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Sunday School Lesson

TOPIC:

“The Christian Race”

Hebrews 12:1-13

VERSE DISCOVERY: Hebrews 12:1-13 (KJV, Public Domain)

Prepare

- What does it mean to push forth in faith or to run the Christian race? Are we talking about physically running as people do in marathons? Or, are we talking about something altogether different?
- Do a quick overview of Hebrews 11 (the Hall of Fame of Faith), highlighting some of the stories and examples found there. Emphasize the endurance factor of each one. What did they have to struggle against? What was the hardest thing about their story? What did they do to be considered part of this “Hall of Fame of Faith”?
- Although a physical and spiritual race can look quite different from one another, they both also have some of the same qualities such as the carrying of weight can be a hindrance, and so forth. (For a great lesson lead in, follow the object lesson link found on site)

Explore – Full Lesson Available on pages 5-13

Verses 1-4

Off to the races, and you are the star! All eyes are on you as you take in a deep breath, exhale, and prepare yourself to push forward at the sound of the start signal. But, as all eyes are on you, who are you focusing on? As you push on in the race, and discouragement comes, where do you draw strength from? What’s your motivation?

All those questions can be summed up in one word: JESUS! Jesus is the beginner and finisher of our race. He is our example of how to run it successfully and make through the arduous process. He, and those before us, show us that there are some things we must put down (sin and weight) and there are some things we have to pick up (patience and endurance) in order for each of us to successfully finish the race that is before us.

Verses 5-11

All that requires discipline. As children of God, our heavenly Father wants our feet to run on the right path that will lead to a deeper relationship with Him, ultimately leading us to be where He is in eternity. Following wrong paths will stop that. In order to correct those missteps or wrong actions, sometimes discipline and correction come as a source of direction. There is a

reward in the end for the righteous, for those who press on in holiness. Correction to keep us on that right way may not be pleasant at the time, but in the end, it's for our good.

Verses 12-13

Therefore, don't let discouragement get you down. Strengthen those weak knees and run! Turn back toward the race and be healed. There is a goal at the end and obstacles may be in the way but run! Some days are harder than others and the pressure of the race needs lifting but run! Don't stop now. Get in your lane, put your feet on the starter block of your God-ordained heavenly course, and run! "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved," (Matthew 24:13).

Activities

- What are some "weights" that personally hold us down in our Christian race? What can we do to run better? Use **Journal Pages** found on site. The **Kid's Page** asks, *What are some things people do to prepare to run in a marathon? What are some things we can do to prepare us to run our Christian race?* Or, use the blank pages to bring out your own points.
- Younger students can draw a picture of themselves in a race as an example of today's lesson. See the **Draw the Scene** section found on site.
- Video links that complement the lesson can be found on site.
- Alternate activity sheets are available for those who just want to work with printed activities can be found on site.

Review

- Commit to memory the base verse from the lesson: ***"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith..." Hebrews 12:1-2a***
- Fill out the review sheet provided (page 14)

Life

Our faith for our Christian race can be strengthened through the Word of God. Throughout this coming week, find seven bible verses that encourage and strengthen you, and write them on

separate index cards. Some examples are: Jos. 1:9; Neh. 8:10; Psa. 23:4; Psa. 27:13-14; Pro. 3:5-6; Isa. 40:13, 29; Phil. 4:13; 1 Pet. 5:7. But, of course, there are many, many more to choose from.

Carry these cards with you as a handy reference for when you face discouragement. Allow those words to minister to your soul during hard and difficult times.

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"The Christian Race"

Hebrews 12:1-13

VERSE DISCOVERY: Hebrews 12:1-13 (KJV, Public Domain)

On your marks. Get set. Go! Once you have accepted Jesus Christ into your life as your personal Savior you have officially entered the Christian race. The prize is before you and the contests are around you, and the only way to make it to the finish line is by focusing on He who paved the way before you. The struggles may seem hard at times, but Jesus promised, "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved," (Matthew 24:13).

Endurance is the key and although troubles seem to catch us off guard, we are reminded that we are not the only ones suffering; we are not alone in our pursuit to live like Christ and yet face adversity. Others have gone before us, including our Lord. Let their testimony encourage the weary and faint of heart to press on through the contentions of this life that we may gain the crown of life in the next.

