

Christ-Focused Endurance

Hebrews 12:1-11

Introduction

Our text this morning begins with these words: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses."

What the author of Hebrews exhorts us to do in the following verses rises from the host of examples he has just rehearsed.

"Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses"
The context conveys not that you are running a race in a stadium full of people who've finished their race and are now witnessing your performance. Rather, everywhere you look in the past to the present, there are people whose lives testify to the power and reward of faith in God. They bear witness to His performance.

Such people of faith surround you. History is full of their stories. Look around, ahead and behind and beside you— however strong your sense of not belonging to this world, you're not living a life of faith alone. You live a life of faith in solidarity with a host of men and women who like you bear testimony by their lives to the reliability of God.

What is the focus that enabled them to endure all they did and still persevere in faith?

Let's find out.

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be

subject to the Father of spirits and live? **10** For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Through focusing on Jesus we find endurance

1. To Run the Race Assigned to Us (1-2)
2. To Suffer the World's Hostility Against Us (3-4)
3. To Benefit from God's Discipline of Us (5-11)

Christ-Centered Endurance

1. To Run the Race Assigned to Us (1-2)

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Lay aside every weight—anything that impedes your progress and undercuts your life purpose.

Lay aside sin which clings so closely—not just a “besetting sin.” Any and every sin will hamper us, shackle us, cripple us. Grace and forgiveness do not lead us to take a light view

of sin and its harmful effects. Just the opposite. Repentance and faith are joined from the beginning of our turning to Jesus and throughout our journey as His disciples. Born-again people have an ongoing disposition of repentance or turning away from our sin and our sins, and an ongoing disposition of faith in turning toward Jesus Christ, the Savior from sin.

Run with endurance the race set before us
Race—athletic contest; word from which we get “agony”

1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith.

The life of faith is not easy—it is strenuous. It is not passive. You can’t just coast. You must not just drift along. Nothing that matters to you can be improved or maintained by such neglect. Why would anyone think it would work that way with your walk with God?

Endurance—to bear up under

The life of faith requires bearing up under the strain. The strain of weariness, mistakes, sorrow, hostility, temptations, threats, mistreatment. Many hardships are common to human life. Added to them is the cost of following Jesus in a world that rejects Him.

Set before us—God has assigned to each of us the life journey we are to run

Whatever you encounter in your journey is what God has assigned to you—it is set before you. The dangers and difficulties are not there to destroy you, but to strengthen and prove you as one of God’s witnesses who live by faith. And don’t turn a blind eye to the blessings God pours into your life along the way, nor forget that your journey has a destination. In your case as a believer, it is a glorious inheritance God has assigned to you.

Most importantly, keep your eyes on Jesus, the One who is leading you to your heavenly home.

Hebrews 12:2

Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Founder—leader, pioneer, trailblazer

Perfecter—one who brings it to completion, reaches the goal

He endured the cross—the worst of executions

“A punishment reserved for those who were deemed of all men most unfit to live, a punishment for sub-men. From so degrading

a death Roman citizens were exempt by ancient statute" (Bruce, 352).

Despising the shame—thinking down on it; considered it small—how is that possible?

For the joy that was set before Him—same language used for us—the race set before us. According to God's purpose and plan for Him, Jesus' great agony resulted in joyful victory over sin and death, the redemption of His people and rescue of the universe. He now sits in power at the right hand of God to intercede for His blood-bought people.

Without Jesus, the Hero of the gospel, we have no hope. But He has made a way for us. He has run the race God the Father assigned Him. He finished it to perfection.

Looking to Jesus—looking away from all the distractions—the troubles, the enemies, the substitutes, the temptations, the doubts, the faults of others, our own strength or successes, weaknesses or failures. Looking instead to Jesus—call Him "Yahweh saves," for He shall save His people from their sins. That is what the saints of God have done all along. Despite the swirl of threats and distractions around them, they were looking away to the One who would redeem us, the One who would procure our reward.

We look back to the historical record of His incarnation and perfect life, His atoning death, His victorious resurrection, His ascension into heaven. We look up to His intercession for us at God's right hand, and we look forward to His return. Jesus is the center point and pinnacle of all human history, including our own personal histories as God's people. He promised to be with us all the days even to the consummation of the age.

We look to Him as our Redeemer and as our Shepherd and Guide, showing us the way through whatever suffering comes our way on account of faith in God.

1 Peter 2:20-21

²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

What battles and burdens has God assigned to you? What responsibilities and opportunities?

Seize the day! Do what God has give you wholeheartedly as to the Lord not unto men. What distracts you from your life purpose? What sins are tripping you up?

2. To Suffer the World's Hostility Against Us (3-4)

³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Consider—intensified word from which we get logic, logistics, logbook (accounting); take stock—do so intently.

Consider how sinners—religious and secular—treated Jesus. They were intensely anti-Jesus in their reckoning. The Gospels are full of examples of their speaking against Him.

Breaking the law

Violating the traditions of the elders

Blaspheming

Crazy, demon-possessed

Doing miracles by the power of Satan

Leading insurrection against Rome

John 15:18-19

¹⁸ If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Lest you grow weary or fainthearted—become weary as your souls give out—you lose heart; its hard to keep going when your soul is worn

out. Focusing on Jesus your Savior, Lord, Redeemer, Good Shepherd, Intercessor, King, Captain keeps you from losing heart. He will never leave you or forsake you. The difficulties you face do not mean you're losing, but that you are following the path Jesus walked. The broad and easy road leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13).

