

Sunday School Lesson

Hebrews 12: The Purpose of Chastening (April 12, 2026)

## **Faith**

How do you define Faith? We have said that it is: believing in something you cannot prove; a gift from God; trust. It is the basis for all our decision-making and action-taking. Even an atheist has faith that the laws of nature (gravity, hot & cold, stepping in front of a moving bus) are consistent and reliable; not arbitrary and only function part of the time.

How robust is your faith? Rev. Rudolph recounts in his book, “There is an old story about a man who wanted to prove he was the greatest tightrope walker in history, so he had a tightrope stretched across Niagara Falls. He walked across and back successfully and gathered a large crowd in doing so. Next, he pushed a wheelbarrow across and back to cheering crowds. Then, he put two hundred pounds of bricks into the wheelbarrow and successfully pushed it across and back. Finally, he said to the crowd, ‘Do you believe I can carry a man across and back?’ The crowd shouted, ‘Yes!’ He responded, ‘Who will get in the wheelbarrow?’”<sup>1</sup>

Do you believe that God is all powerful and can take care of you in any situation? Then why do you hesitate to get into His wheelbarrow?

“Faith does not give us all the answers; it enables us to live with the questions.”  
- George R. Platt (1936 – 2006) Engineer, Golfer, and my great friend

## **Running the Race for Christ**

Remember the famous verse Paul wrote about striving for “the prize?” Read **Philippians 3:14**.

What is the “prize” that Paul is striving towards?  
Now, read **1 Corinthians 9:24-25**:

This is one of the parts of Hebrews that leads scholars to believe that the Apostle Paul might have written it. Now read what is in **Hebrews 12:1-2a**.

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<sup>1</sup> Rudolph, Day 351.

The cloud of witnesses means that we are not alone; there are others whose lives prove that faith is possible. “Cloud” in Greek is *nephos*: sometimes meaning highest seats in a stadium – “in the clouds.” And a witness is authorized to give legal testimony. As a runner, we need to shed any weight, or encumbrance (sin), that might slow us down, or get in our way of victory.

In the second verse, the Greek word is *archēgon*, which means “author,” or “pioneer.” As the “author” of our faith, Jesus is the designer of the race; He has laid it out for us. And, as the “pioneer,” He is the leader, and to be followed.

The second Greek adjective is *teleiōtēn*, which means “finisher.” This word is not used anywhere else in the NT, and may have been coined by the author for this special application. Jesus is the first to finish/complete the race that He designed. He was the first, the pioneer, the trailblazer, but there are many of us following!

The second half of verse 2 lays it out for us:

*<sup>2b</sup> For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Jesus’ race: \_\_\_\_\_  
His approach: \_\_\_\_\_  
His reward: \_\_\_\_\_

In verse 3 the author scolds us that we have never had to endure anything even close to this kind of punishment.

### ***Chastening for Spiritual Development***

As we raise children, what are some reasons we discipline them? \_\_\_\_\_

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Read **Proverbs 13:24**.

Is disciplining “fun” for the giver or the receiver? Not usually. But, we do it for the long-term outcome. It is not always punishment; it is preparation, and it is part of our training for future challenges. Well, God loves us and cares enough for us to bother with disciplining us. And, no, it is not expected to be fun. But, it is for our own good; it gets us in shape.

In verses 5 & 6, the author reminds his readers of the admonition that comes in **Proverbs 3:11-12**.

One of God’s disciplines is immediate obedience. Next, the author goes on to explain the proverb’s application and expected results. Read **Hebrews 12:7-11**.

Parents and other adults discipline children (and even our bosses at work), usually with the best of intentions. But, as well-intentioned as they might be, God does it perfectly, and with the purest motivation.

### ***Endurance***

What does a person look like when they are beaten down, haggard, and depressed? So, what are you supposed to do? Read **Hebrews 12:12-14**.

You have not truly suffered for your sins like Jesus: you have not bled, but Jesus not only bled – he DIED!! So, now stand up straight! Throw your shoulders back! Flex your muscles! Now, use what you have to help others and make peace wherever possible.

*Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.  
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!<sup>2</sup>*

Though we are supposed to pursue peace whole-heartedly, the reference to “holiness” appears to mean that we are not supposed to seek peace with the wicked solely for the sake of peace. And “seeing the Lord” means to have perceptive insight; to have some level of understanding.

Read **Hebrews 12:15-17** for the author’s admonition about helping others.

What did Esau do wrong? \_\_\_\_\_

### ***Comparing the OT & NT: 2 Mountains***

The author closes out Chapter 12 with another comparison of the Old Testament and the New Testament. He says that you are not approaching the terrifying images that appear in the OT: blackness (darkness/gloom), tempests (damaging whirlwind), and fire, as in multi-stroke flashing lightning. These awesome and frightening attributes were associated with God in the OT, as well as the sound of trumpets and the deep booming voice of The One who created the universe. No wonder the people were afraid of God. They did not want Him to talk directly to them; they wanted Him to only talk through Moses.

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<sup>2</sup> “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” Thomas Chisholm, 1923.

What mountain is associated with the OT? \_\_\_\_\_

What mound is associated with the NT? \_\_\_\_\_

But now, the author says, you should be glad to hear directly from Jesus, who IS God, but is not frightening. He is full of grace and represents a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

*<sup>18</sup> You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; <sup>19</sup> to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, <sup>20</sup> because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." <sup>21</sup> The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."*

*<sup>22</sup> But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, <sup>23</sup> to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, <sup>24</sup> to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

*<sup>25</sup> See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? <sup>26</sup> At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." <sup>27</sup> The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.*

*<sup>28</sup> Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, <sup>29</sup> for our "God is a consuming fire." - Hebrews 12:18-29*

God's Kingdom is the only thing that is "unshakable" and will remain.

One last piece came from Exodus 24:17:

*<sup>17</sup> To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain.*

### **...and what is our “Race?”**

Ah! That is the subject for a whole ‘nother lesson! What are some of the facets you would identify?

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### **Summary (Why do we care - what’s in it for us?)**

- Jesus has defined the challenges before us by running “the race” first.
- God disciplines us and trains us to be properly prepared for our own “race.”
- We are encouraged to endure (our trials and challenges are nothing compared to what Jesus faced).

### **References:**

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