



**Hebrews 12:1-11**

To create the intro slide of my message each week, naturally I search online for ideas. Usually I create my own slide but occasionally I will find one that matches the text of Scripture. Here are a few that I found. After I show them to you I will tell you why I don't like them.



These all relate to the theme of Hebrews 12 but here's why I don't like them. They all show some sort of elite athlete or adventurer conquering mountain tops and winning races. To me, it subtly gives the impression that if you have enough faith, you too will conquer every mountain and win every race. Now there is something to be said for a positive outlook. It's nearly

impossible to have any sort of success and joy in life with a constant grumpy and negative attitude. But neither do I ever want to present the Christian life as one continuous string of success and happiness. There's nothing more discouraging when you think that your life as a believer is supposed to be all rosy and nice but it never seems to get there. Or worse, you think everyone but you has already arrived at that near state of Christian nirvana. The Christian life is not about constant mountain victories. We know this because of the main purpose of this text found in verse three-- *so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted*. Let's face it, we are much more likely to become weary and fainthearted than we are to scale the proverbial mountain. This text will dispel that myth of the hopelessly happy Christian because it tells us that the Christian life is a wonderful intersection of joy and pain which results in our good and God's glory.

*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, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. <sup>4</sup> In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."*



Let us run with endurance  
the race that is set before us

I prefer this visual representation of this text. It shows that life is a race but also that the route is long and bumpy. We're all in this same race and we need these truths to keep running with perseverance. Here's how we do that.

**1. Know the stories of faith.**

This is what verse one instructs us to do. **of witnesses...**

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses. The great cloud of witnesses is everyone mentioned in chapter eleven. There are fifteen names listed in chapter eleven and many more stories without specific names. These people represent the entire Old Testament. When the writer of Hebrews recorded this chapter, it was the complete summary of all of God's work from Adam and Eve's son Abel all the way through the major and minor prophets. All of it and most importantly, it was a history of God's people expressing faith in God's faithfulness. Remember the description of Sarah that I applied to Mary a few weeks ago? "She considered him faithful who had promised." For everyone in this chapter, the key was not the strength of each of their faith but their recognition of God's faithfulness. Chapter eleven is a four thousand year summary of God's faithfulness. It's four

Abel	Sarah	Moses	Jephthah
Enoch	Isaac	Gideon	David
Noah	Jacob	Barak	Samuel
Abraham	Joseph	Samson	Prophets

thousand years of reminders of what can happen when you recognize that God is good and God is strong, that he is worthy of our trust at all times.

We are told that they are witnesses for all of us. The Greek word for witness is *matura*. It sounds like the English word *martyr* because that is the word. Many of them were actual martyrs in the sense that they sacrificed their lives in the pursuit of God.

*Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.<sup>36</sup> Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.<sup>37</sup> They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—<sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth (Hebrews 11:35-38).*

Others were not killed for their faith but instead experienced tremendous success and victory. Success and victory.

*who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,<sup>34</sup> quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight (Hebrews 11:33-34).*

This group of people would be on the top of mountains and finishing first in races. But whether death or victory, each of them and all of them together are witnesses to us. They remind us that the church did not just make up a compelling story about a savior named Jesus. They remind us that we are part of THE STORY that God set in motion and has directed for six thousand years through men and women of faith. If you're tempted to think you're alone or the Christian message is confusing, remember that we stand upon the foundation of these saints. God's utter faithfulness through them witnesses to us. But that only happens if you know their stories. Do you know the stories of these fifteen people and others who are not named? Do you read the Old Testament? If you do read it, do you see all of their stories in light of the gospel?



For example, David is in Hebrews chapter eleven. You may think you know David's story and of course we tend to first think about David and Goliath. As a young teenager, David was able to slay the enormous giant that stood in front of him. Countless sermons have then been preached about how you and I can also slay the giants in our lives. The giant might represent unhealthy relationships or a lack of money or any hard thing you face, but whatever the giant is, you can slay it and conquer it. You may have seen a meme like this one on facebook. "Sometimes God will put a Goliath in your life, for you to find a David in you." I say, no, no, a thousand times no. The story of David and Goliath is the very opposite of this feel good message.

Here's a one verse summary of the actual story. "The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:37). Tell me, who's the hero of the David and Goliath story? Here's a hint—it's not David. Do you see? This is not an "I can" story it's an "I can't story." I'm not looking for the David within me. I am looking for my Savior outside of me. The David and Goliath story is not supposed to make you wake up in the morning and say, "I'm gonna tackle whatever comes my way today. I'm going to conquer that mountain. I'm going to win that race. Nothing can stop me." It's supposed to make you wake up and say, "There's no possible way I'm gonna get through this day unless the Lord does it for me. He is my sufficiency and my strength." To be a David is to say, "I can't, but the Lord can."

There are 929 chapters in the Old Testament and they are there to remind us that God is faithful and strong and we are not. It's a great cloud of witnesses laid down for us to constantly remind us that we can't. All of these people are in this chapter because they realized this fundamental truth. And next we are told how it should impact us. First we are to...

## **2. Lay aside every sin**

*let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely*

Wouldn't you agree that sin is a weight? When you genuinely confess a sin or repent to someone, what does it feel like? It feels like a weight has been lifted off your shoulders, right? Sin is a weight but it also entangles us. Here are three different English translations of this phrase.

