

# SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**HEB. 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,

**2 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.**

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

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

**5** 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:

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

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

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

**9** 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?

**10 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.**

**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.

**12 Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees;**

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

**14 Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:**

**15** Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled;

**16 Lest there *be* any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.**

**17** For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

## NOTES

# Run toward Holiness

Lesson Text: Hebrews 12:1-17

Related Scriptures: Philippians 3:7—4:1; Hebrews 5:7-9; Isaiah 35:1-8; James 3:13-18; Genesis 25:29-34; 27:36-38

TIME: between A.D. 60 and 69

PLACE: unknown

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—“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” (Hebrews 12:1).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

### **LAYING ASIDE HINDRANCES— Heb. 12:1-2**

The apostle began by calling the heroes of chapter 11 a great cloud of witnesses. He implored the Jewish Christian converts to follow their example by invoking the imagery of a race. Believers must cut off any excess weight that might hinder their progress. Sin is like a net that inevitably entangles runners' feet. It is a trap that keeps believers from growing spiritually.

Good runners diligently discard unnecessary weight and avoid roots, vines, or anything else that might trip them. Since it is sin that entangles and weighs us down, believers are to take inventory of any such hindrances and wage war against them.

To run the race of faith, believers must look to Jesus, who is the ultimate example of endurance and faithfulness. As we fix our gaze on Him as our supreme example, He inspires us to endure opposition and persecution from those who despise Jesus the Messiah.

Supporting his call to fix our eyes on Jesus, the apostle asserted that Jesus is the Author of our faith. This depicts Jesus as the Trailblazer, a pioneer who

leads the way and sets the example for others to follow. He further asserted that Jesus is the Finisher of our faith. This emphasizes His role in bringing our faith to maturity. It conveys that our daily walk of faith is progressing with each step to our journey's end. When we fix our eyes on Jesus, we can follow Him so that our faith is brought to maturity.

### **SEEING JESUS' ENDURANCE— Heb. 12:3-4**

Verses 3-4 highlight how Jesus modeled endurance and suffering. The apostle urged believers to do the same so that they do not grow weary or lose heart in their own struggles. He implied to his persecuted Jewish Christian audience that the community leaders and their own family members who persecuted them were behaving like the vile sinners who crucified the innocent Messiah. Knowing this and seeing Jesus' example, we gain strength, motivation, and perspective when sinners in our own communities persecute us for our faith.

As our Trailblazer, Jesus “endured.” The malicious hostility He endured is well documented in the trial and crucifixion scenes of the four Gospels.

Because Jesus went through such intense persecution, He knows what it is like when believers go through their own difficulties (2:14-18). He gives believers strength to endure persecution.

The apostle knew his audience well enough to see that they were growing weary as they were harassed in various ways. His comments suggest that he feared they were at risk of giving in and giving up. Believers may experience great discouragement, not only through concerted persecution against them but also through long-term difficulties like unemployment, illness, family conflict, and even litigation and bureaucratic ordeals. Christians should rally around one another in prayer and personal support, but the apostle's first remedy was to look to Jesus.

The struggle is real, but we must not allow hardships to make us feel sorry for ourselves. The apostle put things into perspective in 12:4, pointing out that none of his audience had yet spilled their blood for Christ.

### **ACCEPTING FATHERLY DISCIPLINE—Heb. 12:5-13**

**The importance of discipline (Heb. 12:5-11).** Verses 5-11 reminded the Jewish believers that God's discipline is a sign of their identity as God's children. Just as an earthly father disciplines his child out of love, God disciplines believers to bring about maturity and holiness.

Discipline encompasses training, instruction, and correction. God's discipline is not in anger or malice but comes from pure love. It is intended to shape believers more into the image of Christ. Believers should not reject, despise, or ignore God's gracious acts of discipline, because it validates our status as God's children. Just as an earthly father disciplines his children for their own good, so also the Heavenly Father disciplines His children for

their spiritual growth and conformity to Christ.

Greco-Roman men who did not consider a child their own would not bother to love and discipline the child. Confidently, the apostle asserted that his audience should be assured of their privileged status because God was, in fact, disciplining them.

