

## **A Study in Hebrews**

### **Study Ten**

#### **Hebrews 11:32-12:13**

##### **Day One**

32 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets,  
33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions,  
34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

v. 32 – When the writer started to write about faith, he simply had too much material! The Bible is full of stories of men and women who put their faith in God and saw results that were worthy of being recorded for future generations. It is only what we do in faith that is worthy of such a legacy.

Three names strike me as odd on this list: Barak, Samson and Jephthah. Barak was “conscripted” into the deliverance of Israel by the prophetess Deborah. I like to refer to him as the reluctant warrior (see Judges 4). Jephthah was another warrior, but he endured much scorn because he was the son of a prostitute (see Judges 11-12). Yet God used him to deliver Israel. Samson had a major flaw in his relationship with women, but God used him nonetheless to bring down the Philistines (see Judges 13-16). There is something in the stories of these three men that should encourage you that God can use *you* to do His work and will.

vs. 33&34 – These great faith heroes did mighty exploits. But one phrase in particular is worthy of note. It says, “who became powerful in battle.” Most of us want to be powerful and then enter into battle. But these heroes didn’t find their power *until* they entered battle. That is real faith—to not “feel” anything special, but to move at the direction of God’s word. When you move in that obedient faith, *then* and only then does God give you the strength that you need. It proves once again that faith without some kind of action is useless.

It also says that their “weakness was turned to strength.” Don’t wait until you have the strength you think you will need. Act and trust that God will give you the strength when you need it. Now, as usual, I must ask you: How can you apply this truth to your life today? Not next week, or next month, but *today*?

##### **Day Two**

35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.

36 Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison.

vs. 35&36 – Apart from the two sons that Elijah and Elisha brought back to life, I am not sure what the writer was referring to in this verse. But the point is that faith doesn't guarantee an outcome that would be considered by everyone as acceptable. Here we read that some in faith were tortured, flogged, jeered and imprisoned.

It is one of the most difficult aspects of faith, I think, to hold onto faith in the midst of circumstances that are unpleasant. But as I stated in an earlier study, I would rather die in faith than live in un-faith or presumption. There are some who have tried to use faith as a means to control the circumstances in their lives so as to avoid pain, suffering or confusion. But I don't think faith is something we "use." Faith is a way of life that ultimately says, "Lord, I trust you, no matter what happens. I know that what I see is limited, so I am putting my trust in what You see and allow to happen."

Church tradition tells us that almost all of the original apostles died a martyr's death. Did they lack faith? Some would say they did. But I would say that their faith allowed them to fulfill the truth found in Revelation:

"They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (Revelation 12:11).

Their deaths and the deaths of so many martyrs doesn't represent un-faith, but the ultimate expression of faith and confidence. Do you agree or disagree?

### **Day Three**

37 They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-

38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

40 God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

v. 37 – This list is not exactly an advertisement for the life of faith! We cannot be sure of the stories that the writer was thinking about when he composed this list of trials, but it goes back to what we discussed yesterday: Faith does not guarantee an easy life. We are inspired by the price that others have paid to walk out their faith, but we aren't always willing to pay that price ourselves! I would rather read about it or watch a movie that chronicles such faith. But the way to please God is not through someone else's faith, but

through our own. Are there stories and lives that inspire you to faith? What are they? Is it time to review them?

v. 38 – The world would see the people described in this passage as misfits and failures. But these are the very people that God honors because their rejection by the world was based on their faith in God. Faith may not earn you a parade in this life, but the Bible promises an awards ceremony in the next life that will bestow honors on everyone who put their trust in God. When do you want your parade: now or later? The answer to that question will determine how you use your life now.

v. 39 – Each person alluded to in the preceding verses was commended. Who commended them? It had to be God. And how did He commend them? I am not sure we really know, except that some of their stories are included in God’s inspired Word. Others received some kind of praise that they knew was from God but perhaps no one else did. Consider what was written in John’s gospel:

"I do not accept praise from men, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?" (John 5:41-44).

Whose praise do you crave, man’s or God’s? What are you willing to do to be commended by God? How will you feel if your commendation is not seen or recognized by other people, even those who are closest to you?

v. 40 – While each person commended had faith in God, they did not receive what was promised, because Jesus was the ultimate promise! My ultimate faith reward is to know Jesus and to be like Him! The object of my faith cannot be houses, cars, ministries or spiritual gifts. While all those things may come, the ultimate reward was and is to know and be known by Jesus.

There really is what the Catholic Church has referred to as the “communion of the saints.” This communion is realized as each one of us takes our place next to those who have gone before us to put our faith in God through Christ. Faith is the common denominator that defines our communion with those of the past, present and future. It is not what church we belong to; it is the fact that we are part of *the* Church by faith.

#### **Day Four**

12:1 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 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him 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 sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

v. 1 – The image of the writer here is one of an Olympic race, where many bystanders are watching the runner exert himself to win. The “therefore” in this verse obviously ties this verse back to the stories just written in the preceding chapter. I am not sure we have a literal audience in heaven of the great faith heroes of the past, but we are continuing their faith work in our generation. Against that backdrop, the writer urged us to run the faith race that is marked out for us.

The faith race is not a sprint, but a marathon that requires patience and perseverance. It is not who starts quickly, nor the one who has a lead at the halfway point who wins the race. And our main enemy in the race is sin, which so effortlessly wraps itself around us to slow us down or knock us out of the race. How are you doing in the race that is set before you? Are you running to win or is sin weighing you down, hindering your ability to compete?

v. 2 – What can we do to help us win the race? As much as the heroes of Hebrews 11 can encourage and help, there is only one source of strength and motivation for the faith race and that help is Jesus! Abraham, Moses, and the others can provide us encouragement as we read about their lives, but Jesus helps us not only through the story of His life, but also through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are commanded to “fix our eyes” on Jesus. How can we see someone who cannot be seen? Only through faith eyes. Remember that we learned in Hebrews 11 that faith always leads to vision.

