

Faith that Endures, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: Finishing Well

Hebrews 12:1-3

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Do not open at Hebrews 12:1. Open at the word “Therefore,” and make your class look back at what it points to. They have just walked through a gallery: Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Rahab, and then a rush of the unnamed who were tortured, sawn in two, and wandering in deserts (Hebrews 11:35-38). That is the “great cloud of witnesses.” The writer has not changed subjects; he is landing the argument he has been building since chapter 11 verse 1. Help your class feel the transition. For eleven chapters they have been reading about other people’s faith. At the word “therefore,” the writer turns and hands them the baton. It is now their race, and this is the last lesson in a series called Faith that Endures for a reason.

The engine of the passage is a contrast between two directions of sight. Verse 1 has us laying things down and running. Verse 2 has us looking to Jesus. Verse 3 has us considering Him. Notice that the writer’s cure for a tired Christian is not a technique and not more effort; it is a gaze. And notice who he points at. Not the heroes of chapter 11, remarkably, since he just spent a chapter on them. He points past all of them to Jesus, the only one who ran the whole distance and is now seated. Aim the hour at that movement, from the crowd, to the track, to the Person at the finish, because that is the shape of the text and it is the shape of endurance.

Two boundaries need a steady hand. First, “let us run with endurance” is a command, and commands are not given to people who cannot fail. This whole letter warns brothers against falling away (Hebrews 3:12-14; 10:26). Do not let “once saved, always saved” quietly remove the urgency the writer worked eleven chapters to build. Second, guard “cloud of witnesses” before someone in your class turns it into the dead watching us from a balcony, or worse, the dead being spoken to. Scripture forbids seeking the dead (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Isaiah 8:19). These are witnesses in the sense of testimony given, not spectators in the stands. This is the last hour of the series. Let the class leave with their eyes in the right place and their feet moving.

Question 1

Student Question:

In verse 1, the writer refers to a “great cloud of witnesses.” Who are these witnesses, and in what sense do their lives serve as testimony for us?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Answer the “who” from the word “therefore,” because the writer already answered it. The witnesses are the men and women of Hebrews 11: Abel who still speaks though he died, Noah

who built in the dry, Abraham who left without a map, Moses who chose ill treatment over Egypt, and the unnamed ones who were stoned, sawn in two, and destitute in deserts and mountains (Hebrews 11:35-38). Do not let your class picture a vague, faceless crowd. The writer has just given them names and scars. That is the cloud.

Now handle the word “witnesses” carefully, because the whole question turns on it and most people get it backward. The Greek is *martus*, from which we get martyr. A *martus* is not someone who watches; a *martus* is someone who testifies. And the writer already told us what they testified: “by it the people of old received their commendation” (Hebrews 11:2), and again, “all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised” (Hebrews 11:39). Their faith is the evidence they gave. They are not in the stands looking at us. They are in the record book, and their lives are the deposition.

So guard the boundary before anyone stumbles into it, and do it kindly, because the stadium picture is beloved and it is nearly harmless until it is not. Nothing in this text says the dead observe our lives, and nothing anywhere permits us to address them. Scripture is blunt about that road: God forbids inquiring of the dead (Deuteronomy 18:10-12), and Isaiah asks the obvious question, “Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living?” (Isaiah 8:19). Jesus described a great chasm fixed between the dead and the living (Luke 16:26). Name the error plainly, then answer it from the text: the writer’s point is not that they are watching us. It is that they ran, and their finishing is on the record, which is a far better encouragement than an audience.

Then let the class feel why testimony encourages more than an audience would. An audience only watches you struggle. A witness has already proved the thing can be done. Every one of these people was ordinary, most of them were badly treated, and none of them received the promise in their lifetime, and they held on anyway. Ask your class what it does to a discouraged believer to know that the road he is on has footprints all over it. Faith that endures is not theoretical. Chapter 11 is the evidence, and the evidence is what the “cloud” is made of.

