

October 30

Lesson 9

MODEL

OF ENDURANCE

DEVOTIONAL READING:: Isaiah 53:1-6

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12

HEBREWS 12:1-13

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, 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, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

⁴ In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline,
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”

⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰ They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

¹² Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ¹³ “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.



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KEY VERSES

Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.—Hebrews 12:1, 2

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List some features of God's discipline.
2. Explain the connection between discipline and righteousness.
3. Identify the verbs in the lesson text and describe how these will serve as "action words" in his or her life.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Classic Stories
- B. Lesson Background

I. Preparing for the Race ([Hebrews 12:1-4](#))

- A. What to Do ([v. 1](#))
The Race of Life
- B. Where to Look ([vv. 2-4](#))

II. Nature of the Race ([Hebrews 12:5-11](#))

- A. What to Remember ([vv. 5, 6](#))
- B. What to Expect ([vv. 7-11](#))
Discipline with a Goal

III. Recharging in the Race ([Hebrews 12:12, 13](#))

Conclusion

- A. To Seek His Will
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Classic Stories

Some stories we read, hear, or watch don't stick with us for long, even if they have great appeal at the time. Other stories, however, may cause us to ponder and deliberate over the course of months and years. Why the difference? What is it that sets enduring, classic stories apart from the many that are soon forgotten, even though the latter may feature many exciting elements of action and adventure?

A story is *classic* to the degree it resonates with the moral order that God has established in creation and written on our hearts. The classic stories reflect in some way the broader human story of creation, fall, and redemption. And as they do, such stories lead us to deeper truths about ourselves and about life under God. The Chronicles of Narnia series is an example.

The hero in classic stories is one who, by struggle and sacrifice, restores a right moral order for self and others. This is the direction taken in [Hebrews 11](#), sometimes referred to as "Faith's Hall of Fame." There, faith as trust in the character and promises of God is illustrated in the lives of numerous named individuals of Israel's past. As the writer moves into what we designate as chapter 12, the heroic stories of the lives of patriarchal and other old-covenant believers are connected with ours.

B. Lesson Background

Those who have virtuously endured severe suffering display a certain seriousness of character that sets them apart. Yet such suffering also enables them better to understand and relate to others. Foremost among such individuals is Jesus, of whom the writer to the Hebrews notes, "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered" ([Hebrews 5:8, lesson 7](#); compare [2:18](#); [4:15](#)). The writer's point is not that Jesus moved from a state of disobedience to a state of obedience. Rather, he learned obedience in the sense of living out experientially the capacity for complete obedience that was at all times part of his character.

When we think of the character of Jesus, we usually think first of his love, and we rightly want to be able to love others as he has loved us ([1 John 4:11](#)). Our ability to love is the outcome of our development in the basic virtues. If we want to love well, we seek the virtues of humility, integrity, wisdom, and holiness, because these virtues are grounded in who God is. They lead us to become like him and enable us to love more as he loves.

We develop these virtues largely through pursuing them intentionally as we experience the adversities of life in a fallen world. As the discipline of physical exercise strengthens the body, so too the discipline of spiritual exercise strengthens the soul (sanctification). God's intent is that Christ be formed in us ([Galatians 4:19](#)). Discipline through suffering develops and refines our hearts as we mature in Christlike holiness.

A goal of the writer of Hebrews is to encourage suffering Christians of Jewish background to persevere as followers of Jesus (see the Lesson Background of [lesson 5](#)). The pain of being ostracized seemed to be taking its toll. As tragic as that was, a return to a Judaism-without-Christ

would be a case of “the cure is worse than the disease.”

The writer argues against this course of action by establishing the superiority of Jesus over the old covenant and its priesthood. Although Israel’s history had many heroes of faith, “none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:39, 40). With the opening *therefore* of today’s lesson, the writer begins summarizing why all this is important to the reader.

I. Preparing for the Race

(HEBREWS 12:1-4)

A. What to Do (v. 1)

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, 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,

The writer calls the readers to follow the examples of the heroes of faith just listed in Hebrews 11. Together, these heroes constitute a *great cloud of witnesses*. They are witnesses first by their own testimony of faith—some by what they accomplished and some by what they suffered. They are also witnesses as they in some way observe those of us in later generations of believers who are running *the race marked out for us*.

An important part of running to win is to lay aside anything that hinders us in the race (compare 1 Corinthians 9:24). Our race is not a 100-yard sprint but a lifelong marathon. Hindrances once set aside may have ways of reattaching themselves to us over the years of our race. The Old Testament heroes of faith became sad examples of this at various times. Thus we *run with perseverance* as we are ever alert in this regard.

THE RACE OF LIFE

Every two years, police officers and firefighters from around the world gather at a host city to compete in the World Police & Fire Games. The games include typical athletic competitions, but also events tailored specifically to participants’ jobs.

