



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

HEBREWS

Lesson 12

In chapter 11 we had the privilege of meeting some of the great heroes of the faith. Hopefully, they all were a great encouragement to you. Now, in chapter 12 he continues to try to motivate and challenge his weary readers to continue to persevere in their faith. He reminds them of the faithful believers of the past, in hopes that they will be inspired to continue in the present! Persecution and hard times were in the near future, and they faced a significant amount of pressure from their Jewish friends and family. They wondered why the Jewish faith wasn't good enough anymore or why they would turn away from the faith of their nation. Some were losing jobs and were not welcome in the same circles. The writer seeks to strengthen their faith and remind them that through these hard times, they needed to look to Jesus, the fulfillment of God's promise to His people.

I love how the writer begins this chapter by using athletic terms. That's something I can relate to. Athletics were popular at the time, so his readers were familiar with athletic terminology. I pray that this chapter fires you up to run "your" race the best you can. Make sure you're running "your" race and not someone else's.

First Day

1. Read Hebrews 12:1-29. Observe and write the facts you find. (What's he saying? Why is he saying it? How is he saying it?)
2. Are there any repeated words, phrases, or thoughts?
3. What would you say is the main theme or thought of the chapter?

4. How does chapter 12 relate to chapter 11?

5. To make it a little easier, let's break the chapter down into sections. Write one sentence to explain the main point of the section.
 - A. Section 1: Verses 1-3
 - B. Section 2: Verses 4-11
 - C. Section 3: Verses 12-17
 - D. Section 4: Verses 18-24
 - E. Section 5: Verses 25-29

6. What are the readers being exhorted to do with the "let us" phrases?

7. Are there any warnings in this chapter?

8. What immediate application do you see for yourself? How does this chapter speak to you?

We'll end here for today. There are so many "action" words in here... I love it! Get ready to hear from the Lord. I believe He has a lot to say! ☺

Memory Verse of the Week: "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Hebrews 12:11

Second Day

Work on our memory verse. It's an important one to remember.

1. Read Hebrews 12:1-29. Now go back to verses 1-3. What is the "therefore"?
2. What are we surrounded by? What do you think that means? Who are they?

Picture the setting as a foot race in a big arena, with witnesses, or spectators, filling the stadium seats. The "cloud of witnesses" are the great spiritual athletes of the past, members of the Hall of Faith. They aren't actually there but are witnesses in the sense that their lives were examples of a persevering faith that still cries out today, like the faith of Abel, "Still speaking, even though he is dead." (11:4) These witnesses are all nodding their heads and waving their arms to encourage us, as if they were saying, "You can do it! We did, and so can you!"

3. What is the first thing we're told to do in verse 1? Why?

The word "weight" means "hindrance." He tells us to lay aside everything that hinders us, like athletes that strip off their warm-up clothes before a race. The clothes are heavy and will weigh him down, and he wants to be as light as he can while he runs. But hindrances aren't always "bad" things, just things that are keeping us from doing our best. It's not always about laying aside the bad for good; sometimes we lay aside good for the best. Hindrances aren't always sinful in themselves but can become sin if they hinder our race. Kenneth Taylor paraphrased this verse and wrote, "Let us strip off anything that slows us down or holds us back, and especially the sins that wrap themselves so tightly around our feet and trip us up."

4. What kinds of things threaten to hinder "your" particular race?
(Is it being hindered?) What do you need to "lay aside"?
5. What does "sin" do, according to verse 1? What sin easily entangles you?

All of us struggle with different sins, which, I believe, is the reason the writer simply referred to it as "sin," expecting us to fill in our own blank. Some fight sensuality, while others battle with envy, jealousy, or pride. Some may have a temper, while others have a hard time being honest. All of these sins can entangle us and slow us down.

6. How are we to run the race He sets before us? How is Jesus an example of this?
7. Why do you think the writer didn't put Jesus in the Hall of Faith chapter? How is He different?
8. What helped Jesus endure the cross? (This is the only time the writer mentions the word "cross." I wonder why...)