Bring it home locally, because your class has a cloud of their own. Ask them to name someone, a grandmother, an old preacher, a widow who kept coming, whose life was testimony that this is worth it. Then ask the harder half of the question. That person is testimony to you. What is your life testimony to, and to whom?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “Therefore” identifies the witnesses as the faithful of Hebrews 11, named and scarred (Hebrews 11:35-38)
- *Martus* means one who testifies, not one who watches; their faith is the evidence given (Hebrews 11:2, 39)
- Nothing here teaches that the dead observe us, and Scripture forbids inquiring of the dead (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Isaiah 8:19)
- A great chasm is fixed between the dead and the living (Luke 16:26)

- Testimony encourages more than an audience: it proves the thing can be done
- None of them received the promise in this life and they held on anyway (Hebrews 11:13, 39)

Discussion Prompts

- Who is in your own cloud? Name someone whose life testified that this was worth it.
- Why is a witness who already ran more encouraging than a crowd that is merely watching?
- Your life is testimony to something. To what, and to whom?

Question 2

Student Question:

What is the difference between the “weight” that slows us down and the “sin which clings so closely”? Why does the writer mention both?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Give the class the distinction, because it is the reason the verse names two things. Sin is sin. Weight is not. A weight (the Greek word simply means bulk, mass, encumbrance) may be perfectly innocent in itself and still have no business on a runner. Nothing in a marathon is more harmless than a winter coat, and nothing will finish you faster. The writer is not doubling up for emphasis. He is naming two entirely different problems that produce the same result.

Then press the weights, because your class will nod along about sin and never think about these. A weight is the hobby that ate the year. The career that quietly became the point. The relationship you are not sure about. The hours of nothing. The good and lawful thing that has slowly taken the place of a better one. Ask your class the diagnostic question and let it sit, because it is uncomfortable: not “is this a sin?” but “is this slowing me down?” Those are different questions, and most of us have only ever asked the first one. Paul answered the same way: “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Now take up the second phrase, because the picture is vivid. Sin “clings so closely.” The word suggests something that wraps around, that entangles the legs, that is well-placed to trip. This is not sin as a stain on a record; this is sin as a thing tangled in your feet while you are trying to run. Notice the writer assumes his readers still have it. He is writing to Christians, and he tells them to lay it aside, which means it was still there. Your class needs that honesty. The presence of entangling sin in a believer is not a sign he was never saved. It is the reason this verse was written to him.

Then let them feel the verb, because “lay aside” is not a passive word. It is what a runner does with his cloak: a deliberate act, done before the race, by the runner himself. Nobody lays it aside for him. This is that cooperation the Scriptures keep insisting on. God gives the grace and God gives the word that trains us, and the runner still has to take the coat off. Help your class see that repentance, in this picture, is not agonizing over the coat. It is dropping it and running.

Bring it home by asking for one of each, because a general resolution will change nothing. One weight, named out loud or on paper. One entangling sin. Then ask what “lay aside” would actually look like this week, concretely, in a way someone could observe. The writer did not say resolve to carry less. He said put it down.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A weight may be innocent in itself; the question is not “is it sin?” but “is it slowing me down?”
- All things lawful are not all things helpful (1 Corinthians 6:12)
- Sin “clings so closely” means it entangles the legs, not merely stains a record
- The writer assumes Christians still have entangling sin, which is why he commands them to lay it aside
- “Lay aside” is a deliberate act performed by the runner, not something done to him
- The Christian genuinely cooperates: God supplies the grace and the word, and we take the coat off (Philippians 2:12-13)

Discussion Prompts

- Name one weight. Not a sin, a weight. What is it costing you?
- What has clung so closely to you that you have stopped noticing it is there?
- What would “lay aside” look like this week in a way someone else could observe?

