

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

HEBREWS 12-13

A city slicker, on a business trip, was driving through the countryside where he ran his car into a ditch. About that time, a farmer and his horse trotted by. The businessman asked the farmer if his horse could pull his car out of the ditch. The farmer said, "Ole Buddy will be happy to help!" He hitched his horse to the car, and yelled, "pull Nellie, pull!" *The horse didn't flinch.* Next he screamed, "pull, Daisy, pull!" *Not a budge.* Again he barked "pull, Coco, pull!" *The horse stood still.*

Finally, the farmer spoke softly, "pull, Buddy, pull." Immediately, ole Buddy pulled the car out of the ditch.

Of course, the stranger was astonished. Three times the farmer had called his horse by the wrong name, *why?* The farmer explained, "Well, ole Buddy is blind, and he's got a lazy streak. If he had thought he was the only horse pulling, he wouldn't even have tried."

And this is the approach the author of Hebrews is taking with his readers. He's encouraging them to walk by faith, *and He wants them to know they're not alone!*

Chapter 11 showed how all of Israel's heroes won God's approval **by faith, not works.** *The Hebrews who had receive this letter were not the first to live by faith!*

Chapter 12 begins, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses..." *And who are these witnesses?* Well, taken in context, it's the men and women of faith spoken of in Chapter 11...

Some people interpret the "cloud of witnesses" as people in heaven looking down on us to cheer us on. That the spirit of some dead saint may be looking over your shoulder... *Not so!* Citizens of heaven have far more to interest them than us... They're at the feet of Jesus, praising the King, beholding the glories of God!

The cloud of witnesses are the people of faith in Chapter 11 - not because they're now witnessing, but because they've left behind a witness. The record of their lives testifies that it can be done! If they could hold fast to their faith in a fallen world - we can too!

And in light of their witness, "let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." Here, the Christian life is referred to as a race. This is a common NT analogy. The Christian life is likened to a footrace, *but not a sprint - a marathon.*

Some Christians are quick out of the blocks. They give their lives to Jesus, and they're fired up to serve. But they don't make it through the first turn before they run out of steam. God isn't interested in *flash in the pan* Christians. He wants us to run with endurance.

And to do so the writer encourages us to dress for success. To *"lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us..."* We need to shed two kinds of hindrances: *"weights"* and *"ensnaring sins."*

You would never see a competitive runner in a trench coat, or army boots, or carrying a backpack. He gets rid of every *"weight"* that would slow him down.

A runners' clothes are lightweight, wind-resistant, designed to allow the greatest range of movement. The ancient Olympians competed naked. All Greek racers were **streakers**. The goal was to run unencumbered.

Realize *"weights"* in life are issues that no one would necessarily call *"sinful."* There's nothing evil about them per se. They just make it more difficult to achieve our goal. Like extra baggage they drag us down.

If you travel a lot you learn that your enjoyment of the trip is direct proportion to how light you can pack. Try navigating an airport lugging a lot of luggage and its torture. This is the key to living a victorious and vital Christian life - *down-size!* Cull away the fluff and stuff.

Ask yourself, *"What activities, or commitments, or pastimes suck up my energy and resources without directing me or others to Jesus?... Where do I invest time without gaining a godly reward?... When it comes to spiritual growth what's slowing me down, and getting in my way?"* Find your weights; then lay them aside.

And along with the *"weights"* a Christian also needs to lay aside *"the sin which so easily ensnares us."*

I'm sure you realize, we're not all vulnerable to the same temptations. One person battles alcohol. Another person struggles with anger, or gossip, or lust. Your **ensnaring sin** is whatever it is that causes you the most trouble. *What is it that consistently trips you up?*

Don't live in denial. We need to come clean and face our sin squarely. **The keys to victory are to identify; then crucify!** Jesus died on the cross to put an end to our sin. Let's lay our sins on Jesus' shoulders, and believe that He's paid our debt and broken sin's power. Through faith in Christ crucified we can live in victory.