For firefighters, abilities to carry and use various pieces of equipment while being burdened with heavy attire characterize the timed events. Participants appear to complete the competitions effortlessly, and this is due to hours of hard work in training. Firefighters practice the same actions repeatedly so that they will be ready and able to save lives when an emergency comes. Preparedness is their goal, and they are careful to keep it in sight.

HOW TO SAY IT

Deuteronomy Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.

Hebrews Hee-brewws.

patriarchal pay-tree-are-kul.

sanctification sank-tuh-fuh-kay-shun.

The equipment and attire that firefighters use in the games and in real life are burdensome but necessary. As such, these items cannot be cast off in the interest of greater speed. Similarly, Christians throughout the centuries have practiced their faith with an eye toward what should be cast off as a hindrance and what must be retained as necessary for remaining faithful in the race of life. We can look at their successes and failures in that regard for help in keeping our focus on the end, on Jesus. His is the ultimate example of faithfulness that should inspire us daily. See the next verse.—L. M. W.

What Do You Think?

What strategies work best for helping you lay aside hindrances to your Christian race?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- For overcoming bad habits
- For remaining unhindered by negative talk
- For staying focused on God’s Word

B. Where to Look (vv. 2-4)

² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The *faith* in view is the Christian faith, which replaces the faith the readers have left (or should have left) behind. By his sinless life and

atonement death, Jesus is *the pioneer* or founder of the new faith. He is also the one who will bring this faith to its complete fulfillment when he returns as its *perfecter*.

By mentioning Christ's endurance of *the cross*, the writer may intend to show that Jesus' willingness to suffer human brutality and divine wrath makes him the ideal example of faith as trust in the promises of God. As he suffered, Jesus held fast to the everlasting *joy set before him*. As the promise of Heaven fortified his resolve to endure, so it can strengthen us to pursue righteousness in whatever temptation, injustice, and suffering come our way.

In *scorning [the] shame* of an undeserved public crucifixion, Jesus saw the injustice in its right measure: it was of such little weight and brief duration as to be "not worth comparing with the glory" that was to follow ([Romans 8:18](#)). As a result, he was seated *at the right hand of the throne of God*. We do well to consider our trials of faith and sufferings in this life as Jesus did!

3. 4 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

The writer understands that at least some readers are in danger of losing the will to continue enduring the animosity directed against them. But those who follow Christ should contemplate not just the end-result of what Jesus accomplished but also the process as he accomplished it. Jesus "resolutely set out for Jerusalem" ([Luke 9:51](#)), knowing what would happen to him there. He understood clearly and was dedicated fully to his purpose. Jesus knew there would be hostility, deceit, and fury directed against him. His death was assured and drawing nearer by the hour—yet he set out for it.

This is our example; this is our master; *consider him*. Have we as his followers been pressed to the point of personal harm or loss of life? If we ever are so pressed, will it be too much to ask of us? Do we not trust that eternal life awaits, and that the Lord will continue to rule over the world we leave behind? Thus we are called to (re)consider him lest we cease our *struggle against sin* and come to presume as ours the blessings of grace without the cost or discipline of discipleship.

What Do You Think?

Which quality of Jesus inspires you most in being able to endure hostility? Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding hostility directed against you as a Christian personally

Regarding hostility directed against the Christian faith in general

II. Nature of the Race

([HEBREWS 12:5-11](#))

A. What to Remember ([vv. 5, 6](#))

5. 6. And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,

**"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,
because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."**

The phrase *have you completely forgotten* is written so that it may be understood either as a statement or as a rhetorical question. Either way, the writer warns readers that they are in spiritual danger if they forget who they are in Christ: children of God. [Proverbs 3:11, 12](#), quoted here, culminates a passage that calls the believer to a life of wisdom grounded in trust in, fear of, and honor toward the Lord. This exhortation brings a mild rebuke. But it is also a word of encouragement in that *the Lord's discipline* is itself evidence of the believers' status and value as children of the loving Father.

Jewish teachers like to set [Proverbs 3:11, 12](#) alongside [Lamentations 3:40](#) ("Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord") and [Psalm 94:12](#) ("Blessed is the one you discipline, Lord, the one you teach from your law"). Just as old-covenant believers were called to discern the Lord's discipline, faithfulness, and love in the hardships of life, so also are new-covenant believers. His chastening springs from love that seeks our highest good; the purpose is to lead us to be like his Son in our virtues.

In drawing the relation between discipline and sonship, the writer recalls a theme highlighted earlier: "In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered" ([Hebrews 2:10](#); compare also "pioneer" in [12:2](#)). Jesus was made perfect by remaining faithful throughout the course of his sinless life and especially by his sacrificial suffering and death on the cross. The writer's point in both [Hebrews 2:10](#) and [12:5, 6](#) is that if Jesus was made perfect through sufferings, then we should not think that we will reach the completeness that God desires of us apart from sufferings.