Question 3

Student Question:

The passage calls believers to “run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Why does the writer describe the Christian life as a race, and what does endurance require?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Start with what the metaphor concedes, because your class may have heard “the Christian race” so often it has stopped meaning anything. A race is exertion. A race has a course you did not design. A race has a finish, and a race can be quit. Every one of those is a claim about the Christian life, and every one of them is unwelcome to somebody. Notice too that the word is not a sprint. The Greek is *agōn*, from which we get agony. The writer picked a word with sweat in it.

Then take up “the race that is set before us,” because it is quietly one of the kindest phrases in the passage. The course is assigned. You did not choose it and you cannot trade it, and the man beside you is not running yours. Some races go through poverty, some through illness, some through a marriage that is hard, some through decades of plain obscurity. Hebrews 11 makes this point loudly: some “conquered kingdoms” and some “were sawn in two,” and the chapter commends both with the same word (Hebrews 11:33-37). Help your class stop comparing courses. Faithfulness is running yours, not admiring somebody else’s.

Now get to endurance, since that is the word the whole series is named for. Hupomonē is not passivity and it is not patience in the sense of waiting quietly. It is remaining under, bearing up, staying put under a load that is not lifting. The writer already told them what they need: “you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised” (Hebrews 10:36). Note the order there. They had already done the will of God. What they lacked was the ability to keep standing afterward. That is the whole problem of this letter, and probably of half your class.

So guard the boundary here, plainly and without heat, because this verse settles a question your class has heard argued. If a Christian is commanded to run with endurance, then running is possible to stop. Commands are not issued to people who cannot fail. This letter has said it directly: “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God,” and “we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end” (Hebrews 3:12-14). Paul disciplined himself “lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27). A doctrine that says the race cannot be abandoned makes “run with endurance” an odd thing for the Holy Spirit to say. Name the error, answer it from the text, and move on without contempt for the people who hold it.

Bring it home where they live. Ask what endurance requires, and let them answer, because they know: it requires knowing the finish is real, it requires laying the weight down, it requires other people, and it requires a gaze that is fixed on something other than the miles. That last one is verse 2, and it is where the writer goes next. He does not tell them to try harder. He tells them where to look.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A race means exertion, an assigned course, a real finish, and the possibility of quitting
- Agōn is a word with agony in it; the Christian life is a marathon, not a stroll
- The course is “set before us,” so comparing races is a distraction from running our own (Hebrews 11:33-37)
- Endurance (hupomonē) is remaining under a load, not waiting quietly (Hebrews 10:36)
- Against “once saved, always saved”: a command to run with endurance assumes the race can be abandoned
- Hebrews warns brothers of falling away and conditions sharing in Christ on holding firm to the end (Hebrews 3:12-14)
- Even Paul reckoned with the possibility of disqualification (1 Corinthians 9:27)

Discussion Prompts

- Whose race have you been comparing yours to, and what has it cost you?
- If the race could not be abandoned, why would God command us to run with endurance?
- What does bearing up under a load that is not lifting actually require of you right now?

Question 4

Student Question:

In verse 2, Jesus is called “the founder and perfecter of our faith.” What does it mean that Jesus both begins and completes faith?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Give the class the first word, because the ESV’s “founder” is doing a lot of work. The Greek is *archēgos*: a pioneer, a trailblazer, the one who goes first and opens the way for others to follow. Hebrews has used it already, calling Jesus “the founder of their salvation,” made perfect through suffering (Hebrews 2:10), and Peter calls Him the “Author of life” (Acts 3:15). Help your class see the picture. This is not a starter who fired a gun and stepped aside. This is the runner who ran the course first and cut the path the rest of us are on.

Then take up “perfecter,” which is the other end of the same idea. *Teleiōtēs* means the finisher, the one who brings a thing to its completion. Put the two together and you have the whole distance covered by one Person. Now notice the contrast the writer is drawing, because it is the reason he says this here. Chapter 11 was full of people who started well and did not receive the promise; they “did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us” (Hebrews 11:39-40). Every witness in that cloud is unfinished. Jesus is not. He is the only one on the list who ran it end to end, which is precisely why the writer points past all of them to Him.

