



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for June 22, 2008
Released on Wednesday, June 18, 2008**

“Christ as Leader”

Lesson Text: Hebrews 12:1–13.

Devotional Reading: Proverbs 3:5–12.

Background Scripture: Hebrews 12:1–13.

Times: about A.D. 67

Place: unknown

HOW TO SAY IT

BARAK. *Bair-uk.*

ENOCH. *E-nock*

JEPHTHAH. *Jef-thuh (th as in thin).*

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT: Hebrews 12:1–13

1Wherefore 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,

2Looking 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.

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

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

5And 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:

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

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

8But 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.

LESSON AIMS

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

1. Describe the role and the importance of discipline in the training of an athlete and in rearing a child.
2. Compare and contrast human discipline with God's discipline.
3. Identify one area where he or she needs to submit to divine discipline.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is essential to the success of a group. History is filled with examples of what strong leaders can do when they arouse the loyalty and trust of their followers. The armies of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar wrought feats deemed impossible. Joan of Arc inspired the French to expel the English from their soil. Abraham Lincoln's perseverance brought the American Union back together. Winston Churchill rallied the British to repel Nazi attacks. Martin Luther King, Jr., gave hope to African Americans in their quest for equal rights.

Successful leaders translate hopes into plans and plans into actions. They identify with their followers and earn their respect. They display wisdom, courage, and perseverance. As this week's lesson reveals, Jesus Christ did all of these and more. He entered into our human weakness and bore our sins. He intercedes for us and has left us a perfect example of perseverance and the ultimate triumph over suffering.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Today's lesson text follows one of the most famous chapters in the New Testament, Hebrews 11. That chapter is known as the "Faith Hall of Fame." It is a rehearsal of the lives of several key Old Testament saints, showing how they lived by faith in God. Yet the chapter ends by noting, "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise" (Hebrews 11:39).

The Old Testament faithful could only look ahead to the blessings enjoyed by Christians. The original community receiving the letter to the Hebrews was facing hardship (Hebrews 10:32-34), even persecution. The author of Hebrews did not want his readers to think that they were alone in enduring hardships; the earlier people of God had it rough too. A frequent exhortation in the book is to "hold" or "hold fast" to the precious faith in Christ (see Hebrews 3:6, 14; 4:14; 10:23).

Chapter 12, this lesson's focus, gets down to some of the nitty-gritty details of this "holding fast." Not only will there be hardships imposed on the believers from the outside, there will be hardships that come from God himself. This is the chastening of God. As the author clearly portrays, it is discipline designed for the benefit of the believer. The central principle in this chapter is that such discipline is part of His love.

Discipline could be harsh in the ancient world. The success of the Roman army was built on ruthless discipline within the legions. Apprentices learning a trade were forced to work long hours. Yet there was another side to discipline in this era too. To be a *disciple* meant that you were a student. You had attached yourself to a teacher and allowed him to be your master in all things.

This relationship was more than tutoring once or twice a week. The teacher-disciple arrangement was often a "24/7" situation, where the teacher was in total control of the student's life. This is the way the book of Hebrews pictures the relationship of Christians to God. God is concerned with every aspect of our lives and uses corrective discipline to bring us to advanced levels of godliness and holiness.

QUESTIONS

Preparing to Run with Jesus (Hebrews 12:1, 2)

1. What role do Old Testament heroes of faith have in regard to our spiritual race (Hebrews 12:1) ?

At the end of chapter 11, we are told that the great faith heroes of the Old Testament could not be "made perfect" (Hebrews 11:40). This expression was sometimes used of runners who could not finish a race. The author of Hebrews continues this race analogy into chapter 12, now applying it to Christians.

"Wherefore" In Hebrews 12:1 makes the connection. The Christian life is like a race run in a stadium where believers are "compassed about with... a cloud of witnesses."

This verse paints a marvelous picture. Imagine the premier running *race* in all the world: the marathon at the Olympic games. A handful of runners, the world's finest, are at the starting line. Thousands of spectators await the starting gun. But this crowd is magnified to perhaps two or three billion people via worldwide television. That would be a great *cloud of witnesses!*

The runners are wearing the barest of essential clothing. They have shed their warm-up suits. They are not carrying their duffle bags. Some have even shaved their bodies to rid themselves of a tiny amount of weight. Their training has increased their endurance and eliminated excess body fat. They have lain *aside every weight* that might slow them down.

The analogy to the Christian life has to do with personal sin. The author's point is that sin slows us down in our pursuit of godliness. We know the racecourse. We want to finish the race. Sin hinders our success. Unchecked sin in our lives may slow us down, get us off course, or even stop us dead in our tracks. We want to be like Paul, who at the end of his life was able to say, "I have finished my course [race], I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).