OUR FOCUS

Hebrews 12:1-4 "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

In the chapter prior to this, we have some of the greatest sources of encouragement recorded not only in God's Word but in the world. We have, as the people of God, dubbed it the Hall of Fame of Faith; and, rightfully so. In that chapter, we see a concentrated version of God's

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mighty acts performed through and for those who followed hard after Him in faith. Their stories are amazing, and their examples are a testimony of how to do life while still holding on to the promises of God; how to make it to the end even when some personally didn't see the fulfillment of said promises.

These people who have gone before us can testify that the road wasn't always easy. They can tell their story of how they tried to do the work of God and people acted adversely toward them and did not respond the way they had hoped, or the trials they faced on the way to their particular promise were heavy at times. They can let the cat out of the bag about how they were mistreated, used and abused because their desire was to fulfill the call of God on their lives. They are a **"great cloud of witnesses"** that can testify and say, "I've been there and done that. Just hold on to God's unchanging hand and He will see you through."

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." Most Olympians and accomplished runners in any race strive to enter the competition with as little baggage as possible. Clothing is kept to a minimum, as much as decency will allow. Preparations for physical strength and the shedding of unwanted weight that can prove to be a hindrance were made before one foot touches the starters block.

Why? To give the athlete the best possible chance of winning.

Jesus wants us to make it to the end of our race. He wants us to come in victorious as the winners He knows we are in Him. That can't happen if we allow people, and stuff, and sin bog us down. The feet that were meant to run like they had wings attached rather sink as if stones were wrapped around their ankles. Therefore, the author of Hebrews commands us to **"lay aside"** everything that wants to hold us back; everything that stands as an obstacle to our spiritual success; everything that works against our salvation preventing us from experiencing the fullness of joy we have in Christ Jesus.

Those in this world compete for trophies, but our competition in our Christian race is for a prize this world can't offer. We must do as Paul instructed and, "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:14). We can't do that carrying the extra **"weight"** of worries and **"sin"** of this world.

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Notice the word **"us"** written here. That word is inclusive and tells us that we all have our own race to run that is **"set**

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before us.” The track I am on may not look like yours, but we’re still in this together, each running the course that’s ahead of them. The things I fight with may not be the same for you, but we are altogether battling against things that try to stop our progression in Christ.

This was especially true for the original readers of this letter who were suffering through times of persecution and hardship. I can imagine some lying awake at night or hiding out in some undisclosed location wondering about the promises of God through the murkiness of the pain they were experiencing. I don’t care what anybody tells you, nobody likes to experience troubles, but the soul that can hold on will see the light at the end of the tunnel. It may not shine as you supposed it would, but it will be there nonetheless as a testimony to the glory of God working in your life as well.

But, to continue this course, in spite of it all, requires **“patience;”** endurance. Going back to the picture of an athlete preparing for the competition, they stretch their bodies past normal limits in order to condition it for the race. They add on extra time and additional boundaries to push past in order to get their endurance and stamina up so that they can power through the most difficult times. They mold, shape, and work their bodies to be fit for the fight.

Here, the writer is giving us the same advice in the spiritual. We must purposely trust God and push past some stuff we see now to build up our faith and give us the strength to make it to the end. We will never be able to power through the competitions of this life if we don’t allow our faith muscles to be conditioned for the battle.

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.” Jesus, once again, stands as our perfect example of not only how to run the race but how to endure during the process, and one thing I wrote about in a previous article was His “Focus Shift” (I encourage you to read the entire article). Jesus, while going through the worse thing He could ever possibly endure, didn’t dwell on His current situation or even the enemies at hand, He was more concerned about the welfare of others; He gained a heavenly perspective for souls and salvation that we can only hope to emulate as we look to Him.

Through the trials and tribulations we may face in our own race, we are told to gain a new perspective as well; we are told to shift our focus from ourselves and look to Jesus. In His life

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and His obedience, He has gone the road before us to show us how to live and walk in accordance with the Father's will and never give up.

He is the **“author and finisher of our faith.”** He is the originator and completer of our faith. He is our soul's pioneer, if you will (a word you often hear referenced when discussing this topic). He went before us into uncharted territory to gain heavenly ground for each one of us. Jesus Christ has secured everything we need under the faith umbrella to live this life the way God is calling us to live.

“Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.” The cross and the process of dying on the cross were ugly. But, the results that would come from the cross were beautiful and brought joy to the heart of our Savior. One of my favorite articles written is titled “Reap Rejoicing.” In that I wrote:

“No one could ever put into words the pain of what it felt like to hang on that cross and bear the sins of the world. But, as He hung there, with blood pouring down, He was in the gathering process. That's why He couldn't come down because even as He was nailed and left to die, He with great sorrow and tears, was working at gathering that would eventually lead to rejoicing.