The apostle was drawing from general truths. He knew that human parents are imperfect, noting that they discipline their children as they deem best in their own limited understanding. God, however, is not like faulty human parents who might not discipline children in the right way all the time. Rather, God is the good Father who fully understands our situation and frailty. He supplies what we need to share fully in His holiness—including discipline when necessary.

In Hebrews 12:11, the apostle waxed proverbial, asserting almost humorously that no person would think discipline is pleasant! Of course, we know it is downright painful. And as we read these words, let us pause for a moment to weep over those difficult days of affliction when we went through such pain.

Now we can reflect with the apostle and understand that those difficult times when we soaked our beds in tears were actually times when God was working in our hearts to produce a great harvest of righteousness. We went out weeping (and planting seed) but returned rejoicing, carrying the harvest with us (Ps. 126:5-6).

**The call to endure (Heb. 12:12-13).** Using direct language, the apostle closed his argument by telling the believers to strengthen their "hands which hang down, and the feeble knees." This refers to limp, drooping hands and weak, trembling knees. The apostle conveyed that the children of the King should get up, stand strong, and get on with the glorious race.

## PURSUING PEACE AND HOLINESS—Heb. 12:14-17

**Virtues to pursue (Heb. 12:14-15).** Especially given the distress from the larger unbelieving Jewish community against Jewish Christians, the apostle urged his audience to pursue peace with one another. He knew that internal stresses in a church only exacerbate external pressures. Instead of dividing, believers should stand in solidarity with other believers.

Along with peace, the apostle implored them to pursue holiness. Christian holiness is not optional. Without it, we will not see the Lord (vs. 14). Holiness distinguishes us from those who persecuted Christ (vs. 3). In a world that honors what is vile to God (cf. Ps. 12:8), we must not arrogantly presume that our holy God has nothing to say about how we live! Living in peace and holiness is essential for maintaining a vibrant relationship with God and with fellow believers.

The apostle urged his audience to take care lest they fail to live up to the grace that had been given to them. Believers should live their lives in light of the empowering grace that God eagerly provides us. In the chaotic times of the Jewish Christians' distress, the apostle warned against buried bitterness that might burst forth to disturb the well-being of the church and individual believers.

**An example to avoid (Heb. 12:16-17).** In this short concluding paragraph, the apostle specifically referred to sexual immorality (“any fornicator”) and godlessness, citing Jacob’s brother Esau as a prime example.

The apostle noted the irreversible consequences of Esau’s choice to sell his birthright for a single meal. Despite his great regret, Esau could not reverse the sale. His decision serves as a solemn warning to believers to value the spiritual blessings and inheritance purchased

for them by Christ. They must not be exchanged for momentary gain.

To finish our race, we must divest ourselves of the snares of sin, embrace God’s loving discipline, and steadfastly hold to our precious and eternally valuable God-given birthright through holy living. By God’s strength and guidance, we can run the race with endurance, knowing that our eternal reward far outweighs any temporary trials we may face.

—James M. Leonard

## QUESTIONS

1. What does Hebrews 12 present as a hindrance to running the Christian race?
2. What does it mean for Jesus to be the “author and finisher of our faith” (vs. 2)?
3. Why was Jesus’ crucifixion especially encouraging to the readers of Hebrews?
4. How could the Jewish Christians know they were legitimate children of God?
5. How did first-century Roman culture help the author make that point?
6. What benefit ultimately comes from good discipline?
7. What exhortation did the author intend through his reference to “hands which hang down, and the feeble knees” (vs. 12)?
8. How does internal peace in the church help with the goal of attaining maturity of faith?
9. Why is Christian holiness so important?
10. What solemn warning can we learn from the negative example of Esau?

—Matthew Robinson

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Old Testament heroes persisted in faith while awaiting Christ's coming; we should do the same (Heb. 12:1).
2. Nothing in this world is worth tearing our fixed gaze away from Jesus (vs. 2).
3. Our perspective on life is always better when seen in light of Jesus' sufferings (vss. 3-4).
4. Faithful disciples submit to the loving Father's discipline (vss. 5-11).
5. Holiness is not optional; believers should cooperate with God's discipline to root out sin (vss. 12-14).
6. We should never sacrifice eternal reward for temporary pleasure (vss. 15-17).