And here's how to *walk by faith.* Lay aside *"weights"* and *"ensnaring sins,"* and as you do *"look 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 has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” We need to fixate on our example. Consider what Jesus did on the cross. Chapter 11 listed dozens of Hebrew elders with impressive faith, **but the greatest example of faith by far was Jesus.**

He *“endured the cross”* and all its pain - *the nails, the rejection, the scourging, the agony, the separation from His Father.* All the while He *“despised the shame.”* *The cross was meant for capital criminals, not the sinless Son of God.* And He did it *“for the joy set before Him.”* What motivated Jesus was *the joy of pleasing God and the joy of saving you.* Faith enabled Jesus to keep His eyes on the *joy ahead, not the pain at hand.* **And if you stay focused on Jesus, faith will do the same for you.**

It reminds me of the famous track meet that occurred on August 7, 1954. The world’s best two milers squared off in what was touted as *“The Miracle Mile.”* John Landy and Roger Bannister were running neck-n-neck as the men turned down the final backstretch.

Landy had a small lead, but as they rounded the turn the crowd let out an enormous roar. Because of the noise Landy could no longer hear Bannister’s foot strike the ground behind him. It caused him to make a fatal mistake. He turned his head to look back. And as soon as he did, Roger Bannister initiated his kick, passing Landy, and eventually beating him by 5 yards.

In the midst of a trial or persecution the worse mistake to make is to look back on the world you’ve left behind. Fix your eyes squarely on Jesus. Lock onto the joy that’s ultimately yours, if you follow Him to the end!

Verse 3, *“For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”* **Consider Jesus!** In short, this is the theme of the book of Hebrews.

And we’ve considered Jesus in multiple ways - *His deity, His humanity, His rest, His priesthood, His sacrifice.* But here, we’re to consider *His endurance.*

Jesus was tortured and executed at the hands of a bloodthirsty mob, yet He never *gave up or caved in...* **now what lesser trial has God asked you to endure?**

The author reminds us in verse 4, *“You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.”* Apparently, the Hebrews were tasting some minor persecution. Maybe they’d been ostracized socially, or penalized financially. *It was enough for them to throw a pity party.*

Yet here the writer reminds them none of their members had been fed to the lions, or sawn in two, or nailed to a cross. *Get a grip!* Former believers suffered far more than they did - yet still stood strong in faith!

Sometimes we think we're candidates for martyrdom just because we were snubbed by our peers, or not invited to the office party. The persecution we suffer in America is trivial compared to *what's been or could be!*

Verse 5, "And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons..." Here he quotes Proverbs 3:11-12, "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

A good parent consistently and biblically disciplines his or her kids. A parent's job is to curb a child's rebellion... And likewise God disciplines His kids. When you become a child of God expect the Father to correct you. **Disciples aren't made without discipline.**

And God chastens His kids primarily through our circumstances. He'll upset your plans to grab your attention. He intervenes to **correct**, to **direct**, or to **protect...** Job's hardships **corrected** his misconceptions about life... The fish that swallowed Jonah **redirected** him toward Nineveh... Paul's thorn in the flesh **protected** him from getting the big head...

In those times when God engineers a hardship, He's being a good Dad who's faithfully disciplining His kids.

Verse 7, "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons." Often, when hardships come our way, we feel as if God abandoned us - He doesn't really love us - *but the exact opposite is true!* Here we're told, **God's discipline is proof of His love!**

"Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?" As a kid just before my dad spanked me he'd say, "Son, this is going to hurt me more than it hurts you!" I never believed him until I became a dad. A wise son accepts and trusts his father's loving discipline. While a fool bucks and disrespects his dad.

"For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Ask a child three minutes after he's been disciplined if it was fun. He'll say "no!" But ask him thirty years later if he appreciated that discipline - he has a different perspective. And so it is with God's

discipline. The pain and hardship God allows has to be measured by its long term effect not its immediate sting and discomfort.

Verse 12, “**Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.**” Just because God *knocks us down*, doesn’t mean He’s *knocked us out*. *Take heart!* God’s discipline is the result of God’s love.

“**Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled...**” When God chooses to discipline us, there’s one fatal reaction we should always avoid. **Don’t get bitter!** Don’t grow bitter toward God or toward the instrument He uses to initiate the spanking.

Notice here, bitterness is the result of “**falling short of God’s grace.**” I have a friend who struggled for years with bitter feelings toward the woman who murdered her mom. She thought she’d made progress until she saw a gal at work who looked like her mom’s murderer.