Now be careful with the phrase “of our faith,” because there is a Calvinist reading of it that your class may have met. Some take this to mean God unilaterally creates and completes faith in the elect, and the man himself is a bystander to his own believing. Read the sentence in its paragraph and it falls apart. The command in verse 1 is that we run. The command in verse 3 is that we consider. Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ, not by an irresistible operation (Romans 10:17). And Hebrews says Jesus “became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Hebrews 5:9), which is a strange thing to say about people who cannot help themselves. He pioneers and completes the faith; He does not believe it for us.

So say plainly what He does begin and does complete, because it is far better than the caricature. He began our faith by being its object and its content: there was nothing to believe until He came and did it. He perfects it because He is the destination; a faith aimed at Jesus reaches its end in Jesus. And what He accomplished at both ends is entirely His work, unearned by any of us. The grace is His. The running is genuinely ours. Those have never been in competition, and your class needs to hear both said in the same breath.

Bring it home with the direction of the verb, because everything in this verse depends on where the eyes are. “Looking to Jesus.” The word means to look away from other things in order to look at one thing. That is the writer’s prescription for exhaustion, and it is worth asking your

class the plain question: when you are worn out, what do you actually look at? Most of us look at the miles, or at ourselves, or at whoever seems to be running better. The writer says look away, and look at Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Archēgos means pioneer or trailblazer: He ran the course first and opened the way (Hebrews 2:10; Acts 3:15)
- Teleiōtēs means finisher; between the two words, one Person covers the whole distance
- The witnesses of chapter 11 are all unfinished; Jesus alone ran it end to end (Hebrews 11:39-40)
- Against Calvinism: faith comes by hearing the word, not by an irresistible operation (Romans 10:17)
- Christ is the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9)
- He is the object and the destination of faith; He does not believe it for us
- “Looking to Jesus” means looking away from everything else in order to look at Him

Discussion Prompts

- When you are worn out, what do you actually look at?
- Why does the writer point past the whole cloud of witnesses to one Person?
- How do you say “He perfects our faith” and “run with endurance” in the same breath without dropping either?

Question 5

Student Question:

The writer says Jesus endured the cross “despising the shame.” What does it mean to despise shame, and how does Jesus’s attitude toward the cross instruct believers facing hardship?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Make the class feel the shame before you explain what He did with it, because we have hung crosses around our necks and lost the word entirely. Crucifixion was designed to humiliate. It was public, it was naked, it was reserved for slaves and rebels, and it was staged beside a road so everyone would see. Add what Scripture said of it: “cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Galatians 3:13). And add the taunting, the spitting, the mockery from the men He was dying for. The physical agony is not what the writer names here. He names the shame.

Then define the verb, because “despising” does not mean what your class assumes. It does not mean He hated it or fought it. It means He thought it beneath consideration, He counted it as nothing, He disregarded it as unworthy of weighing against what was coming. This is a word for valuation, not emotion. Jesus did not deny the shame was real. He put it on the scale opposite

the joy, and it did not move the needle. That is the point, and it is a very different thing from pretending it did not hurt.

Now show the class why this matters for them, because shame is the specific weapon their generation is losing to. Not many of your class will be asked to die. Nearly all of them will be asked to be embarrassed: to be the odd one at work, to be thought narrow, to be laughed at by family, to be the person who does not go along. And shame is the pressure most likely to make a Christian quiet. Notice the original readers had already been through it publicly: they “were publicly exposed to reproach and affliction” (Hebrews 10:33). The writer holds Jesus up to people who had already been humiliated for the name.

Then draw out the instruction, and be precise about it, because the class may misread it as a call to callousness. Despising shame is not developing a thick skin and it is not pretending we do not care what people think. It is caring about something else more. Moses did the same thing, and the writer said so: he “considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward” (Hebrews 11:26). Both men did arithmetic. The shame is real in both cases; it is simply outweighed. That is a skill, and it is trainable, and it starts with knowing what is on the other side of the scale.