—James M. Leonard

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How do people feel pressured by society to abandon their faith in our cultural environment?
2. What helps you resist discouragement and persevere in faith?
3. Are there members in your congregation who are so discouraged that they may want to give up on their faith? How would others in the church know? What might you do to help them?
4. How do church members display a root of bitterness? Why do bitter roots need to be uprooted? How can others help them remove it?
5. How should churches address professing believers who persist in sin? What might happen when a church takes steps to correct such individuals? What might happen if it takes no action?

—James M. Leonard

## Golden Text Illuminated

**“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” (Hebrews 12:1).**

If you have ever been in a race, you can imagine the enthusiasm of a runner finishing the race. The encouragement from the crowd cheering provides a motivation to exert enough energy to get over the finish line. Hebrews 12:1 presents the imagery of an athletic race, encouraging Christians to rid themselves of every hindrance so they can focus their attention on Jesus, the ultimate example of faithfulness.

We can apply this in a few ways. First, to effectively run the race of faith, we must identify and lay aside the hindrances that impede our progress. We must regularly evaluate our priorities, relationships, and habits, discerning whether they align with God's will. This requires a willingness to let go of anything that diverts our attention from Jesus.

Second, we should know the power of focused vision. Fixing our eyes on Jesus is not a passive gaze but an intentional redirection of our attention and affection. By consistently studying His life, teachings, and character through Scripture, we gain a clearer vision of who He is and the path He calls us to follow.

Last, we must remember that we run together. The Christian journey of faith is not intended to be solitary. The cloud of witnesses includes people in the church today, not just saints of old.

—Page Brooks

# Daily Bible Readings for Home Study and Worship

(Readings are for the week previous to the lesson topics.)

## 1. December 7. The Glory of the Lord

M — God's Glory at Sinai. Deut. 5:22-29.  
T — Unable to Live in God's Presence. Ex. 33:1-6.  
W — Revive Us Again. Ps. 85:1-9.  
T — Living in God's Presence. Ps. 27:1-14.  
F — God's Glory Reflected. Ex. 34:29-35.  
S — God's Glory Unveiled. 2 Cor. 3:7-18.  
S — Beholding God's Glory. Ex. 33:12-23.

## 2. December 14. God's Glory in the Tabernacle

M — Moses and the Elders on Sinai. Ex. 24:9-18.  
T — The Place of God's Dwelling. Ex. 29:38-46.  
W — Aaron's Burnt Offering. Lev. 9:1-7, 22-24.  
T — A Heavenly Tabernacle. Heb. 9:1-14.  
F — An Eternal Temple. Rev. 21:22-27.  
S — Longing for God's Presence. Ps. 84:1-12.  
S — God's Glory Descends. Ex. 40:1-11, 34-38.

## 3. December 21. God's Glory in the Coming Christ (Christmas)

M — Assyria Invades the North. 2 Kgs. 15:27-30.  
T — Light for All Peoples in Christ. Acts 26:12-23.  
W — A Light for the Nations. Isa. 49:1-13.  
T — Prayers for a Righteous King. Ps. 72:1-4.  
F — The Promise of an Eternal King Fulfilled.  
Luke 1:27-33.  
S — The Birth of the Promised Son. Luke 2:1-7.  
S — A Son Is Given. Isa. 9:1-7.

## 4. December 28. No One Is like God

M — The Worthlessness of Idols. Jer. 51:15-19.  
T — Let All the Earth Fear God. Ps. 33:1-12.  
W — God's Enemies Put to Shame. Ps. 83:1-18.  
T — Christ's Judgment. Luke 3:15-17.  
F — God Delivers the Weak. Ps. 35:1-10.  
S — God Gives Strength for Trials. 2 Cor. 1:8-11.  
S — God Is Sovereign over All. Isa. 40:21-31.

