

Run with Endurance

Hebrews 12:12-17

May 24, 2026

Hebrews is written to the Jewish believers in Jesus as the Messiah. It is meant to be read as a letter from beginning to end. We have been studying pieces of the letter each week, but it is important to understand the setting and context of the letter as a whole. So, bear with me as I quickly connect the whole message of chapters 1-11 to our text in chapter 12.

The faith in Jesus as the Messiah and the following of His teachings was counter to the established Jewish and Roman culture. As a result, these Jewish Christians experienced persecution. Some were considering returning to the Law to avoid persecution. The author writes this epistle or letter

- To proclaim the superiority of Jesus.
- To encourage them to stay strong in their faith and endure their suffering.
- To warn them not to neglect their faith or succumb to the temptation to return to the Law to blend into the culture and avoid persecution.

He begins his letter by presenting the superiority of Jesus. He tells them, God is speaking to us by His Son. Jesus is the heir of all things and the creator of the world. Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God and He is the exact imprint of His nature. He upholds the universe by the word of His power. He is superior to the angels, superior to Moses and He is a superior high priest. The old covenant, the temple sacrifices, and the temple ceremonies are obsolete. They have been replaced by a better covenant, a better sacrifice and a perfect high priest sitting at the right hand of God. Righteousness is achieved, not through the Law, but through FAITH.

POWERFUL – The Author starts his letter establishing the preeminence of Jesus.

The author also gave five warnings to the Jewish believers.

1. Hebrews 2:1-4 – Warns of the believer who begins to **drift**.
2. Hebrews 3:7-4:13 – Warns of the believer who begins to **doubt**.
3. Hebrews 5:11 – Warns of the believer who becomes **Dull to the Word.**”
4. Hebrews 6:6 – Warns of the believer who falls away, is worthless and have nothing to show for their life.

Chapter 10 is the pivot point for the entire book of Hebrews. The first ten chapters is all about Jesus. Who is Jesus is and what He has accomplished. Chapters 11-13 tell us what to do. Look with me at Chapter 10 verse 12 where the author **ESTABLISHES WHO JESUS IS** and what He accomplished.

Hebrews 10:12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

- Jesus was the perfect and final sacrifice and He sat down at the right hand of God because His work was finished.
- He is our perfect high Priest

Then the author **CHALLENGES THE HEBREW CHRISTIANS** in verse 21 saying.

Hebrews 10:21-22 ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in **full assurance of faith**,

This challenge is immediately followed up with **THE STRONGEST WARNING** in all of Scripture:

Hebrews 10: 26-31 ²⁶ For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses

dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which He was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

- Now that we know the truth, if we reject the truth and live in deliberate sin, how much worse will the punishment be deserved by the one who offends the whole Trinity? The one who offends God the Father, tramples on the Son of God, and outrages the Spirit. He says, It will not end well for you.

Following this strong warning, the author concludes chapter 10 with a **GREAT HOPE** for his readers in verse 39.

Hebrews 10:39 ³⁹ But WE are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have **faith** and preserve their souls.

- It is **FAITH** that preserves their souls, not the Law or works.
- And he then transitions to define and illustrate FAITH in the great Hall of Faith chapter 11.

Hebrews 11:1-2 Now **faith** is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the people of old received their commendation.

We spent many weeks walking through the illustrations of faith in the lives of Able, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses and so many OT saints.

A good friend of mine encouraged me to **“go back and visit the places where God visited you.”** I had considered making a trip this summer to visit the place where I accepted Christ.

I accepted Christ one night laying on my back at Kanakuk Kamp in Lampe Missouri on a hot tennis court looking up at the stars. I was thinking to make a pilgrimage to visit this place where God visited me when it happened that Joe White’s assistant called me to see if I had time to have breakfast with Joe.

As a kid, Joe’s messages and the influence of the counselors led me to Christ. As a college student I worked with Joe, became friends with Joe, shared Christ with other kids, and got up early on mornings to meet Joe and baptize those kids who had accepted Christ in Table Rock lake.

I got to share with him at breakfast that I was encouraged to return to go back and visit the place where God visited me, but instead God had a better plan, to have the person that led me to Christ to visit me.

The part of the letter we call Chapter 11 was a great encouragement to these struggling Jewish Christians

- They were reminded of their history
- They got to return to the stories of the people and the places where God visited them and they demonstrated their faith.
- They got to connect their Fathers faith in God’s promises that were not fulfilled in their lifetime to the promise fulfilled in Jesus.

Chapter 12 transitions from the faith testimonies of the saints to the picture of running an endurance race to encourage the Christians living in the Jewish and secular world. The race analogy carries into the text I will cover today. It starts here in Hebrews 12: 1-2.