Bring it home where they will feel it. Ask your class where shame has silenced them this year. Who did they not speak to, what did they not say, where did they go along because the cost was looking foolish? Then set the two things side by side the way the verse does. He counted public execution beneath notice for the joy set before Him. We counted a conversation too expensive.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cross was engineered for humiliation, and Scripture called it a curse (Galatians 3:13)
- “Despising” means counting as nothing, a word of valuation rather than emotion
- Jesus did not deny the shame was real; He weighed it against the joy and it did not move the needle
- Shame, not physical danger, is the pressure most likely to silence believers today
- The original readers had already been publicly exposed to reproach (Hebrews 10:33)
- Moses did the same arithmetic, valuing reproach for Christ above Egypt’s treasures (Hebrews 11:26)
- Despising shame is not a thick skin; it is caring about something else more

Discussion Prompts

- Where did shame silence you this year? Name the moment.
- What is the difference between despising shame and pretending it does not hurt?
- What would have to be on the other side of your scale for embarrassment to weigh nothing?

Question 6

Student Question:

Why does the writer say Jesus endured the cross “for the joy that was set before him”? What was that joy, and how does future hope sustain present endurance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Notice first where the phrase sits, because the writer put the motive before the suffering. “Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.” The joy came first in the sentence and first in the reasoning. Jesus did not endure and then discover joy on the far side as a consolation. He saw it, weighed it, and then went to the cross because of it. Ask your class to sit with how strange it is that joy is the word the Holy Spirit chose to explain Gethsemane and Golgotha.

Then work out what the joy was, and let the class do some of it. It was the finished will of the Father, the “not my will, but yours, be done” carried all the way through (Luke 22:42). It was the exaltation the same verse names next, being seated at the right hand of the throne of God. And most of all it was us: Isaiah says “he shall see the fruit of the anguish of his soul and be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:11), and Hebrews says He was “bringing many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10). Help your class feel the weight of that. The joy set before Him included the people sitting in your class this morning. He looked down the years, saw them, and counted it worth a cross.

Now notice the parallel the writer is quietly building, because it is why he mentions the joy at all. “The joy that was set before him,” and one verse earlier, “the race that is set before us.” Same phrase, same construction. Jesus had something set before Him and so do we, and He is showing us how a man runs when he can see it. This is the answer to the question of what fuels endurance, and it is not willpower. It is sight. Endurance is what happens when the future is more real to you than the present.

Then be careful to keep this from becoming a cold transaction, because someone will hear “he did it for the payoff.” That is not it. Love is what made the joy joyful. It was not a wage He was owed; it was people He wanted. A father who works a double shift for a child’s sake is not being mercenary, and neither was Christ. The joy and the love are the same fact seen from two sides.

Bring it home in the shape the passage gives you. Ask your class what is set before them, and whether they could describe it without stalling. Most people cannot, which is exactly why they are tired. Then ask the hard version. If your future is vague, your present will be heavy, because nothing outweighs a hard Tuesday except something you can actually see. He endured a cross with the joy in view. What are you enduring your life with in view?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The joy came before the cross in both the sentence and the reasoning; it was motive, not consolation
- The joy included the finished will of the Father and the exaltation that followed (Luke 22:42; Hebrews 12:2)

- The joy included the redeemed: He would see the fruit of His anguish and be satisfied (Isaiah 53:11; Hebrews 2:10)
- “Set before him” and “set before us” are the same phrase; He models how a man runs toward what he can see
- Endurance is fueled by sight, not by willpower
- This is love, not a transaction: it was people He wanted, not a wage He was owed
- A vague future produces a heavy present

Discussion Prompts

- What is set before you? Try to describe it without stalling.
- How does it change the cross to know the joy included you?
- Is your future vague? What would it take to make it real enough to pull you forward?