The mere sight of this woman triggered all sorts of bitter feelings. To make matters worse the woman’s office was four doors down, so she saw her constantly. My friend knew she had to overcome her bitterness. So one day she approached the woman, and the two women introduced themselves. When my friend heard the woman’s name, she was stunned. It was “**Grace.**”

And that’s when the Holy Spirit spoke to her - **the key to overcoming bitter feelings is to recall God’s grace toward you.** *Folks who know grace will show grace.* *When we realize all that God has chosen to forgive us; how can we then withhold love from others?* From then on whenever my friend saw “**Grace**” she was reminded of the power of God over bitterness!

Verse 16, “**lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.**” Recall, how Jacob tricked Esau out of his birthright. He exploited his brother’s hunger. He traded him a bowl of stew for the family blessing. Later, Jacob even conned a confirmation from his dad.

And it all embittered Esau. *He stewed over the stew.* It stifled any repentance, and any progress with God.

Realize, **bitterness is a blocker.** It impedes God’s work in your life. As long as you’re obsessing over the other guy’s crimes; even if like Esau, you want God in your

life, you'll miss Him because you never deal with your own sin. **If you're *resenting* you're not *repenting*.**

Now in the last half of Chapter 12 the author of Hebrews sums up the theme of his book. Through Jesus, God has made a New Covenant with His people that replaced the Old Covenant He made through Moses. A better way has been established for mankind to relate to God. There's no reason these Jewish believers should retreat to the confines of Judaism.

Jesus is better than Judaism in every respect!

And to once more illustrate the superiority of Jesus and the NC over Moses and the OC - the writer compares the two mountains from which the covenants came. The OC came from **Mount Sinai** in the wilderness. The NC from **Mount Zion**, or heaven itself.

Verse 18 addresses the Hebrew believers, **"For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.")** When God met with the Hebrew people at Mount Sinai the manifestations of His presence were frightful, and scary, and intimidating. God put His holiness on display. Coming to God was an audience with the Almighty, not a stroll in the park.

Neither man or beast was allowed to touch God's holy mountain, or else they'd be struck dead. The point being that the Old Covenant offered limited access to God's presence, and no assurance of His acceptance.

Moses was Israel's mediator, yet even he stood on the outside looking in - Moses trembled before God.

Yet look at how different the approach is under the New Covenant, verse 22, **"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel."** This all speaks of *openness* and *assurance!* Rather than keep us on the outside, the New Covenant registers us as citizens of heaven. We have membership - *and with membership comes privilege!*

In Christ we are *“just men made perfect.”* Jesus mediates for us. We’re sprinkled in His better blood. The martyr Abel’s blood cried out from the ground for vengeance on his assailant, Cain - but Jesus’ blood cries out for forgiveness, mercy, peace, and love...

Thus, verse 25 tells us, *“See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth...”*

When God spoke from Mount Sinai the ground rumbled. His voice shook the mountain. No one can escape God’s voice... That was true then, and even more so, now. God’s voice still speaks through the NC, and today no one can escape His overtures of love...

“But now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” Now this, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.”

The Old Covenant began with a shaking, whereas the New Covenant will end with a universal shake-up.

Under the Old Covenant one mountain shook, but as the Age Of Grace concludes, the whole universe will be knocked off its foundations! The book of Revelation forecasts cataclysmic, last days’ judgments, that’ll rock our world. Everything man-made will be destroyed. When the smoke clears all that’s left standing will be God, His truth, and the souls who’ve followed Jesus.

This is why its foolish to put your trust in anything labeled *“made on earth.”* Put your trust in God!

Realize, eleven millionaires went down with the Titanic. One that survived said he left \$300,000 worth of money, jewelry, and securities in his cabin. Later he said, *“At the time, the money seemed a mockery. I picked up three oranges instead.”* When God rocks this world, man-made values and treasures will be a joke!

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” Hey, live for the oranges - *for what will fuel your faith!* For faith is all that will survive when the shaking stops.