Hebrews 12:1 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,

- Since we have these great witnesses or these testimonies of faith to inspire us, let us “lay aside” or cast away “every” weight or sin that “clings” so closely.
- Do you have any “cling on” sin? Any baggage that weighs you down?
- Sin that just sticks on you and you can’t seem to shake?
- The author challenges them and challenges me and you to lay these sins aside, to shake em’ off!

In verse 2, In this endurance race the author directs our eyes to the prize. He says, “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.”

- When we run a race we look to the finish, to the prize.
- The Spirit took me down a rabbit trail here that blessed me and I think is worth sharing.
- I couldn’t resist Paul’s encouragement to the Corinthians to run a race and what it means to “**gain Christ**” as the prize. To the church in Corinth he says,

1 Corinthians 9:24 ²⁴Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain IT.

Paul describes what it means to “gain Christ” as the prize in his letter to the Philippians. He says, I count everything as loss...

Philippians 3:9-10 ...that I may **gain Christ**, and be found in Him...the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death,

- Did you get that? This is one of Paul’s most profound statements giving a picture of what it means to “gain Christ.” To be conformed to Christ.
- “That I may know Him.” – That we may know Him personally.
- That we may know the POWER of His resurrection – Through Christ’s resurrection we also have overcome death and have strength to resist sin.
- That we may share in His sufferings – that we also may be sanctified through hardships conforming to His righteousness.
- That we may become like Him in His death.
 - To let the old self die.
 - To die to self-centered living
 - To submit to the will of God.

This is what Paul aspired to become – to be like Christ.

To the Galatians, Paul said:

Galatians 2:20 ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

To the Philippians, Paul said:

Philippians 1:21 ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain

So we are to run to receive the prize. - To Gain Christ!

Last week, Brett covered the author’s instruction that God is treating the Hebrew Christians as sons who are disciplined for their good.

- The author describes the discipline from our earthly fathers as a necessary method for teaching, for correction and for training.
- In Chapter 12 verse 11 he describes the discipline of our heavenly Father is also for good. That those who have been trained by it may share in His holiness yielding the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

James, the brother of Jesus, also writes in his letter to Jewish Christians whose faith is being tested, encouraging them to count all these trials and tests as joy.

James 1:2-3 ²Count it all joy, my brothers,^[b] when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

So, the author is providing an illustration and an analogy of an athletic endurance race. He continues on with this illustration to encourage and give instruction the community of Jewish Christians in our text today. Let us read the text.

Hebrews 12:12-17 ¹²Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. ¹⁴Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; ¹⁶that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

I couldn't help but being reminded of the many endurance races that I ran where I would go out too fast, my strength would fade, and I would feel like I was running in slow motion as I was being passed by my competitors. I planned to share one of my stories but couldn't beat this video from the 2026 Boston Marathon. Ajay Haridasse was nearing the finish of the marathon when, as describe in our scriptures his knees weakened and he could not run in a straight line. Two other runners, Aaron Beggs and Robson De Oliveira, stopped, picked him up and carried Ajay the last [1,000 feet to the finish line](#).

Scripture tells us that following Jesus is an endurance race. The Lord will discipline us to purify us and to sanctify us over the course of our life so that we may yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Scripture tells us as Christians we will experience persecution. Paul tells his disciple Timothy.

2 Timothy 3:12 ¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

The Apostle John describes Jesus' command to love one another and then Jesus says,

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.

- Is your life as a Christian remarkable or noticeably different than your Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist or secular neighbors or friends?
- Do people in your work or community recognize you as a Christian?
- Do you respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit when interacting with non-believing coworkers or people in the community? Or are you afraid that you might be perceived negatively as "religious" or offend somebody?
- We are told that if we desire to live a godly life as a follower of Jesus, we will be persecuted? Do you feel you have been persecuted?
- I probably push the boundaries more than most and I cannot say that I have not experienced any real persecution. I don't ever recall losing a deal or being excluded from a group or conversation because of my beliefs. There has only been one time that when I asked if I could pray for someone at my work that I was turned down.
- Maybe I need to be more uncomfortable? Maybe I need to ask more probing questions.

- Maybe after sharing some of the stories of my faith, I should ask them where the Lord is working in their lives.
- Perhaps, I am just missing some great testimonies? Or perhaps, I have missed the opportunity for someone to invite me into their life, to their doubts, to their struggles, or to their fears?
- Perhaps, I am missing out on the privilege to join in the work the Holy Spirit is doing and will do in someone else's life?

So, the author again writes to encourage the Jewish Christians who are running the race, enduring persecution, and considering returning to the Law. He says,

SLIDE 11

Hebrews 12:12-13 ¹²Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.

