

life group study guide

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Series: The Exodus
Title: Discipline in my Pain

At the very beginning of Hebrews 12, we are addressed with a dramatic announcement – that as we live the Christian life and run the Christian race, we are being encouraged by the lives of those who have victoriously finished the course. The writer of Hebrews then takes us into the very heart of what it means to be a Christian.

Read Hebrews 12: 1-13

First, we see a beautiful illustration of the Christian life. We are told that it is like a race, as in “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” While we may not be absolutely sure who the writer of Hebrews is, there is a good possibility it is Paul – and he frequently dips into the world of athletics in order to find an illustration of spiritual truth. In this passage, we are taken to a track meet! Every true believer of Jesus Christ is in a race. And thus this illustration reveals some important truths about the Christian life.

Who are the “great cloud of witnesses” in verse 1? What testimony do they offer?

How can the race illustration be applied to us?

Explain how verse 1 relates to the previous chapter and to the Hebrew people.

(Hebrews 11 is called the “Faith Hall of Fame” from history past. We read the names and epitaphs of great champions of faith, men of whom God was not ashamed: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua and others.) The Bible is teaching by example.

In the opening verses of chapter 12, these great champions are pictured as having passed from the arena of faith...finished their course...and now they take their places in a crowded grandstand. They form a “great cloud of witnesses” who surround US as we run the race which they’ve already run.

The race illustration reveals two important truths about the Christian life:

- 1.) It is an *appointed, assigned* life. We do not select the course ourselves. We do not follow a route of our own choosing. The course is set by our Heavenly Father. A Christian is not just a wayfarer along the byways of life. We are not tourists taking a scenic tour. If we take off on our own, we are on a course to ruin. It is an “invitational” race, and the invitation is for salvation. We can reject, ignore or accept it. Each runner is assigned a specific lane on the race track, and we are expected to stay in our lane. All *opportunities* are previously determined, and all *obstacles* as well. It must be clearly fixed in our minds that God sets before each of us a clearly defined race, an appointed course.

When you hear that you are to run a race as a follower of Christ, what does that mean to you?

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- 2.) It is an *active, aggressive* life. We are not to sit still in a passive way, attending church as a spectator. We are runners! While it is true that we are to trust, and not try – it does not mean that we are carried dreamily to heaven on an air-foam cushion. This life is full of concentration, discipline and energetic effort. (The Greek word that is translated as “race” in this verse is *agona*, from which we derive the word agony. This pictures strong and powerful exertion of energy.)

Who set the ultimate race example for us and how does “agona” powerfully illustrate that?

In what sense was the cross a cause for shame, and why did Jesus endure that? Can you give some examples of hostility and opposition that Jesus endured? And how does considering that give us the energy and concentration to keep running our own race?

What lessons or applications does the writer of this book want the Hebrews to understand? How about us?

What important subject is introduced in verses 5 and 6? What Old Testament passage is cited?

Define the word “chasten” and give some examples of chastisement which God approves or causes. When we consider our hardships in life, how can we recognize that those may be consequences of decisions that we have made?

In what sense is “chastening” or discipline an act of love? Why should we not despise it or faint (grow weary in the race) because of it? Explain.

How is punishment for wrongdoing generally viewed in our society? Give examples. How does this contrast with Biblical teaching?

How would you respond to someone who says discipline of children (or church discipline of erring members) is unloving?

What attitudes should we have toward any discipline that God ordains, as we see here in Hebrews 12?

What should we do for people who suffer, as in verse 12? If chastisement is from God, why should we do this?

Discuss the illustration in verse 13. What is the point of those thoughts?

As a Christian, you are automatically in the race! Are you running as God has commanded? Are you keeping your eyes on Jesus through the race? Are you submitting to His discipline and chastening along the route? One day you too will join the great cloud of witnesses for future generations to come. May they say you were a man or woman of faith!

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