator of our faith, life, and salvation, and He is the supreme witness. He is our *Pioneer, Champion, Captain, and leader*, as this word also means He is the greatest example of endurance. Here, it is also a Name for Jesus meaning *He, as the perfect One, will perfect us*, which is what He did, giving us redemption and the forgiveness of our sin, to which we responded in justification by faith alone. Christ is the Exalted One who saves us. It is by His work alone that fulfilled God's promise and gave us salvation, freeing us from the fear of death. He is the One who cuts the path for our salvation and our life of faith for us to follow. This also means the consecration of a priest who paid and paved the way to God for the Jews by sacrifices, ordinances, and representative rituals. Therefore, because of our transformation, we have the power to take our faith and build upon it, so we can know and worship God, and also keep the pollution of sin from corrupting us. (Acts. 3:15; 5:31; 1 Cor. 8:6; Phil. 3:10-14; Heb. 2:10).
- *Perfecter/finisher of our faith.* A Name for Jesus meaning He is the fulfiller of faith and we are complete in Him. Jesus chose to suffer to fulfill faith for us. He is our forerunner and example, who purchased and gave us our faith, received His Joy for it, and now helps us build it for our benefit and His Glory. This is also a call for us to respond with gratitude, and worship Him in reverence (Isa 53:10-12; Heb. 1:2; 10:14; 11:40; 12:28).
- *Joy set before.* For us to receive the great joy of our salvation required a great cost of suffering of which Jesus was fully aware and willing to endure for us. And the prize and reward received enabled us to partake in and receive too. He could have avoided the cross, but He did not (John 10:17-18; 12:27; Phil. 2:6).
- *Endured the cross.* Here, refers to what it meant then: an instrument of shame, torture, and execution. Jesus accomplished our eternal redemption from our greatest problem and need. Also, regarding the proverb that anyone who is hanged on a tree is cursed: in Jesus' case, He bore the curse of sin for us (Deut. 21:23; Josh. 10:26-27; Matt. 5:10-12; Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17; Gal. 3:13; Phil. 2:5-8; 1 Pet. 4:13; 5:1, 10; Heb. 11:26).
- *Scorning/despising its shame.* The path of crucifixion was not light for Jesus, even as God; it was a torture of shame. For us, it is a call to bear the embarrassment from the world and take a stand for the Gospel and God's glory even in suffering, because what we face is temporary and will be greatly overshadowed by our future glory and reward.

- *Consider him.* We are called to reflect on the fact that Jesus suffered considerably more than any of His disciples or the martyrs who followed, and more than anything we will ever face. We are not asked to venture into suffering on purpose; rather if it comes, we are to look to Him as our great encourager so we will not be drained, discouraged, disheartened, or be tempted to sin (Isa 40:28-31).
- *Opposition/hostility/contradiction.* Meaning “speaking against,” referring to the hostility that sin causes for the sinner and all those around him or her (Heb. 10:33).
- *Grow weary/fainthearted.* Meaning the exhaustion of an athlete; here, it is a call to press on and receive our strength from Christ (Prov. 3:11-12).

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

Have you ever felt that being a Christian who exercises his or her faith is like being an athlete running a race? This is an illustration that Paul uses too. We get exhausted, fall back, and wonder if it is worth the effort. But like any athletic event, we have to not just train and be ready; we have to keep focused during the event and not give in or up. The simple rule of the matter, that makes a great competitor in any endeavor, is our *focus*. And if we consider dropping out of the race for a perceived easier life, and “pew-sit” in the stands just to watch others, we will gain very little and lose out on so much. The race is well worth our struggles and efforts, even when we are last. Faith is what is kept and built; maturity and character are the prizes, along with a life well lived that affects others for Him. This is far better than never entering, or quitting when it gets tiresome or difficult.

Have you ever wondered what it means in practice to fix your heart, mind, and your all on Christ? It means we respond to Him because He has apprehended our lives. The secret to a triumphant and contented life, as Paul found out, is really simple; keep your eyes, thinking, heart, will, and direction on Christ, just as a good athlete keeps his or her eyes on the ball or opponent. Thus, whatever situation we are in—good or bad—we know we are in Christ; we can seek His empowerment and even live in His presence. This is what our lives, feelings, attitudes and even joys are, and it is not metered from what we have/do not have, or what we want/cannot have. Nor is faith based on what is currently happening in our lives; rather, it is all about *who I am in Christ*, so my focus is on Him, bringing Him glory, reverence through my devotion, and gratitude, regardless of stress and situation. We can do this well, not in just more tyranny of activity, but rather in the crucible of surrender to Him. Our lives are His, to run hard and run deep by our absolute devotion, trust, and obedience to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord over all—including us, our thinking, and our situation.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?

3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Who in your life has shown remarkable faith? How did this help encourage you?
2. What brought you to the point that you knew Christ could be trusted? What gets in your way of this mindset?
3. What does it mean to you to have a thriving faith in Christ regardless of what you may have been through or will face?
4. The Christian life is allegorized as an athletic competition in this passage. How would you describe it?
5. How do you feel that receiving the great joy of your salvation required a great cost of suffering from Jesus? What are you willing to endure for Him?
6. What does it mean to you to fix your eyes on Jesus? How have you failed at this? How have you succeeded? What did you learn? Consider we have the Hope of Christ behind us and the hope of eternity before us and we are not alone!
7. How is your endurance strengthened by the fact that great people have gone before you who had much less and did so much more? Upon whose shoulders do you stand; who are those who helped you on your Christian path?
8. If others have trusted in Christ in the face of great lows and highs, how does this influence you in those times?
9. Jesus was willing to die for us. So, how can you do a better job to live for Him? How can the Christian faith give you more great joy and purpose for living? What will you do?
10. What do you need to get rid of so you can throw off that which hinders and slows you down in the practice of your faith? What sins need to be removed? (Anything that gets in the way of God can be a sin!)

11. What are some burdens, such as fear or a lack of focus or... that hinder you from your training and running? What do you need to do?

12. What do you need to do to not only enter the race and run it, keep on running it, even finishing it, and even winning it?

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