The chapter closes by reminding us, “**For our God is a consuming fire.**” And God hasn’t changed. He’s still holy, and fiery, and unapproachable on our own - *but the terms of our relationship with Him have changed!*

In Christ rather than scorch us, the holy fire that is God melts us, warms us, even lights our path. In Christ we hold on to a new covenant with God *by faith!*

In Chapter 13 the doctrine is behind us. The author now tackles some practical matters facing church life.

Verse 1, “**Let brotherly love continue.**” Not everything is coming to an end. **Let “brotherly love continue!”**

And “**Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.**”

The man who helped you change a flat tire, or who kept your child from running into the busy street, or the couple who bought you a meal after you lost your job...

At the time you thought they were random strangers, but in retrospect could he or she have been an angel incognito? *According to the writer of Hebrews, “Yes!”*

Verse 3, “**Remember the prisoners as if chained with them - those who are mistreated - since you yourselves are in the body also.**” First century Roman prisoners didn’t have food or clothes unless it was supplied to them by friends on the outside of the jail.

Here, the writer of Hebrews is encouraging the family of God not to forget those prisoners incarcerated for their faith... And there are folks in our world today jailed for their Christian faith. They need our support.

Verse 4, “**Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.**” The word translated “*bed*” can be rendered “**sexual intimacy.**” Remember, sex is God’s idea. He created sex - and not just for *procreation*, but *pleasure*.

And to maximize and protect that pleasure God has restricted sexual activity to heterosexual marriage - to one man and one woman in a life-long covenant.

Sex prior to marriage is **fornication**. Sex outside of marriage is **adultery**. Both are deviations from God’s design, and God will judge those who participate!

But the marriage bed is “**undefiled**” - it’s pure! Verse 4 teaches us that any sex act between husband and wife that’s loving, giving, and agreed upon **is pleasing and acceptable to God. Sex is God’s gift to marriage.**

According to WebMD if you want to *relieve stress, lower your blood pressure, boost your immune system, burn calories, reduce your risk of heart attack, improve your mood, relieve minor aches and pains, avoid prostate cancer, and sleep better* - **have lots of sex.**

Hebrews 13:4 teaches us that it's not for you to take what doesn't belong to you - ***just get married first!***

Verse 5, **“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.”** Rather than harbor *resentment*, let's learn *contentment*. Everyone wants *more*, but the key to happiness is *to need less*.

“For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” And here's the secret to contentment. It's realizing that **Jesus is more than enough** - there's not a need I have that Jesus can't fulfill - *and He's always with me*. He promises to never leave me or forsake me. Verse 6, **“So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”**

“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you...” There're many ways you can support your pastor, but there's nothing more important you can do for him than pray for him. Here's the logic, **since he speaks to you on behalf of God; then you should speak to God on behalf of him!**

This applies to men **“whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.”** For two chapters we've been looking at examples of faith and faith's outcome. Hopefully, your pastors and elders are also examples of faith. And here, it says you should follow their faith...

But be careful, for even the best pastor is fallible. That's why verse 8 reminds us to **consider Jesus**, **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”** Jesus is the ultimate example of never-failing faith. His ways are innovative and *timely*, but His truth and His intentions remain *timeless*. The methods of our Lord are **adaptable**, but His character is **immutable**.

And that's why we're told in verse 9, **“Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines.”**

Truth is not a moving target. Sound doctrine is the same doctrine taught by Jesus, reiterated by Paul, and recorded in Scripture. Here's a useful adage about doctrine, **“If it's true it's not new. If it's new it's not true!”**

“For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.” Judaism highlighted dietary or

kosher laws... *Eat right and you'll go to heaven.* The truth is, *eat right or you might go to heaven faster*, but Jesus taught us righteousness isn't a matter of what we put in our stomach, it's what God puts in our heart.

These Hebrew believers had escaped this behavioral bondage. The writer warns them not to go back. The menu for *pleasing God* and *going to heaven* is *grace*.

Verse 10, **"We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat."** Again, these Jewish believers in Jesus had been banned from the Temple, and could no longer offer an animal sacrifice. And they worried if they would be accepted by God.

But the people who should've been worried were those *within the Temple* who came to the altar and ate the animal sacrifices. Bulls and goats were inferior sacrifices to the sacrifice of Jesus. It's far better to partake of Jesus, *the Bread of Life*, at *the altar of faith*.