2. Why should we fix our eyes on Jesus as we run (v. 2)?

Although believers are to be aware of the “cloud of witnesses” (v. 1), they are not to focus on them. Their eyes must ever be fixed on Jesus (v. 2), who stands in the distance at the end of the course. This is because He is “the author and finisher of our faith.”

The author speaks of *Jesus* as the runner, and *the cross* as the race. Jesus was willing to accept the hard things of His run. He was not deterred by *the shame* of His scandalous death, a gruesome execution befitting the worst criminal. He was a *finisher*, not a quitter. In this Jesus has shown us the way, the way of *our faith*, the way we too should run the course of our lives in submission to His leadership.

We also see the great reward Jesus has gained. It is more than an Olympic gold medal or a huge signing bonus for the next season. Jesus has been recognized once and for all by being given a seat *at the right hand of the throne of God*. There is no higher honor available.

Training to Run with Jesus (Hebrews 12:3–11)

3. What was the secret of Jesus’ success as He faced the opposition of sinful men (vs. 3,4)?

Distance runners know that in the race there comes a time when the runner wants to quit. The body screams, “Enough!” Lungs are burning. Legs are rubbery. The runner feels weary, oh so weary! The runner feels *faint*.

The race that Jesus ran was made tortuous because of the *contradiction of sinners*, meaning the opposition He received from the leadership of the Jews in His day. He *endured* public denunciations, name-calling, threats of death, attempts to dissuade His disciples from following Him, and eventually arrest and crucifixion. While this atoning death made our salvation possible, the life of Jesus also serves as an example and inspiration to those who follow Him.

The great faith heroes of chapter 11 were surely beset by doubts. They had opportunities to disobey God and serve themselves. The author reminds us that although living the Christian life can be challenging, most of us do not suffer death (*resist unto blood*) in our efforts to resist temptation and avoid falling to sin. Our efforts, no matter how great, will not equal the sacrifices made by our leader, Jesus.

4. Why do Christians sometimes find it hard to endure through the hard times? What can be done to help them?

Western culture places much emphasis on the comforts of life and having conveniences at hand for any purpose. Also, having many options at our disposal makes us think that when a difficulty arises, we can just opt out of that situation and move on.

A mistake that is often made in the church is that when a brother or sister in Christ is going through difficult times, we abandon them instead of being there for them. If they struggle with doubt, we question their faith. If there is a sin they struggle with, we question their commitment to the lordship of Christ. It is in these times that Christians need “to be there,” encouraging and teaching instead of criticizing and condemning.

5. Why is discipline from God a sign of His love rather than a sign of His rejection (vs. 5,6)?

God deals with His people as a Father with His children. He urges them not to treat the chastening of the Lord with contempt or indifference. The word translated "chastening" in Hebrews 12:5 means "training," "instruction," or "discipline." The hardships of discipline are not pleasant, but believers must take them seriously, for they are God's way of shaping their character. Even if discipline involves rebuke, it should never lead one to faint, or lose heart.

Discipline, far from manifesting God's rejection, proves His love. Every son or daughter He receives is scourged (made to endure pain) at some point in his spiritual development. Family discipline was expected in the ancient world; the father who did not discipline his children revealed neglect, not love. If he really cared for them, he would correct them. So too it is the heavenly Father's love that leads Him to correct and train His own.

6. What was a time when you believe you were chastened or rebuked by the Lord? How did you grow spiritually as a result?

There are various ways in which God may rebuke us. It may be through a messenger such as a preacher or Bible teacher. It may be through a friend who is concerned about our spiritual walk who challenges us, and God uses that to chasten us. As we read Scripture, we may also be rebuked by God as we better understand our sin.

If we try to repress our guilt, God will work on us to convict us of our sin. When God convicts us, we feel the pressure. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer" (Psalm 32:1-4; see also Acts 2:37). The pressure God exerts is not to destroy us, but rather to strengthen us for greater service and closer fellowship with Him.

7. What does a childhood devoid of discipline say about the child (vs. 7,8)?

"If ye endure chastening" reads more literally, "It is for discipline that you endure what you do." In other words, this is why God permits you to suffer. He is merely dealing with His own as every good father deals with his children. The question "For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" is a way of saying that sonship without discipline is unthinkable.

The writer ventured further. If his readers thought they could have sonship without discipline, they needed to consider that in a family this would be a sign of illegitimacy, not sonship (Heb. 12:8). The word translated "bastards" signifies the offspring of slaves or concubines and sometimes illegitimate children in general. These were not true members of the family and thus not heirs. The father was under no obligation to discipline them.