What a clear head and frame of mind our Lord kept through it all. Most of us would have went into survival mode under such duress, thinking of self. Jesus went to survival mode, too. Not for Himself rather, “To seek and to save that which was lost,” (Luke 19:10, KJV).”

Therefore, He **“endured”** the course before Him with **“joy”** for souls like us and becomes our prime example of how to follow the path of faith. As the **“author and finisher of our faith;”** the beginning and end – He showed us how to run our race.

“Despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” The cross was just not about pain, but it was about **“shame.”** Jesus hung on the cross naked – shame! Jesus took on the curse of sin for humanity – shame! Jesus was abused, beaten, and tossed about as nobody worth considering; just another criminal – shame! Yet, He took any and all shame that would seek to bind us. He didn't give in to the pull to turn tail and run. He took it all on Himself and completed fully the work of the cross and is **“set down at the right**

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hand of the throne of God.” He finished His race and gained His reward and lives forever to show us how to do it.

“Consider him!” He **“endured!”** He was wrongfully accused and wrongfully abused due to the **“contradiction of sinners against himself.”** Jesus spoke rightly when He said, “He that is not with me is against me...” (Matthew 12:30), and at the time of the cross His body bore the marks of their opposition and hatred toward Him – yet, He still refused to give up. Even when the taunting tongues said, “He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him,” (Matthew 27:42); He held on and endured the cross until He gave up the ghost and ascended on high.

“Lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” Why are we continually told to look to Jesus, to fix our spiritual gaze upon Him and consider all that He went through? Because His legacy becomes a testament to how one should run this Christian race. His story becomes a well of strength from which we can draw encouragement from. His experience becomes the energy that we need to motivate us to press on despite all the adversity that tries to mount attacks against us; that try to move us from our faith. “But they that wait upon the LORD,” the Bible tells us, “shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint,” (Isaiah 40:31). Consider Jesus that you yourselves to don’t faint in the process of running the race.

When we discussed the previous chapter, the Hall of Fame of faith, in that we see Moses’ character in taking a stand against sin: “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season,” (Hebrews 11:25). Standing for one’s faith usually brings about persecution and affliction such as what the readers of this letter were facing. How far are they willing to go in order to stand for their faith? There are many in the body of Christ who have borne the harsh ravages of persecution on their own bodies, and even their lives. There are many who gave all to follow Jesus. The encouragement is for these readers to stir up their minds, gain strength from the stories of those devoted lives, keep pushing forth, and don’t give up!

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OUR DISCIPLINE

Hebrews 12:5-11 “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

“Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him... if ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons.” “Chastening” or discipline is part of what we must go through in order to grow and mature in Christ as need be. There will be times of suffering as we continue to walk our path to go higher in Him. There will be times when the road traveled will seem like we’re fighting an uphill battle. There will be times of pain and hardships, but as Romans reminds us, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose,” (Romans 8:28).

Keep in mind, how we view something as working out for good and how God views it could look very different. Something that may bring us sadness now, God may see a better benefit down the road for our good. When God looks into the meat of our lives, He’s looking beyond the here and now and the tool that is often used is discipline.

Discipline is rarely seen as being pleasant. Whether it refers to the bringing of one’s body under subjection for the benefit of exercising and preparing for a race; or, if it is for correction to set one’s course on a right path – hardship in this life is rarely a welcomed companion.

But we are told not to “**despise**” it as we are reminded that Jesus, the author of our faith, didn’t mount Calvary’s cross by bypassing suffering (see also Proverbs 3:11 and Job

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5:17). He faced it head-on as the Son of God who would redeem mankind from their sins. Now, we are referred to as sons and daughters of God, and as such should we not take it all in stride when the Father's molding of our lives involves things we would rather not endure? Yet, endure we must for one will never reach the finish line of any competition by dropping out. It's pushing through despite the pain and the struggle that allows us to reach our eternal reward in victory.

For when God chastens, His only motivation is **"love."** Proverbs 3:12 verifies this by telling us, "For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." Parents don't want to see their children hurting or sad over a situation no more than God does. But there are some things that parents can't allow their children to pursue because, in the end, it will be to their ruin.