ESV—*sin which clings so closely*

CSB—sin that so easily ensnares us

NASB/NIV—sin which so easily entangles us

Sin clings to us, ensnares us and entangles us. Again, this sounds about right, doesn't it? It exactly how it feels. I recently listened to a podcast of two men who were in the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando three and a half years ago when gunmen opened fire and killed 49 people. It was one of the worst mass shootings in US history. These two men were sharing their story about the terror of that night in 2016. One man named Angel was only five feet from the shooter when the slaughter began. He was shot in both legs and fell to the ground. Then people rushing out of the club trampled him and he heard his femur crack in half. Finally, the terrorists put four more bullets into him.

He spent the next several months healing from his wounds and longer than that healing from PTSD. But his greatest battle was overcoming his homosexual temptations and seeking to follow Christ. As he lay dying—or so he thought—he prayed and prayed to the Lord to save him. He promised the Lord he would worship him the rest of his life if he spared his life. The first year after he still struggled and did not fulfill his vow. He said something interesting about his sin. He realized that even though his sin was a weight and clinged tightly to him, he still loved it too much. One day he realized that dying to himself was not deprivation but preservation. In other words, before, he felt that if he left this sin, he would be depriving himself. He would be missing out. But he finally realized that the opposite was true—that by leaving his sin God was

preserving him for so much better. He described how what helped the most was simply falling in love with Jesus more and more.

He's exactly right because that's the thing with the weight and snare of our sin. We can't just hate the sin, but we also have to love Jesus at the same time. If we only hate the sin and focus on defeating it, another sin will rush in to take its place. It's not unlike Jesus' message of the unclean spirit.

*When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. <sup>44</sup> Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. <sup>45</sup> Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first (Matthew 12:43-45).*

Our hearts are so inclined to sin that when one is cast out more will take their place. But if our hearts are increasingly filled with Jesus, sin will lose its luster. The weight will be removed and we will be released from the snare.

### **3. Run the race with endurance**

This phrase is so helpful because it reminds us that the Christian life is a race and it's an endurance race. The finish line is death so you might have eighty years left or eight minutes. We don't know how long we have but it's good to be reminded that life is not a sprint. It's not a quick race and then we're done. It is a lifelong endurance race. It's the ultimate ultramarathon. Paul gives us great perspective on this race.

*<sup>24</sup> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. <sup>25</sup> Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. <sup>26</sup> So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. <sup>27</sup> But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).*

There are a lot of Christians who look like good sprinters. They're in the race and they appear to be running strong but if they don't finish the race—if they drop out of the faith—it's as if they never ran at all. Run the race with perseverance but do it while looking at Jesus.

### **4. Look to Jesus.**

Let's walk our way through this wonderful description of Jesus but first notice the end of verse three—*so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted*. That's the reason we are supposed to look to Jesus. Now you might be thinking, don't we look to Jesus so that we can be saved? Isn't that his main purpose? There's no question that's true. If my whole message this morning was "Jesus will help you not grow weary" it would sound like a self-help message. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost but he also came *so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted*. By the way, that's how you finish the race, by not growing weary or fainthearted. Both are true. He came to seek and to save the lost but he also came to help us run the race and not grow weary.

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.
- Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself,

Jesus is the founder and perfecter of our faith. Here's the foundation of the salvation message. This one verse is not a full theology of salvation but there's still a lot here. As founder and perfecter of our faith, he is the beginning and the end of salvation. There is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved. The word for perfecter is *telios*. Jesus' last words on the cross were *tetelestai*, which is the same word. In effect he said, "It is *telios*." It is finished. It is perfected. Nothing else needs to be done.

who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross

I mentioned this verse last week as well. When Jesus sweat drops of blood in the garden and said, "If it is possible, remove this cup from me," he was experiencing joy. He wasn't joyful because of suffering but he was joyful through suffering because suffering had a greater purpose. His suffering led him to his *telios*, to the completion and perfection of our faith.

Despising the shame

Shame drives half the world's cultures in the Middle East and Asia. Shame is what causes a Muslim to kill his sister because she converted to Christianity. Shame is what causes Japanese to disembowel themselves with a sword. Shame is a function of societal and cultural pressure which says you did something which brought dishonor to our family or to our nation. In Roman culture, you could argue that being crucified was the most shameful thing that could happen to a person. It was publicly humiliating. It was scornful and dishonoring. But Jesus despised this shame. That doesn't mean he hated the shame. In this context despising the shame means he counted it as nothing. It was insignificant compared to the final goal.

and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

This phrase just reminds us that Jesus took his rightful place after his death and resurrection. He was always God and always will be God and ruler over us.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself

This is a summary sentence of what came before which serves to drive to the purpose statement—*so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted*. This is what makes us quit the race. This is what can make us want to quit life altogether. This past Monday I led a breakout session at Living Waters on the topic of how to handle doubts. In that session we introduced them to the website [Gotquestions.org](http://Gotquestions.org). Every Christian should be aware of excellent resources like this one. I took their top 20 questions and asked the students to choose their top 3 out of the 20 so we could discuss them. They chose this question. 8. What is the Christian view of suicide? What does the Bible say about suicide? What about a believer who commits suicide?

We talked about the multiple possible reasons that would lead someone to this tragic decision. There's often some mental illness in play. There's usually a spiritual component, a lack of belief. And circumstances can also play a significant role. But whatever the exact cause or combination

of causes, one thing is certain. The person who takes his or her own life has become weary and fainthearted. They have lost hope. They have given up.

Suicides will never go away, even among believers but the main antidote to weariness and despair is to look to Jesus so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. But it's not just a sappy, "look at Jesus and all your problems will go away. Look at Jesus and you will conquer every mountain and win every race. But we are to look to him, consider him in all the ways Hebrews instructs us to do. Know the four thousand year history of God's faithfulness. Know every aspect of Jesus' victory at the cross.

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