- Since you are being corrected and trained through discipline.
- He says, therefore, renew your strength and be healed.
- The author offers three instructions to maintain the health of the Christian community.
- These are instructions for the healing and for the health the Jewish Christian church in the late first century. It is also instruction for the health of all communities of believers and for Village Community Church today.

First, to be a healthy church:

Hebrews 12:14 ¹⁴Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

- In Jesus' sermon on the mount He says, "Blessed are the **peacemakers**, for they shall be called **sons of God**." Romans 12 describes a peacemaker as someone who never avenges himself, if your enemy is

hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. Overcome evil with good. Of peacemakers it says, “They shall be called sons of God.” Who are “sons of God?” **Galatians 3:26** says, “for in Christ Jesus you are ALL sons of God, through faith.” The “sons of God” are those Brett referenced last week in

Romans 8:16-17 ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

- Sons of God are Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. Sons of God also willingly follow Christ in suffering.
- Verse 14 says, Strive for peace with everyone and “strive for holiness.” To “strive for holiness” is not a claim of salvation by works, but “holiness” literally means to be Set Apart. Strive to be set apart **TO God** and to be set apart **FROM sin**.

Second, to be a healthy church:

Hebrews 12:15 ¹⁵See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God;

- **“See to it that”** – Watch out for one another. Remember our encouragement in **Hebrews 10:24-25** ²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.
- Watch out for one another that no one **“fails to obtain the grace of God.”** – See to it that no one falls short of receiving the gift of eternal salvation.
 - At VCC we have the core development series to ensure that the essentials of the Christian faith and covenant membership are covered.
 - We host new member dinners with Elders to give new members the opportunity to share their testimony and ask questions. Ensuring that no one fails to obtain the grace of God at VCC is a top priority.

- At VCC, our mission is to preach the gospel, to make disciples and to equip the saints.

Third instruction to be a healthy church

Hebrews 12:15b see to it... that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

- **That no “root of bitterness:” springs up.** The “root of bitterness” is referring to **Deuteronomy 29:18** that describes a person whose heart turns from God to serve other gods as a “root bearing poison or a bitter fruit.” A bitter and resentful person is like a contagious poison, spreading division and resentment to others.

The author then ends with verses 16 and 17 providing an illustration of the root of bitterness that would be familiar to the Hebrews:

Hebrews 12:16-17¹⁶ that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷ For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

- Verse 16 is an illustration of what can happen if you let a root of bitterness take hold in your church. See to it that... no one becomes like Esau. Esau embraced the desires of the flesh. Esau was sexually immoral and unholy.
- In Genesis 25, the Scripture says, “Esau despised his birthright.” Esau **DESPISED** the grace given him through his birthright. His attitude and his posture were the seeds that prepared the ground for the roots of bitterness to grow.
- Regret is not the same as repentance. Verse 17 says, “**He found no chance to repent.**” Instead of responding to his loss with repentance and transformation, Esau responded with resentment and hostility.
- The root of bitterness grows and takes hold when unrepentant consequences come. When Esau’s desire to inherit the blessing was

rejected he was in great anguish, it says he “sought IT with tears.” The “IT” was the desire for the blessing, NOT the chance to repent.

- Hebrews 12:15 warns that bitterness spreads and “defiles many.” We know that Esau’s line (Edom) became many people and were a long-term enemy and adversary to Israel.
- So, we tend to the flock and we know our community. We see to it that... no one comes to despise God’s grace and grows a bitter heart that can spread resentment and division within the church.

What Message Did the Spirit Give to Me?

1. Consider visiting the places or people where God visited you. – If you are able, call them.

2. Run to receive the prize – to Gain Christ, as Paul described so well:

- That we may know Him personally
- That we may know the power of His resurrection – Through His resurrection we also receive the power to overcome death and have strength in the power of Christ's resurrection to resist sin.
- That we may share in His sufferings – that through hardships we will conform to His righteousness.
- That we may become like Him in His death. –To die to self, Die to Self-centered living, and submit to the will of God.

3. Be the Church – Each and every one of you.

- **Expect Persecution** - 2 Timothy 3:12 ¹²Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted
- **Be Peacemakers and stive for Holiness**, be set apart to God.
- **Leave no one behind.** Make sure no one slips through the cracks and does not obtain the grace of God – salvation.
- Make sure we protect each other and the church from growing any roots of bitterness. Watch out for those that are
 - Drifting away – prioritizing other activities
 - Those who are doubting
 - Those who become dull to the Word
 - Those that do fall away
 - Most importantly, those that despise the grace offered to them, reject Christ and choose to follow other Gods.
- **Let us run with endurance to receive the prize-to Gain Christ**