God wants us where He is. He **"scourgeth even son whom he receiveth."** He is our ultimate prize at the end of this race, but we will never get there if we allow the cumbrances of this world to deviate us off that path. God steps in and corrects the steps we take that we may gain the richer rewards of heaven rather than settle for the less than this world has to offer. He beckons us to follow the discipline and not to give up. Allow it to mold you and work for your good to bring about a better end.

Did He not say in Jeremiah, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end?" (29:11). Those words of promise were spoken as the people endured the discipline of captivity. God always, always, always has the greater good of His people in mind despite what it currently looks like. Therefore, run the race and "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ," (2 Timothy 2:3). Subject yourselves **"unto the Father of spirits, and live!"** His correction in our lives is for our good!

He does it for **"our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness."** Anything we face in this world cannot compare to the joy that we have in Him and the glory that lay ahead eternally. One can only be a participator of that joy and glory if they are **"partakers of his holiness."** "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy," (1 Peter 1:15-16).

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God wants holiness in our lives and in our worship. I love a message that pronounces blessings just as much as the next person, but without holiness, it means absolutely nothing in His sight. We need to come back to the central theme of holiness because the LORD requires nothing less. It is for our profit and if discipline is what it takes to get us there, then God will have His way because you and I are treasured that much that He wants you to be where He is.

No, it's not **"joyous"** at the time of receiving said correction and discipline, but **"afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."** There have been times when correction was probably necessary for our own lives, growing up or as an adult. And no, we don't like it but, we can thank God for where the correction keeps us from. The paths of sin and wrong choices that could have kept us walking a road that yielded anything but **"righteousness."** It could have kept us bound in sin.

Children don't usually rejoice due to correction and discipline. When parents send a correction in the way of a child it is to prepare them for life up ahead. When God sends discipline for each of us, we become like trees fit (trained, **"exercised thereby"**) due to pruning to prepare us to yield **"fruit"** that will carry over into eternity.

OUR RACE

Hebrews 12:12-13 "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed."

Be encouraged through it all! Get in there and run this Christian race! Don't let defeat win. Don't let the hardships knock you out of place, robbing you of the goal at the end. If you feel down, get back up, strengthen yourself, and keep on running that your soul may be **"healed."** Jesus is waiting at the finish line.

We can be so easily swayed this way and that with the moving of our circumstances and our emotions and just plain old life itself. But Jesus, **"the author and finisher of our faith;"** our perfect example, never let anything sway Him from the righteous path. He never let anything drag Him off course from where God wanted Him to be. As a matter of fact, He repeatedly let us know "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me," (John 6:38). And yes, He suffered through it all, but suffering didn't win, and

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discouragement didn't stand a chance against the will of God planted so deeply in Him, ergo He ran His race unhindered.

The writer of Hebrews is teaching his readers and us the same valuable life lesson. Everything will not always seem to work in our favor (despite the barrage of popular messages that tell otherwise), but **"make straight paths for your feet;"** look past the obstacles that try to obstruct your view from the finish line and stay wholly focused on Him who is our spiritual forerunner. Follow His lead who endured already and "ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established," (Proverbs 4:26).

Remember, others are watching your race so run that they too may be encouraged to keep going and not be **"turned out of the way."** May they press on to receive healing for their souls as well.

Sometimes the things we deal with get hard. Trials and tribulations are nothing to sneeze at, but we must make the decision to respond the way Jesus did and to not let it frustrate us from everything that God has for us and want us to do. If you keep your eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, you can make it to the end of your Christian race.

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TOPIC:

"The Christian Race"

Hebrews 12:1-13

Please Answer the Review Questions Below

1. **T or F.** The Lord bypasses disciplining His children. (Hebrews 12:6)
2. "We also are compassed about with so great a cloud of _____" (Hebrews 12:1).
A. Spectators B. Helpers C. People D. Witnesses
3. What does it mean to "**lay aside every weight, and the sin which doeth so easily beset us?**" (Hebrews 12:1)

4. How is Jesus the "**author and finisher of our faith?**" (Hebrews 12:2)

5. "Jesus... who for the joy that was set before him endured the _____" (Hebrews 12:2)
A. Burdens B. Sufferings C. Cross D. Pain
6. **T or F.** Staying focused on Jesus will help to strengthen us. (Hebrews 12:3)
7. What are some things every Christian can do during hard times to strengthen their own faith in this Christian race? What are some things we can do to strengthen others?