"For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate." The OT sacrifices all spoke prophetically of Jesus - and even the end of Judaism.

For after the animals were sacrificed their carcasses were taken outside the camp of Israel and burned. This foreshadowed the fact that the ultimate end of sin would occur outside Jewish boundaries. Thus, in God's providence, Jesus was crucified north of Jerusalem, outside the city's walls, at a place called, **"Golgotha."**

The writer concludes, **"Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come."** He's telling the Hebrews, **God is to be found outside Judaism.** Jesus died outside the priestly jurisdiction of Judaism, thus believers in Jesus are no longer bound by Jewish laws, sacrifices, rituals. We no longer relate to God through *performance-based* religion. Christianity is *faith-based* and *grace-based*.

And if you're to live by faith you can't be re-entangled in a legalistic culture. To live by faith and grace you have to leave the camp. Freedom is outside the walls! Hebrew believers needed to abandon their old religion.

But some of the Jews had a sentimental attraction to the sacrifices. Offering a lamb was ingrained in them.

This is why he says, *if you just need to offer a sacrifice*, **"Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks**

to His name.” Here’s a New Covenant sacrifice: a *“sacrifice of praise.”* Giving thanks to God!

Then he mentions two other NC sacrifices... *“But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”* Here are three ways we as NC believers can offer a sacrifice to God: praise and **gratitude, good deeds, and generous giving.**

Then verse 17, *“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive...”* Today’s church is not only in need of *good leaders*, we also need *good followers*. A good follower knows his pastor is human, yet he trusts God to work through him. *As long as a leader is biblical in his teaching, moral in his conduct, and ethical in his handling of people and money* - then a good follower sees it as his duty to support that pastor and his vision.

Yet here’s a problem in churches. *Leaders can’t lead, if members won’t follow.* It’s true, *“The person who can’t lead and won’t follow makes a dandy roadblock.”*

As kids one of our favorite games was *“follow the leader.”* But adults grow jaded. We trust in a leader and get burned, and now it becomes harder to follow. Yet if we’re to please God we need Him to heal our cynicism. For as with any army, God’s army has a chain of command. And at times we’re required to fall in line. We’re to submit to leaders who are submitted to God.

For the only thing harder than following is leading. it’s not easy being a spiritual leader. Notice, the writer of Hebrews says of the pastor and elders, they *“watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.”*

Do you realize when CalvaryCSM gets summoned to the judgment seat of Christ the first person to give an account will be me! And according to James 3:1, as your teacher I will incur *“a stricter judgment.”* This is why the leaders of your church need your prayers.

And there’s another reason why you should follow the leader - *“Let them do so (i.e. let them watch out for your souls) with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”* In other words, you don’t want to make the pastor’s job more stressful than it already is.

It’s not in anyone’s best interests to have a pastor who dislikes his job. If a pastor gets too discouraged - if his heart isn’t in it - he won’t be a very good pastor.

It reminds me of the mom who shook her son to wake him up for church. *“Come on Johnny. It’s Sunday. You’ve got to go to church!”* He rolled back over, *“Ah, Ma, do I*

have to go every week?" The mother replied, "Johnny, of course you do. You're the pastor!"

No congregation wants to cultivate a sourpuss pastor. To encourage your pastor follow verse 18, "Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably." **Pray for your pastor!** His job is to work hard and maintain his integrity. Your job is to lift him up in prayer.

"But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner." The writer requests prayer because he hopes to visit them in the near future.

The writer of Hebrews closes with a benediction.

Verse 20, "Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant..." Under the OC the sheep died for the shepherd, but under the NC the Shepherd dies for the sheep. Jesus "*that great Shepherd,*" died in our place.

To "make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." He works in us, for us to do good works. This is Christianity - **we work out what He works in.**

"And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words." The theme of Hebrews has been the superiority of Jesus. *He is better than anyone, anything, any other way!*

It's taken the author 13 chapters, but compared to what he could've written, it was just a "*few words.*"

Verse 23, "Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.

Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you." Apparently, he was writing from Rome, Italy - probably to the church in Jerusalem.

Verse 25 signs off, "Grace be with you all. Amen."