What do you see? It can be said that what we see is what we get when it comes to faith. And the ultimate faith expression was Jesus’ life, as expressed by his death, burial and resurrection. Jesus isn’t asking us to do anything that He hasn’t already done and that is put His complete and total trust in God. That is why we can study the lives of the faith heroes, but we fix our faith eyes on Jesus, the faith champion!

v. 3 – The original readers must have encountered tremendous opposition from their fellow, non-believing Jews. The writer reminded them that their opposition was similar to what Jesus experienced. Jesus did it and because He did, we can do it too? What is the “it” you may ask. It is finishing the race of faith.

### **Day Five**

4 In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

5 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "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 those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

v. 4 – There is one word in this verse that catches my attention, and that is the word “yet.” I wish I could ask the writer, “What do you mean I haven’t yet resisted to the point of shedding blood?” Of course, I am having a little fun here, for I know that the main point of the verse is to highlight the fact that Jesus shed His blood in the battle against sin. No matter how badly I may have it in this life, I cannot even approach what Jesus did until I give my life; and even then, my sacrifice cannot be compared to His.

The writer has shifted the attention to Jesus as he concludes his discussion of faith. If you are encountering opposition from sinful people or struggling with sin in your own life, do not give in to discouragement or self-pity. And you cannot compare what you are going through to anyone else’s situation. You must compare what you are going through to what Jesus went through. That is the only standard you are permitted to have.

v. 5 – Some of the struggles that we are going through are forms of God’s discipline. It is a sign of God’s love and not His anger or displeasure when we encounter His discipline. The writer quoted Proverbs 3:11-12 here, which appeared to be an admonition from David or Solomon to one of their sons. But they were really writing a divinely-inspired message from God to His children.

You and I are God’s children and we must never lose sight of that fact. Because we are His children, He must act as our Father and at times chasten, rebuke or discipline us. This is the only explanation for some of what you are going through right now. The lack of finances, the job that doesn’t allow you to utilize all your gifts and talents, the relationship that isn’t what you want it to be—all these can be forms of discipline. But if you see them as signs of God’s love for you, it can change how you view and react to them.

### **Day Six**

7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?

8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

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 our spirits and live!

v. 7 – The command here is to endure; the incentive to endure is that what you are going through is not from the devil or your own devices. What you are going through is from God. The writer now draws on an earthly analogy of fathers who discipline their earthly children, something to which almost every reader can relate.

v. 8 – God’s discipline is a sign of legitimacy. The hardship you are going through is proof of God’s love for you, because He is training you in His ways. God loves you enough to endure your misunderstanding as He disciplines you for your good and to make you more like Him.

v. 9 – I have counseled many people who had little discipline from earthly parents and they struggle with rejection. They interpreted the lack of discipline to mean that their parents didn't love them and not to mean that their parents loved them so much that they couldn't discipline them. If you are a parent, are you willing to endure the misunderstanding of your children as you choose to discipline them? If you are a child, can you see your parents' discipline as a sign of love and not control or meanness?

But ultimately, can you, as a child of God, see your current circumstances as a sign of God's love and not anything else? If you are a child of God, can you see your Father's love and hand in your life right now? I hope you can. Submit to your heavenly Father's hand of discipline and read on, for this discipline will not last forever.

### **Day Seven**

10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, 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," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

v. 10 – The goal of God's discipline for us is so we can share in His holiness. God knows what He is doing and disciplines us with perfection. At times, it may not seem like there is a reason for what is happening in our lives. But we can be certain that there is.

If we had a less than pleasant experience with our earthly father, we must be careful not to project that bad experience onto God and His Fatherhood. Our earthly fathers were and are imperfect, some painfully so, but we must now learn to trust our heavenly Father and His discipline in our lives.

v. 11 – Discipline is not enjoyable. I don't think you have to enjoy the season of discipline you may be in. You accept it in faith, confess that the destination is worth the price you are paying and ask God's grace to endure the season you are in. I am thinking of the verse in Thessalonians, which states:

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Paul did not say to give thanks for all things, but in all things. Seasons of discipline are certainly times in which we give thanks, but not necessary for which we give thanks. Do you agree, or do you think I am "splitting hairs" here?

By the way, the word “trained” in this verse is the Greek word from which we get our word “gymnasium.” All of this talk on discipline has an athletic sense of training to it. The athlete endures many hours of rigorous training for an athletic performance. It is the same for the believer.

vs. 12&13 – There is no room for self-pity in this spiritual “athletic” preparation. You cannot allow yourself the luxury of feeling sorry for yourself in what you are going through. The writer, who was addressing believing Jews who were undoubtedly enduring hardship for their faith, was telling these believers to strengthen themselves, to “get on with their lives,” so to speak.

There are many hardships that the Christian must endure:

They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said (Acts 14:21-22).

The news that there are many hardships may not encourage some people. We may encounter things in our walk with the Lord that cause us to stumble. Even those who walked with Jesus heard Him say things that caused those people to withdraw (see John 6). It is possible for our limbs to be out of joint as we walk out our faith.

If you are discouraged or perhaps a bit disillusioned at this point in your walk with God, then these verses are for you. You need to strengthen yourself and move on. If you are limping, then get those joints back in place. I know that this may be easier said than done, and I don't know what you have been through. But God knows and He will help you. But you must do your part and that is to choose to move on and through this season of training and discipline.

You may not know where all this is going, but you can take solace in the fact that if you endure, you will share in God's holiness when all is said and done. May God strengthen you today and may you walk on with grace and peace. Amen.