In suffering, Jesus demonstrated His faith in God, and in obedience He sustained the anguish of death on the cross. He endured the cross to set people free, and He triumphed when He sat down at God's right hand. Hughes wrote, "He accomplished His task on earth, assuming His place in Heaven, and now assures the believer of divine assistance in the race marked out for him."

9. In the ancient world, the phrase "growing weary and discouraged in your soul" referred to the exhausted collapse of a runner. What does the writer tell his readers to do if they find themselves in this exhausted state? Why?

In verse the writer is basically telling them to compare their lives with Christ's and be reminded of all that Jesus had to endure. They needed to stop looking back at their old faith and across at each other and look to Jesus, the one who can help them endure their race.

10. Where should we be "looking"? What happens when you look back in a race? What happens when we compare our lives, or our races, to someone else's?

11. Where have you been "looking"? Are you looking back at something? Are you comparing yourself to a friend? Are you envious of someone else's race, wondering why theirs is easier than yours? Be honest with yourself and allow the Holy Spirits to adjust your "gaze."

We're all individuals, running a specific race the Lord put before us. We all have our own obstacles, hindrances, and problems. We also have our own talents and giftings. It's important that we focus on Jesus and run our own race. He is our inspiration; He is our hope. Let's "consider" Him when we face hard things, knowing that because Jesus endured, we can too. He will give us the strength.

That's all for today, ladies. Do you have your *running shoes* on? Are you focused and steady? Are your eyes set on Jesus?

Third Day

What's your memory verse? How does it speak to you?

1. Read Hebrews 12:1-29. Now, let's take a closer look at verses 4-11. How does verse 4 tie the previous section in with this one?

Verse 4 is funny to me. I read various explanations of what the writer was trying to say. There are some who think he was trying to tell them that they should resist sin to the point of death. The possibility of persecution was a reality, and if Christ Himself endured persecution, why wouldn't His followers? I tend to agree with Kent Hughes' theory. Because he was admonishing them to stay strong, using Christ as their example, Hughes writes, "He begins with a soft reproach, reminding them that life is not as bad as some may suppose." Jesus, along with many of the heroes of faith, had died for His faith, and his readers knew nothing of that kind of persecution, at least as of yet. He goes on to say that it's as if the writer is saying, "Cut the melodrama. I don't see any dead bodies lying around!" ☺

The key word in this section is "*chastening*." It's a Greek word that means "to instruct or teach as one would a child," or "to correct or punish." Hughes writes, "Broadly, it signifies much of what we would think of as discipline for the purpose of education. We experience God's education through hardship or affliction."

When we are suffering or experiencing hard times, we often feel like God doesn't love us. In these next few verses, the writer is trying to show them that it's just the opposite. Discipline stems from the Father's heart of love.

2. In verse 5 we find another mild rebuke. What does he say to his readers?

The writer quotes Proverbs 3:11-12, which should have been a very familiar passage to them. They can't be encouraged by what they don't know, showing us again why it's so important to study the Word. The word "despise" in verse 5 also means "make light." And the word "discouraged" is translated "overwhelmed."

3. Read verse 5, substituting the words above. Does this make more sense? What two extremes does he say to avoid, and why?

4. According to this section, why does God discipline us? What examples does he use to prove this truth? (Note how many times the words "children" and "sons" are used.)

5. How does discipline teach us? (How does discipline teach your children?) If we were never disciplined, what could happen?

John Calvin wrote, "God's discipline takes three distinct forms, namely, corrective discipline, preventative discipline, and educational discipline." You won't necessarily find these specifically "named" in Scripture, but it's a very interesting observation.

6. How do you think the following characters are examples of:

A. Corrective Discipline: David (Psalm 119:67-71, Psalm 51)

B. Preventative Discipline: Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7-8)

C. Educational Discipline: Job (Job 42:4-6)

God never makes mistakes in His discipline or chastisement. He has one goal, which is to make us more like Him (Leviticus 19:2, Matthew 5:48, 1 Peter 1:15-16). We are partakers of His divine nature, and as He chastens us, we will partake even more. He wants us to share in His holiness.