Hebrews 12:4

In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Christ went all the way to the cross. Many a martyr stayed true all the way to death.

The word *martyr* is the word translated "witness" in Hebrews 11 and 12. With the waves of persecution in the first two centuries of Christianity, so many who testified to faith in Jesus had paid for their faith with their lives that by the third century the term martyr meant just that—someone who died for his or her faith.

The writer of Hebrews could say the same thing to us. We feel the growing hostility of our culture. Many have rejected God, His Word, and ignore or repudiate Jesus as Savior and Lord. But we have not yet had to resist unto blood. Brothers and sisters in other countries have done so. Our time may come. But fretting and fear is unnecessary. If it ever

does come to that, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus will help us bear up under it and keep on track. Nothing can separate us from His love—nothing in life or death. But for now, shall we shrink from following Jesus and His Word just because we want to be liked? That is the trend of the day.

What forms of worldly hostility have you encountered?

Don't let any of it drive your heart from loyalty to Jesus.

3. To Benefit from God's Discipline of Us (5-11)

⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Regard lightly—make light of it, neglect it
Lord's discipline—child-training

Be weary—same word translated "faint" in verse 3

Reproof—rebuke

Drawing from Proverbs 3:11-12

11 My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, **12** for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

It is for discipline you have to endure—even Jesus was trained in obedience through what He suffered as a human being.

The hard things are not punishment, but child-training—discipline from a loving Father. Even what enemies intend for evil God turns for good.

Israel was trained to lean on God in their warfare against the Canaanites to take the Promised Land. God used their captivity in Babylon to purge them of their idolatry.

A good father disciplines his children not to destroy them but to train them.

When a child misbehaves, you know who the parents are by who steps up to deal with it. It is not loving to leave it unchecked.

Disciplines the one he loves

Chastises every son he receives—physical pain; term means scourging or whipping; in a permissive society that denies the power of inborn sin and the value of pain in curbing it, such language seems harsh; even necessary

painful discipline is deemed child abuse. No wonder people think judgment and wrath are somehow beneath God. And no wonder so many even that profess to know God believe their own definitions of right and wrong.

There is such a thing as child abuse that physical harms children. But understand that leaving your children to themselves does them real harm as well. Let them choose their own way with no rebuke, no discipline, no pain for rebellious behavior and you are giving them a false view of reality and a self-absorbed view of life.

Proverbs 29:15

The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

One of the best things you can do for your children is to teach them that sin brings judgment and sin brings pain. They need to know that authority over them is real. They need to know how strong sin is in their hearts, and how much they need a Savior. How will they ever understand mercy and grace, if they have no understanding of what their sin deserves and the pain it brings?

God does the same thing in training us. He chastises us precisely because He loves us. He stirs our dissatisfaction with sin's

outcome, and promotes repentance in our hearts.

C. S. Lewis

"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to arouse a deaf world."
(The Problem of Pain)

⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

No human parents ever rear their children perfectly. We do our best to train our children well but we all make mistakes. Nonetheless, children are best served if they submit to their parents—honoring and obeying them as those God has assigned to rear them in the disciplines and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:1-4).

But there's no getting around the reality that discipline is painful—whatever form it takes, it is by its nature restrictive, corrective, hard. *Athletes and soldiers have to endure hardness if they're going to be any good at what they do. Same with us as God's children. We need the hard things. We need the training. And*

our loving God sees to it we receive it. Unlike human parents, He never makes mistakes in how He disciplines us.

It is always for our good.
That we may share in His holiness.
The goal is to become more like Him—mature in Christ.

That is what He is working in us by the indwelling Spirit through everything that happens to us. All things are working together for good to them that love God and the called according to His purpose. He has predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son. (Romans 8:29)

“What did you learn from this trial?”
Less about His teaching us some truth, although that happens sometimes, and more about being transformed by what He takes us through. More like training us and equipping us so we can live life wisely and well, than about amassing a longer list of facts.

The more painful the trial, the more it tends to reshape who we are into being like Jesus.

11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

It doesn't feel joyful during an intense time of discipline. It feels like grief and pain.

But later—fruit takes time—this is about growing you and making you healthy so that good fruit comes from your life

Peaceful fruit of righteousness

James 3:17-18

¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Trained—word we get gymnasium from; think of it as an exercise workout, strength-building training

Tom Landry: "The job of a coach is to make men do what they don't want to do, in order to be what they've always wanted to be."

God is shaping you into what He wants you to be in Christ. Don't despise the process. He is a good, good Father. Your goal is to be like Jesus, full of the fruit of the Spirit.

Conclusion

Through focusing on Jesus we find endurance

1. To Run the Race Assigned to Us

2. To Suffer the World's Hostility Against Us
3. To Benefit from God's Discipline of Us

Discussion Questions

1. What benefits have you found in knowing individuals who have lived by faith (from the Biblical record, church history, and your own history)?
2. What are some weights and distractions that tend to interfere with fulfilling what God has called you to be and to do?
3. How is it that sin cripples you from running your race well?
4. Why should it not be surprising that pursuing a life of faith requires intense effort and endurance?
5. In what ways is it helpful to know God has assigned your particular race to you?
6. Why would looking away from the distractions and sins to Jesus and His successful race toward a joyful goal help you in your struggles to live by faith?
7. What kinds of worldly hostility have you encountered so far?

8. In what ways does it help you to know that all the hard things God brings into your life—even the hostility of sinners—He uses to train you as His deeply loved child?
9. How is a parent's disciplining (training) and chastising (involves physical pain) his/her children a sign of true love and a means of bringing them good?