Question 7

Student Question:

Jesus is now “seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (v. 2). What does this position of honor and authority mean for believers who are still in the race?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Start with the posture, because Hebrews has been building to it for eleven chapters and your class may miss it. He is seated. The priests of the old covenant never sat down; there were no chairs in the tabernacle, because the work was never finished. Hebrews makes the contrast explicit: every priest “stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices,” but Christ “offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins” and “sat down at the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:11-12). The sitting is the proof of the finishing. Help your class hear the sound of that chair.

Then take up “the right hand,” because it is a claim about authority and it is the most-quoted Old Testament verse in the New. “The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool” (Psalm 110:1). That is not a waiting room. It is the seat of power, and Jesus is in it now. Guard the boundary here plainly and without heat: the New Testament does not present a Christ waiting to be enthroned in a future earthly kingdom. He is reigning, and He reigns until the end, when “he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power” (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). The throne in this verse is occupied, and it is occupied today.

Now answer the question the class needs answered: what does that do for a runner? Three things, and give them all. First, it means the course has been completed, so it is not theoretical. Second, it means the One at the finish is the One with all authority, so nothing that happens on the track is outside His hand. Third, and this is the one Hebrews loves most, He did not sit down to rest from us. “He always lives to make intercession for them,” which is why “he is able to save

to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him” (Hebrews 7:25). Paul says the same: the One at the right hand “is interceding for us” (Romans 8:34). The Man in the chair is talking about you.

Then keep them from a false comfort, because the class may hear the intercession and quietly conclude that the outcome is settled regardless. Read the same letter. Hebrews 7:25 says He saves to the uttermost “those who draw near,” which is a description with a door in it, and this letter’s severest warnings sit three chapters after this verse and one chapter before it (Hebrews 10:26-31; 12:25). His session guarantees His faithfulness, His authority, and His advocacy. It has never guaranteed that a man cannot walk off the course.

Bring it home. Ask your class what changes about a hard week when they remember there is a Man on the throne who has run this exact race and is currently speaking to the Father about them. Most of us pray as though we were shouting into an empty sky. The verse says the finish line has a face, and He is not a stranger to the miles.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- He is seated, and the sitting proves the sacrifice was finished; the old priests never sat (Hebrews 10:11-12)
- The right hand is the seat of authority, not a waiting room (Psalm 110:1)
- Against premillennialism: Christ reigns now and delivers the kingdom to the Father at the end (1 Corinthians 15:24-26)
- His session means the course was completed, the finish is held by all authority, and He intercedes (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34)
- He saves to the uttermost “those who draw near,” a description with a door in it (Hebrews 7:25)
- Against eternal security: this same letter’s severest warnings surround this verse (Hebrews 10:26-31; 12:25)
- The Man on the throne has run this exact race (Hebrews 4:15)

Discussion Prompts

- What changes about a hard week if there is a Man on the throne currently speaking to the Father about you?
- Why does it matter that He sat down rather than kept standing?
- How is the intercession of Christ a comfort without becoming a guarantee that we cannot fall?

Question 8

Student Question:

In verse 3, the writer commands believers to “consider him who endured from sinners such hostility.” Why is considering Jesus essential to preventing weariness and fainthearted faith?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Give the class the verb, because it is stronger than it looks in English. The word means to reckon up, to compare, to weigh one thing against another the way you would compare accounts. It is not a devotional glance and it is not sentiment. The writer is asking for arithmetic. Set your hostility next to His and do the math. That is a demanding thing to ask of a tired person, and it is also, the writer says, the cure.

Then draw out why this works, because it is not merely a distraction from our troubles. Two things happen when a Christian actually does this comparison. First, his own suffering finds its true size. The writer says it bluntly a verse later: "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Hebrews 12:4). That is not a dismissal of their pain, and your class must not hear it as one. It is perspective handed to people who had lost it. Second, and more important, he discovers he is not alone on the road. Whatever the hostility is, Someone has already been there and did not stop.