7. According to verse 11, what is the result of discipline? Why?

I noticed a word in verse 11 that I've never seen before. The writer talks about those who have been "trained" by discipline. He uses an athletic term again to remind them they are engaged in a race that needs continual training.

8. How are we "trained" by discipline?

9. What is your first reaction when adversity strikes? Is it joy? How can this section encourage you?

10. Are you being chastised by the Lord right now? Are you fighting it or accepting it as discipline from God? Are the difficulties distracting you from Christ, causing you to slow down in your race, or are they causing you to focus on Christ and run with endurance?

Have a good run, ladies!

Fourth Day

Are you hiding your verse in your heart?

The writer has been reminding his readers that their spiritual life is like a long distance run. Although it's hard and at times they might want to quit, they need to hang in there. "Though we may 'hit the wall' many times, we are called to 'tough it out,' realizing that the hardships we endure are disciplines that enable us to share in God's holiness." (Hughes)

1. Read Hebrews 12:1-29, then go back to 12-17. So, what is the "therefore"? How does it connect these two sections?
2. How do verses 12 and 13 tie in both the race analogy and our spiritual walk? (Our writer is sounding a bit like a coach now!)

The writer uses a familiar saying to exhort them to be strong. (Isaiah 35:3-4, Job 4:3-4). He then quotes from Proverbs 4:26. The word "strengthen" comes from the word that we get our English word for "orthopedic" from. Basically, he's telling them to "straighten up" and get those arms pumping and those feet moving!

I love what he says in verse 13. When he says to "make straight paths" for your feet, he's again using an athletic analogy. Before a race, the runners would examine the track or course to make sure there weren't any obstacles or any type of unevenness that would make them fall or twist an ankle. They wanted the path level. But notice it wasn't only for themselves, but for others in the race.

3. Besides themselves, who did they want to make the path straight for, according to verse 13? Why? Why is that so significant?

Many runners encourage each other during their race. I can remember many times when I was weary and didn't feel like I could keep running, someone would come alongside me and give me words of encouragement! Other times, people on the sideline would notice that you were fading and start shouting and cheering to motivate you to keep running. I specifically remember one race that the spectators would look up your number in the program and start yelling for you by name. Never underestimate the power of encouragement in a person's life. We are not only called to finish, but to finish together!

4. Not only are we called to "finish well," but to help others finish their race as well. How well are you doing at encouraging others, especially when they're tired and struggling? Are you watching out for others or only focusing on yourself? Are you "making the path straight" for those behind you that may be handicapped or struggling in some way?

The book of Hebrews has many exhortations and reminders of the importance of helping each other. (3:13; 4:1, 11; 6:11; 10:25). Now, he instructs them on what they should be "running after."

5. What does he tell them to pursue in verse 14? Also, read Romans 12:18, 14:19, and Ephesians 4:3. Why is this so important?

The word "pursue" means to "chase after one's enemies aggressively." The writer links together the pursuit of peace with the pursuit of holiness. To finish well, says the writer, we must make every effort to pursue peace with all men and be holy." Peace and holiness are two sides of the same coin.

6. Answer the following questions:

- A. How can conflict within the church bring disgrace to God?

- B. How can conflict with an unbeliever be a stumbling block to them?

- C. Are you in a conflict with someone? How aggressively are you "pursuing peace"?

7. Now the writer turns from telling them what to "do" and admonishes them on what "not" to do. What warnings does he give in verses 15-17?

8. What do you think it means to "fall short of the grace of God"? How do the sins of verses 15-17 rob of us God's enabling grace?

God's grace is always available to us, but we often fail to depend on His grace. When we fall into sin, God's grace is available, Paul says, in Romans 5:20. John Blanchard wrote, "For daily need there is daily grace; for sudden need there is sudden grace; for overwhelming need, there is overwhelming grace." But what can cause someone to fall short, or fall behind, in grace? Unconfessed sin, neglect of God's Word, and staying out of fellowship can cause us to drift, doubt, and turn from God. Notice that the writer says it is 'our' responsibility to keep this from happening to people, as best we can. 'Look diligently' also means 'see to it,' which carries the idea of oversight." We are called to care for each other!