## 5. January 4. Jesus Cleanses God's House

M — Honoring God's House of Prayer. Isa. 56:1-7.  
T — Bearing Reproach for God's Sake. Ps. 69:6-13.  
W — A Righteous Zeal. Ps. 119:137-144.  
T — Dishonoring God's House. Jer. 7:8-15.  
F — Judgment for Profaning the Temple. Ezek. 8:5-18.  
S — God's House—A Place of Peace. Mic. 4:1-5.  
S — Christ's Zeal for God's House. John 2:13-17.

## 6. January 11. Worshipping God in His Sanctuary

M — God Is in His Temple. Hab. 2:18-20.  
T — Let All Flesh Praise the Lord. Ps. 145:1-3, 21.  
W — Enthroned over All Creation. Ps. 29:1-11.  
T — Declaring God's Glory. Ps. 96:1-13.  
F — God Glorified by All Peoples. Rev. 7:9-12.  
S — Ministers before the Ark of God. 1 Chr. 16:1-7.  
S — A Song of Praise. 1 Chr. 16:23-33.

## 7. January 18. Isaiah's Glimpse of God's Throne

M — Standing on Holy Ground. Ex. 3:1-6.  
T — The Angel of the Lord. Judg. 13:17-23.

W — Paul's Heavenly Vision. 2 Cor. 12:1-10.

T — Hearing but Not Understanding. Matt. 13:10-16.

F — Seeing but Not Believing. John 12:36b-43.

S — Refusing the Gospel. Acts 28:23-28.

S — Isaiah's Vision and Commission. Isa. 6:1-13.

## 8. January 25. God's Dwelling on High

M — All God's Works Praise Him. Ps. 103:19-22.

T — Exalted above the Heavens. Ps. 57:1-11.

W — Prayer for the Almighty's Help. Ps. 108:1-13.

T — Hannah's Petition. 1 Sam. 1:1-11.

F — Hannah's Praise. 1 Sam. 1:26—2:10.

S — God Lifts Up the Humble. Luke 1:46-55.

S — The Powerful Goodness of God. Ps. 113:1-9.

## 9. February 1. Solomon's Dedication Prayer

M — The Place of God's Choosing. Deut. 12:8-14.

T — God's Covenant with David. 2 Sam. 7:4-17.

W — David's Humble Praise. 2 Sam. 7:18-25.

T — Building the Temple. 2 Chr. 2:3-6.

F — God Dwells with the Humble. Isa. 66:1-2.

S — God Does Not Dwell in a House. Acts 7:44-50.

S — God Hears Prayer in His Temple. 1 Kgs. 8:22-30.

## 10. February 8. Holy as I Am Holy

M — A High Standard. Matt. 5:21-37.

T — Perfect as the Father Is Perfect. Matt. 5:38-48.

W — Sons and Daughters of God. 2 Cor. 6:14—7:1.

T — Love Fulfills the Law. Rom. 13:8-10.

F — Walk in the Light. 1 John 2:7-11.

S — Show No Partiality. Jas. 2:1-13.

S — Love Your Neighbor. Lev. 19:1-4, 9-18.

## 11. February 15. Holy Conduct

M — God's Will for Your Life. 1 Thess. 4:1-7.

T — Be Transformed, Not Conformed. Rom. 12:1-2.

W — Fearing the Lord. Heb. 12:28-29.

T — Lights in the World. Phil. 2:12-16.

F — Children of God. 1 John 3:1-10.

S — A Chosen People. 1 Pet. 2:9-12.

S — Called to Be Holy. 1 Pet. 1:14-17.

## 12. February 22. Run toward Holiness

M — The Ultimate Prize. Phil. 3:7—4:1.

T — Jesus Defeats Temptation. Luke 22:39-44.

W — Jesus Perfected through Suffering. Heb. 5:7-10.

T — Importance of Discipline. Prov. 15:10, 31-33.

F — The Way of Holiness. Isa. 35:1-10.

S — The Fruit of Righteousness. Jas. 3:13-18.

S — Look to Jesus. Heb. 12:1-17.