Notice the specific hostility named, because the writer chose it carefully: "from sinners." Not from circumstances, not from disease, not from bad luck. From people. That is the hardest kind, and it is what the readers were facing (Hebrews 10:32-34) and probably what half your class is facing right now. Christ endured betrayal by a friend, abandonment by every disciple, false witnesses, mockery from the religious establishment, and a crowd that chose a murderer over Him. When your class considers Him, they are not looking at someone who suffered generically. They are looking at someone who was treated badly by people He loved.

Now show the class the logic of the "so that," because the writer states his purpose out loud: consider him, "so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." The prevention of collapse is tied directly to the act of considering. That means weariness is not primarily a strength problem; it is a sight problem. A man does not fail because the road is long. He fails because he stopped looking at anything worth reaching, and the writer's answer to a tired church is not a rest but a gaze.

Bring it home concretely, because "consider Jesus" can evaporate into a nice thought before your class reaches the parking lot. Ask what it would actually mean this week. Reading a Gospel slowly instead of about Him. Praying to Him rather than reciting. Setting the specific hostility you are enduring beside the specific hostility He endured and refusing to look away first. He asked for arithmetic. Give them a way to do it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- "Consider" means to reckon up and compare, not to glance devotionally
- The comparison gives suffering its true size (Hebrews 12:4)
- The hostility named is "from sinners," from people, which is the hardest kind (Hebrews 10:32-34)
- Christ was betrayed, abandoned, falsely accused, and mocked by those He came to save

- The purpose clause ties considering directly to not collapsing (Hebrews 12:3)
- Weariness is a sight problem before it is a strength problem
- We have a high priest who can sympathize, because He has been on this road (Hebrews 4:15)

Discussion Prompts

- Set your hostility beside His and do the arithmetic. What does yours weigh?
- What would “consider him” actually look like this week, in a way you could schedule?
- Who has been hostile to you, and does it change anything that He was betrayed by a friend?

Question 9

Student Question:

What does it mean to grow “weary” or “fainthearted” (v. 3)? What are common causes of spiritual exhaustion, and how does this passage address them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Separate the two words, because the writer used two and they are not the same. Weary is the body: worn out, exhausted, out of gas. Fainthearted is the will: the word means to be loosened or unstrung, like a bowstring going slack. One is running out of strength. The other is running out of reason. Help your class hear that difference, because a man who is tired can be rested and a man who is unstrung cannot. The second is the dangerous one, and the writer named it second on purpose.

Then let the class name the causes, and be honest about them, because the sanitized list will help no one. People grow weary from long obedience with no visible result. From praying for years about something that has not moved. From watching children walk away. From being the one who always shows up. From suffering that does not resolve. From the slow discovery that faithfulness did not exempt them from anything. Notice that not one of those is a doubt about doctrine. Almost nobody unstrings over an argument. They unstring over duration.

Now take seriously that Scripture never scolds this, because your class may expect to be scolded. Elijah asked to die under a tree and God fed him and let him sleep (1 Kings 19:4-6). The Hebrews were not rebuked for being tired; they were addressed as tired. Paul says “let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9), and notice the shape of that promise: the harvest is real, it is just later than we wanted. Weariness is not sin. Being unstrung and staying that way is where it turns.

Then show how this passage actually addresses it, because the writer’s answer is not the one we would give. We would say rest, or lighten the load, or lower the expectations. He says lay aside the weight, look to Jesus, and consider Him. That is not cruelty; it is diagnosis. If the problem is that the bowstring has gone slack, the fix is not less pressure. The fix is retensioning it against

something fixed, and the only fixed thing in the passage is the Man in the chair. And remember what he told them three verses earlier in the last lesson: they were not built to do this alone (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Bring it home gently, because there is someone in your class who is closer to the end of the rope than anyone knows. Ask which word describes them right now, weary or fainthearted, and let the room be quiet long enough for it to be honest. Then remind them what verse 3 assumes: the writer expected tired Christians. He wrote this for them. The cure he gives is not a lecture. It is a Person, and the invitation to look at Him is open to everyone in the room this morning.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Weary is the body running out of strength; fainthearted is the will going slack like an unstrung bow
- The second is the more dangerous; people rarely unstring over an argument, but over duration
- Scripture does not scold exhaustion; God fed Elijah and let him sleep (1 Kings 19:4-6)
- The harvest is real but later than we wanted; do not grow weary, for we reap “if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9)
- Weariness is not sin; remaining unstrung is where the danger lies
- The writer’s remedy is not less pressure but a fixed point: looking to and considering Jesus (Hebrews 12:2-3)
- Endurance was never designed to be solitary (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Discussion Prompts