9. The writer tells us to avoid sexual immorality and godlessness, using Esau for his example. How does he describe Esau in verses 16 and 17? (Read the story of Esau in Genesis 25:24-34 and chapter 27)

Esau was not interested in the things of God. He had no regard for God's blessings and promise which he, as the first-born, would receive. "He despised his birthright and displayed utter indifference to the spiritual promises God had given to his grandfather, Abraham, and to his father, Isaac. (See Genesis 25:32). His only concern was for temporal matters. He refused to follow in the footsteps of his forefathers, and thus his name is omitted from the list of heroes of faith." (Kistemaker) Esau had purposely rejected God, and his heart was hardened against him. Although he cried, he showed no repentance, only anger towards his brother. He wasn't sorry for what he did; he simply was mad he missed the blessing.

Simply, the writer is telling us to avoid sexual immorality and godlessness. They will stop us dead in our tracks and keep us from finishing well.

10. Let me ask the obvious questions: Are any of the things he is warning his readers about present in your life? Do you have a lack of peace? Are you living a holy life or a godless one, showing indifference to the things of God? Do you have a root of bitterness in your heart that's causing trouble? Are you currently involved in any sexual immorality? And last but not least, how actively are you watching out for others who are struggling? Search your heart on this one. It's a lot to think about.

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

1. Read Hebrews 12:1-29. Reread verses 18-24. Because the readers were being taunted for their new faith and accused of leaving the heritage they had in Abraham and Moses, the writer chooses to contrast where they had been to where they are now. He does this by comparing Mount Sinai and Mount Zion.
2. How does he describe Mount Sinai in 18-21? (Read Exodus 19 and 20:18-21 for the story.) What were the people getting a glimpse of?

Under the old Covenant, God wasn't approachable in the same way. On Mount Sinai, the people got a sense of God's holiness, majesty, and power, giving them a fear of Him. This fear was supposed to keep them from sinning. Although the people heard the voice of God, they failed to let His Words penetrate their hearts and minds. Mount Sinai represented doom and death, but Mount Zion portrayed life and joy! Both mountains, though, reveal the true God. He is a consuming fire and a consuming love.

3. Read verses 22-24. In verse 22 the writer says, "But you," again reminding them to keep going forward in Christ, rather than turning back. What does he say about Mount Zion? What seven realities do we "come to" when we choose Mount Zion?

"Zion is the highest elevation in the city of Jerusalem. As a fortress it was fiercely defended by the Jebusites, who were defeated at last by David. In time the fortress, including the surrounding area, was called the city of David; but poets and prophets used the name Zion and designated it God's dwelling place." (Kistemaker) The writer calls it Heavenly to show us that the Zion he's talking about is where God dwells with all His saints (Revelation 14:1; 21:2).

4. Read Hebrews 11:25-29. What warning does he give us? ("They" are the Israelites)

5. The writer quotes Haggai 2:6 in verse 26. God shook the earth when He gave the Ten Commandments. When will He shake it again? Read Isaiah 13:13, 65:17; 2 Peter 3:10; and Revelation 21:1.
6. What does the writer mean by the things "that cannot be shaken"? What lasts forever? (Daniel 7:14-18)

If we're holding on to the things of this world, we're in for a rude awakening when all things are "shaken" and none of it remains. What a serious admonition to help us stay focused and running strong. We want to be part of the things that remain!

7. Since we are receiving the kingdom that can't be shaken, how should we respond, according to verses 28-29?
8. And verse 29 tells us why we serve and worship Him with reverence. What does the writer call God? How does this tie the two "mounts" together?

Hughes wrote, "When we come to worship, we must keep both mountains in view -- the approachable Zion with its consuming love and the unapproachable Sinai with its consuming fire -- and then come in reverent boldness."

9. Can you explain the above quote? Does it describe how you approach God?
10. From this chapter, what specifically spoke to your heart?

I'm sorry that we "raced" through the last two sections. (Get it? Raced...) It sure was another full and rich chapter. Spend some more time on the points that really interested you. May you be blessed as you study His Word!

