

Hebrews 12:1-13

We often wonder why thousands of marathoners seem to enjoy punishing themselves in grueling races. Certainly, for most, it's not the hope of winning. What is it then? Explaining it to his readers, writer Art Carey said, "The real joy of the Boston Marathon is just finishing, just winning the contest with yourself--doing what you have set out to do." That's the attitude the Hebrews were supposed to have: Stay in the faith-race to the end.

Opening Question – choose one

- 1) What discipline did you sometimes resent as a child that you appreciate now (e.g. practicing an instrument? Putting things in their proper place? Saving money? chores?)?
- 2) Do you perform better in public or in private? Why is that?

Study Questions

- 1) **Read Hebrews 12:1-13.** Who among the “great cloud of witnesses” inspires you in “the race” (e.g. Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, etc.)? How so?
- 2) What does it mean to throw off “everything that hinders” & “the sin that so easily entangles” (consider examples among the “great cloud of witness”; cf. vv.14-17)?
- 3) How have you seen or heard people get & keep their eyes fixed on Jesus? What have you discovered that helps you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus?
- 4) What discipline/training do you think the writer is referring to (12^{3-4, 7}; 11³⁵⁻³⁸)?
- 5) How is discipline an act and sign of a strong and meaningful relationship (vv.7-10)?
- 6) What benefits does discipline bring (v.11)?
- 7) Identify one or two obstacles that hinder or entangle you in your race?
- 8) What’s the hardest thing you’re going through right now? How is God using this in your life?
- 9) What encouragement do you find helps you run the faith-race with perseverance?

Hebrews 12:1-13 (NIV)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. 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. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

⁴ In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”^[a]

⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰ They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

¹² Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ¹³ “Make level paths for your feet,”^[b] so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

Hebrews 12:1-13 (The Message)

¹⁻³ Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we’d better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on *Jesus*, who both began and finished this race we’re in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he’s *there*, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. *That* will shoot adrenaline into your souls!

⁴⁻¹¹ In this all-out match against sin, others have suffered far worse than you, to say nothing of what Jesus went through—all that bloodshed! So don’t feel sorry for yourselves. Or have you forgotten how good parents treat children, and that God regards you as *his* children?

My dear child, don’t shrug off God’s discipline, but don’t be crushed by it either. It’s the child he loves that he disciplines; the child he embraces, he also corrects.^{Prov.3:11-12}

God is educating you; that’s why you must never drop out. He’s treating you as dear children. This trouble you’re in isn’t punishment; it’s *training*, the normal experience of children. Only irresponsible parents leave children to fend for themselves. Would you prefer an irresponsible God? We respect our own parents for training and not spoiling us, so why not embrace God’s training so we can truly *live*? While we were children, our parents did what *seemed* best to them. But God is doing what *is* best for us, training us to live God’s holy best. At the time, discipline isn’t much fun. It always feels like it’s going against the grain. Later, of course, it pays off handsomely, for it’s the well-trained who find themselves mature in their relationship with God.

¹²⁻¹³ So don’t sit around on your hands! No more dragging your feet! Clear the path for long-distance runners so no one will trip and fall, so no one will step in a hole and sprain an ankle. Help each other out. And run for it!