B. What to Expect ([vv. 7-11](#))

7-8. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.



Visual for Lesson 9. Start a discussion by pointing to the compass as you ask, “What other images can illustrate the truths you read on the right?”

The writer draws out clearly the application of [Proverbs 3:11, 12](#): discipline is part of a father’s responsibility toward and relationship with his children. The child that is *not disciplined* is a child that is not loved well. Thus the writer is pressing the readers to accept that the divine discipline they have endured and will endure is to be expected and indeed welcomed. Such discipline speaks to the legitimacy of their relationship with their heavenly Father (compare [Deuteronomy 8:5](#); [2 Samuel 7:14](#)).

The writer’s point that *everyone undergoes discipline* parallels the reminder Paul offers in [1 Corinthians 10:13](#) that “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind.” As creatures who bear the image of God, we are intelligent, free, and therefore morally responsible. We know the difference between good and evil, between right and wrong. Even if the most ethical choice is not immediately clear in certain situations, still we are granted the gift and burden of responsibility for our actions.

We live in a morally ordered world (at least in original design, if not in everyday practice). The moral order of creation is grounded in the moral character of God himself. We may at times be tempted to complain that our punishment is greater than we can bear (compare [Genesis 4:13](#)). But the reality that God grants us the power to make decisions—some with eternal consequences—means that we must accept our responsibility for those decisions. This is true not only for Christians but for humanity as a whole (not including children who are yet to reach their age of moral accountability before God).

What Do You Think?

How do you know when a hardship is a result of divine discipline or merely the natural consequences of your actions? What may happen if we do not ask this question?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding health problems
- Regarding relationship problems
- Regarding financial difficulties
- Other

It is appropriate also to note that Paul's assertion in [1 Corinthians 10:13](#) regarding temptation as a universal experience is joined with the encouragement that "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." We who are children of God are called to endure suffering, resist temptation, and prove ourselves in testing. We can do so when we recall our status in Christ, God's love as it desires our highest good, and his faithfulness toward us in every situation in life.

9. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live!

The Bible speaks to the subject of parental discipline of children in several places (examples: [Proverbs 13:24](#); [22:6, 15](#); [23:13, 14](#); [29:15, 17](#); [Ephesians 6:4](#)). If we respectfully received the training by which our human fathers sought to prepare us to live effective and responsible lives, then so much more we should respectfully receive the training for life from *the Father of spirits*! The Creator is investing himself in us for our good.

DISCIPLINE WITH A GOAL

My preteen son angrily stomped down the hallway after I sent him to his room for misbehavior. I heard a thump and then silence. When I went to investigate, I saw a foot-sized hole in the door to his sister's room. His face registered my own surprise: he had not realized that he was strong enough to produce a hole in the door by kicking it.

I sat down on the bed next to him and told him that he would have to pay for a new door and help his dad install it. He nodded in agreement. I said, "I'm not angry at you. I know people get mad sometimes. I just want you to learn how to control that anger and frustration because someday you probably will be a husband and a father. Someday you will be so frustrated with your wife or your children that if you have not learned how to tame your anger and deal with it in a healthy way, you may hurt them."

I allowed him to experience the consequences of his out-of-control anger when he was young and the stakes were low so that he will not falter after he grows up and the stakes are very high. I discipline him out of love.

God's discipline is also rooted in love. He desires that we live holy lives that point others to him. Do you accept his discipline in that regard, or do you resist it?—L. M. W.

10. They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.

The Lord, through the writer of the book of Hebrews, clearly states his objective in our discipline: *that we may share in his holiness* (compare [1 Peter 1:15, 16](#)). Whether God is making use of the hardships of life in a fallen world or is himself bringing testing or correction upon us, he does so out of love for us as sons or daughters; he does so for our maturing in Christlike holiness; he does so in his faithfulness to us; and he does so for our highest good and his greatest glory.

To refuse to subject ourselves to his discipline is to demonstrate a prideful distrust in his character and wisdom. We are called instead to trust his character and promises ([Hebrews 11](#)), to humble ourselves before him ([James 4:7-10](#)), and to obey his Word ([John 14:23](#)).

11. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Divine discipline is never pleasant as one undergoes it. The way it confronts the presumptions of our hearts can create intensely difficult internal conflicts. But if we work honestly through those hard conversations between our will and our conscience, then the Lord promises us a *harvest of righteousness and peace*. The goal of God's discipline is the purity of a self-disciplined heart. The Lord is more interested in our character than in our comfort, and we do well to align our priorities with his. May we resolve to discern and be faithful to his purposes in us and for us; this is the path of true, abundant life.

What Do You Think?