This teaching raises disturbing questions. If discipline and correction are essential aspects of responsible and loving child rearing, what message are permissive parents sending their children? It may be the opposite of what they intend. And what of the professing believer who experiences no hardships from God's loving hand? Is it possible that such a person is not really a legitimate member of His family?

8. How does God's discipline differ from that of human fathers (vs. 9,10)?

While there are similarities between human and divine discipline, there are differences as well. Our earthly fathers were our correctors during our childhood, and we gave them due respect. We knew it was our duty to do so. Should we not then willingly submit to the discipline of the Father of spirits? This unusual title for God is no doubt used to contrast Him with our fathers according to the flesh. As they gave us physical life, so He gives us spiritual life.

Discipline by human parents is never perfect. Parents use their best judgment (*after their own pleasure*) when administering discipline. Some parents are too harsh; some are too lenient.

God never errs in the discipline He delivers; it is always in our best interest. He knows exactly what we need. And to what end is this done? It is so that we might share in His holiness. God's ultimate purpose is to make us like Himself, and every act of training and discipline He administers is intended to lead us in that direction (cf, 1 Pet. 1:14–16).

9. What ultimate spiritual benefit does discipline bring (v. 11)?

It is hard for one going through suffering to see how it can bring good. It is often a cause for grief. But the phrase "for the present seemeth" reveals our shortsighted perspective. We need to step back and see God's goal for it. This will enable us to see the "afterward" as well as the present. God wants to produce in us "the peaceable fruit of righteousness," reflecting His own character. And this character is accompanied by peace. Gone are inner struggles and fears, discontent with God's will, and the outward irritability that so often accompanies suffering.

This harvest is not automatic. It is reserved for those who are exercised by the discipline. This athletic term means "trained." As the athlete trains without complaint and profits from it, so the Christian must submit to God with a teachable spirit.

Healing to Run with Jesus (Hebrews 12:12, 13)

10. What can stronger believers do to help the weaker persevere (vs. 12,13)?

The idea of the athlete in training is continued. Toward the end of a basketball game, coaches remind fatigued players to keep their *hands* up and keep moving their feet when playing defense. Here, the exhortation is to *lift up* hands and *knees* (v. 12). The underlying idea is that we must grow strong again and not be overcome by weariness. We cannot let fatigue defeat us. We claim God's promise that we may "run and not be weary ... walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31; compare 35:3).

This is not athletic training advice, however. It is spiritual instruction. We cannot be satisfied with reaching a certain level in our walk with God, or "plateauing." We must continue to employ our hands to work for God. We must stay on our feet and continue our spiritual journey, even if our knees are aching.

Why must we continue to work and walk with God? Because there are people following us. There are those who are spiritually disabled, the *lame*, who need a strong leader walking in *straight paths* (v. 13). If leaders sit down or turn aside, these will never *be healed*.

We should not forget that traveling the paths of righteousness is not a solo journey. There is no place for spiritual selfishness in the church. The spiritually

strong are expected to help the weak along the way (see Acts 20:35). Parents will want to make sure their children are walking with the Lord. Teachers should be leading their students to the throne of God. Elders and ministers must never forget the flock they are leading.

CONCLUSION

The best leaders are those who lead by example. They not only tell us what to do; they also show us how to do it.

We can look for no greater leader than Jesus. He endured temporary pain for the sake of eternal glory. Our lesson text has encouraged us to keep focusing on Him as we learn His lessons of patient endurance.

This lesson also introduced us to chastening. Sometimes God allows us to experience negative things in order to refine us and make us more like Jesus, our Leader.

People in your class could be going through some heavy-duty chastening right now. Assure them of God's love and purpose for them.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Following Christ means ridding ourselves of anything that would interfere with wholehearted obedience to Him (Heb. 12:1).
2. IF we are to follow Christ, we must prepare ourselves for opposition, shame, and weariness (vs. 2–4).
3. We should welcome the Lord's discipline as evidence of His love and concern for us in all our weaknesses (vs. 5–8).
4. We should heed the Lord's discipline because it is essential for spiritual growth (v. 9).
5. A life of holiness cannot be achieved apart from hardship and discipline (vs. 10–13).

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Want eternity? Get discipline!

PRAYER

Lord God, we know that our lives are not always journeys of joy. May we not forget that pain and trials are not signs of Your lack of love, and that You will never abandon us. Please help us turn times of trial into opportunities to trust You more. We pray this in the name of our leader in the faith, Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Next week's lesson comes from Hebrews 13:1–16. It shows Christ was eternal God. You should note how we are called to serve the unchanging Christ.

June 29th's lesson is titled, "Christ as Eternal God." The lesson text is Hebrews 13:1–16. You should read Hebrews 13:1–16 in preparation for this lesson. *Good studying!*

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

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