

Once again “therefore” reminds us to keep in mind what has gone before. Take a moment to review Hebrews 11.

➤ Read Hebrews 12:1–17.

1. Who do you think is the “great cloud of witnesses” (v. 1)?
2. What impact should the witness of their lives have on us? (v. 1; Consider the point the author was making throughout Hebrews 11.)
3. Generally, what can hinder us in our life of faith? More specifically, what tends to hinder and entangle *you* as you run your race? (v. 1)
4. To get a better sense of how our race is to be run, fill in the blanks below using various versions of the Bible. (You may use whatever versions you have on hand or go online.^a The NIV has already been filled in for you.)

“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.” (v. 1)

^a Biblegateway.com is a good resource for this exercise.

5. The idea in verse 1 of the “great cloud of witnesses” is probably not the idea of witnesses in the stands watching us run but rather the witness of their lives as they ran their race.¹ What connection do you see between the way we are to run and the examples of those who have gone before us (both those from Hebrews 11 and those who have been in our lives)?

6. Why do you think we are told to fix our eyes on Jesus as we run the race?

What impact have you seen in your life when you have purposely kept Jesus as your focus? (Try to think of specific experiences.)


*Jesus, the pioneer and
perfecter of faith*

“The earlier witnesses supply incentive in abundance... [but Jesus] is presented as the one who has blazed the trail of faith and as the one who Himself ran the race of faith to its triumphant finish.”²

7. Think about what it must have been like for Jesus to endure the cross and the shame of crucifixion while bearing our sin. What are some ways that Jesus demonstrated faith—that is, in what ways was he confident in what he hoped for and assured about what he did not see (Heb. 11:1)? (vv. 2–3; What other instances from the Gospels can you think of?)


*He endured the cross,
scorning its shame*

“To die by crucifixion was to plumb the lowest depths of disgrace; it was a punishment reserved for those who were deemed of all men most unfit to live, a punishment of sub-men. From so degrading a death Roman citizens were exempt by ancient statute... For slaves, and criminals of low degree, it was regarded as a suitable means of execution.”³

8. What joy awaited Jesus that enabled him to complete his mission?
Jn. 14:1–4; 17:24;  Jn. 16:17–22


Jn. 12:23–24; Heb. 2:9; 1 Pet. 1:10–11

Verse 3 pictures us not growing weary or losing heart. If instead you find yourself in a place of discouragement, take some time to meditate on what Jesus has endured for you and ask God to help you “persevere because [you see] him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27).

9. Sin is a nasty enemy and is not defeated without a fight. And so, these Hebrew believers have suffered (and may suffer more) as a result of their struggle against it (v. 4).
 - a. What encouragement in this struggle does the writer now give? (vv. 5–7a)
 - b. What points is the author making by using the example of earthly fathers with their children? (vv. 7b–10)
 - c. Some earthly fathers are negligent or harsh and abusive, and even the best fail to always discipline in love and wisdom. How is God’s discipline superior? (vv. 10b–11;  Jas. 1:2–4)
10. God does not want us to “make light of the Lord’s discipline,” nor does he want us to “lose heart when he rebukes” (v. 5).
 - a. How does it often feel when the Lord is disciplining us? (v. 11)
 - b. What is an example of good fruit (“a harvest of righteousness and peace,” v. 11) that you have seen as a result of God’s discipline in your life?
11. Read Proverbs 4:25–27. The author undoubtedly had this passage in mind when he wrote this section and even quotes it in verse 13. What effect does being intentional about how we live out our faith have on others? (vv. 12–13)

“The chastening [or discipline] of the Lord in the life of the Christian is never punitive [given as punishment]; it is always corrective. The penalty for our sins has already been paid by Jesus Christ. *Christ is the perfect High Priest.* His chastening in our lives is always corrective—to help us become the kind of people we ought to be.”⁴

12. Having spoken in general terms about the race of faith, now in verses 14–17 the writer turns to some specific and practical exhortations to obey.

- a. What are they?
- b. By obeying we can “share in [God’s] holiness” (v. 10) and enjoy “a harvest of righteousness and peace” (v. 11). What do you think are some of the effects of our obedience to the specific exhortations listed in verses 14–17?
- c. Esau is held up as an example of someone who did not live by faith but instead by the things that are seen. What did Esau’s short-term thinking get him? (vv. 16–17;  Gen. 25:19–34; 27:1–28:9)

13. As believers, we are a part of a community of faith reaching all the way back to Genesis and all the way forward into eternity with God. Hebrews reminds us that how we live matters, but that in this race we are not alone. For “his divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him” (2 Pet. 1:3). Review Hebrews 12:1–17 and list some ways God is encouraging you to keep in the race marked out for you.

* For further study

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), 346.

² Bruce, 351.

³ Bruce, 352–353.

⁴ Walter A. Henrichsen, *After the Sacrifice: A Practical Study of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 167.