How would you convince a new Christian that life in Christ is worth the pain that comes with it?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding the necessary discipline from the heavenly Father

Regarding earthly opposition from unbelievers

Regarding spiritual opposition from Satan

III. Recharging in the Race

(HEBREWS 12:12, 13)

^{12, 13}. **Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.**

The word *therefore* indicates that we have arrived at the author’s summary of this unit of thought. The summary is based in exhortations from [Isaiah 35:3](#) and the old Greek version of [Proverbs 4:26](#).

The writer draws from these Old Testament passages to show the better way. To succumb to discouragement is to weaken in faith and turn aside from the right and good path of following Christ. The first-century Christian readers of Jewish background are already *lame* in their faith; if they do not now place their feet carefully, they will soon be farther off course and in even worse spiritual health.

By contrast, if the readers will heed this warning and commit themselves again to the discipline of following Christ, they will find their souls *healed*. The promise of Jesus will then be fulfilled once again: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” ([Matthew 11:28-30](#)). This is the promise of discipleship.

What Do You Think?

How can our church do better at encouraging people to get back on the right path?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Concerning those beginning to stray

Concerning those whose straying has been lengthy

Conclusion

A. To Seek His Will

We live in a fallen world, and we ourselves are not without sin. The hardships and sufferings of life can bring intense discouragement, even times of despair. But there is a truth that can lift us above discouragement and draw us ever closer to Jesus. That truth is that God can and does work through the hardships of life in a fallen world. He also works directly in his ministry of discipline to lead us to maturity. That maturity, which is Christlike holiness, is for our highest good and for his greatest glory. Seek it!

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we confess that we find it difficult to thank you for your discipline. But when that discipline comes, may we see it as the best expression of your love. May we never try to sidestep your discipline. Let us instead look ever to your Son as our model for a spiritually disciplined life. We pray for this in his name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

If God is not disciplining you, then something is wrong!

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Into the Lesson

If anyone in your congregation runs regularly or has competed in a marathon, invite that person to your class to be interviewed about these experiences. Mention that bringing samples of running clothes and shoes would be helpful. Give the interviewee a list of possible questions, such as the following: What are some of your most memorable experiences as a runner? What challenges have you had to overcome in preparing for a race? How does what you wear influence how well you run? Do you have techniques that help you if you become discouraged and want to quit? What are some characteristics of successful runners? Allow students also to ask questions. Then say, “The writer of Hebrews also has some good advice for us on how we are to run life’s race.”

Alternative. Make two copies of the skit, “The Unready Runner,” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Early in the week, enlist two people to present the skit at the start of class. Ask the person who is the Runner to bring the clothes and items mentioned in the skit. After it is completed, ask, “What do you think the chances are of this runner’s completing the race? Which of the runner’s choices might prevent a successful race?” After a brief discussion, say, “The writer of Hebrews compares our lives to running a race, and he has some good advice on what we can do to complete the race successfully.”

Into the Word

Divide your class into three groups, and give each of them one of the following assignments to complete. *Group 1: Christ’s Example.* Read [Hebrews 12:1-4](#). Discuss these questions: What advice does the writer give on how to run the race of life? What can we learn about endurance from Jesus? Why should Jesus’ life inspire us to give total commitment to our discipleship? What can cause us to become weary and discouraged? *Group 2: God’s Discipline.* Read [Hebrews 12:5-11](#). Discuss these questions: When God chastens us, what does it show us about how he feels about us? In what way does chastening confirm that we are God’s children? How is God’s discipline superior to what we receive from our human fathers? What are some of the benefits of God’s discipline? *Group 3: God’s Children.* Read [Hebrews 12:9-13](#). Discuss these questions: Since we accept the discipline of human parents, what should our response be when God corrects us? When we are suffering, why is it so hard for us to see any benefit from it? When tempted to complain, what should we do instead? What are some of the benefits of having a proper attitude toward God’s discipline of us? Allow time for sharing.

On the board write the question, “Why is God allowing me to suffer in this way?” Then inquire, “Have any of you ever asked this question? From what we’ve discussed today, what are some possible answers?” The responses may include: God allows us to suffer the consequences for our disobedience; he uses the bad things in our lives to teach us to trust him more; he wants to make us more like Christ as we learn to endure hardship; he wants to develop the “harvest of righteousness” in our lives.

Into Life

Hand each student a card with the following words: *RUN, LOOK, RESIST, STRIVE, ENDURE, SUBMIT, DO RIGHT*. Then say, “There were a lot of verbs in today’s text. Read through this list. Do any of them inspire you to want to do something different in your life? If you had to pick just one to live by this week, which one would it be? Encourage the class to share with each other which word they’ve chosen and why.”

Option. Distribute copies of the “Runner’s Checklist” activity from the reproducible page. Encourage students to complete these at home to help them evaluate how well prepared they are for the race of life.