- Which word describes you right now, weary or fainthearted? Be honest.
- What have you prayed about for years that has not moved? What has that done to your grip?
- Why is the writer’s answer to exhaustion a gaze rather than a rest?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking at Hebrews 12:1-3 as a whole, and as the conclusion to our series on “Faith that Endures,” what final call does this passage make to every believer?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Have the class assemble the passage, because the structure is the sermon. Surrounded by witnesses, lay aside the weight and the sin, run with endurance the race set before you, looking to Jesus who ran it first and finished it and is seated, and consider Him so that you do not collapse. Read it back to them in one breath. That is the whole Christian life in three verses, and

notice what it is not. It is not a formula, not a technique, and not a promise that the road gets easier. It is a call to keep going, aimed at people who wanted to stop.

Then let the class see what this series has been arguing, since this is the last hour of it. Faith that endures is not a stronger grade of faith given to a few. It is ordinary faith that kept going, and Hebrews 11 is the proof: farmers and shepherds and a prostitute and a stammering fugitive, all commended for the same thing, none of them impressive on paper. The writer's final move is telling. He does not say "be like them." He says look at Jesus. Even the heroes are pointing past themselves. That is the last word of the series, and it should be the last word of your class.

Now press the call plainly, because the passage is a command and your class deserves to hear it as one. Lay it aside. Not resolve to. Not think about. Every verb here belongs to the runner. God has done everything a God can do: grace has appeared, the way is opened, the course is set, the Pioneer has run it, the finish is held by a Man on a throne who is speaking to the Father about you right now. What remains is a runner who has to take the coat off and move. This is the cooperation Scripture keeps insisting on, and it is neither earning nor idling.

Guard the exit, though, because a series on endurance can end in two wrong places. One is despair: the man who hears all this and concludes he is not the enduring type. Tell him the truth, that nobody in Hebrews 11 was the enduring type either, and that the only requirement in this passage is that he keep looking at Jesus and keep moving. The other is presumption: the man who hears "Jesus finished it" and concludes his own finishing is guaranteed. This letter will not permit that. It commands us to run, warns us against falling away, and says we share in Christ if we hold our confidence firm to the end (Hebrews 3:14). Both men are in your class. Send them both out with the same verse and different medicine.

End with the mirror, and do not rush it. Ask two questions and let them sit. First: what is the one thing you know you are going to have to lay down, the one that came to mind three times this hour? Second: where are your eyes? Because this whole series has been building to a single instruction, and it is not "try harder." It is "looking to Jesus." The race is set before them. It is being run this week, in the present age, on the course God assigned. And the finish line has a face.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The structure is the sermon: witnesses, lay aside, run with endurance, look to Jesus, consider Him
- Faith that endures is ordinary faith that kept going, not a superior grade given to a few (Hebrews 11)
- Even the heroes of chapter 11 point past themselves to Christ (Hebrews 12:2)
- Every verb in verse 1 belongs to the runner; this is genuine cooperation, neither earning nor idling
- Against despair: no one in Hebrews 11 was the enduring type either

- Against presumption: we share in Christ if we hold our original confidence firm to the end (Hebrews 3:14)
- The final instruction of the series is not “try harder” but “looking to Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2)

Discussion Prompts

- What is the one thing you know you have to lay down, the one that came to mind three times this hour?
- Where are your eyes? Answer honestly, not correctly.
- After eleven weeks on faith that endures, what will actually be different about next Tuesday?