

Hebrews 12 Sermon Illustrations

HEBREWS SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS OUR DAILY BREAD, et. al.

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Hebrews 12:1 Run with Endurance

Hebrews 12:1 tells us to “run with endurance” the race set before us. George Matheson wrote, “We commonly associate patience with lying down. We think of it as the angel that guards the couch of the invalid. Yet there is a patience that I believe to be harder—the patience that can run. To lie down in the time of grief, to be quiet under the stroke of adverse fortune, implies a great strength; but I know of something that implies a strength greater still: it is the power to work under stress; to have a great weight at your heart and still run; to have a deep anguish in your spirit and still perform the daily tasks. It is a Christlike thing! The hardest thing is that most of us are called to exercise our patience, not in the sickbed but in the street.” To wait is hard, to do it with “good courage” is harder!

Weighted Down by Plunder

The army of Alexander the Great was advancing on Persia. At one critical point, it appeared that his troops might be defeated. The soldiers had taken so much plunder from their previous campaigns that they had become weighted down and were losing their effectiveness in combat. Alexander immediately commanded that all the spoils be thrown into a heap and burned.

The men complained bitterly but soon came to see the wisdom of the order. Someone wrote, “It was as if wings had been given to them—they walked lightly again.” Victory was assured.

Hebrews 12:1 THINGS TO BE LEFT BEHIND

LEAVE BEHIND your past sins. They have been many and great, more than you can count. But if you have confessed and forsaken them, they have been put away, “as far as the east is from the west.” Nothing could be more explicit than 1Jo1:9. It is useless to brood over the past. God has buried it in the grave of Christ. Go and sin no more!

Leave behind your bad habits that encumber you (R.V. marg.). You know what they are, and how they cling--ill-temper, jealousy, pride, evil-speaking, and many another! You have fallen again and again, overtaken by them, tripped up, your robes stained and torn. There should be some finality in your life, a mark on the grass from which you start to run the race. The command to put off the old man is in the definite tense (Col3:8-9). It be-speaks one sudden strong act of the will, God-nerved and God-empowered. This, then, is the hour when you must strike for liberty “Ye have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”

Leave behind your accomplished ideals. They were once far in front and above you. As you climbed they seemed almost inaccessible, and mocking voices rang out their defiance of your attempt. But by the grace of God things that once you dreamt of are now realised, and you are sitting on the peak that once seemed to laugh you to scorn. But you must leave it behind! Look up! look forward! Are there not fresh ideals calling to you? Leave behind your attainments and strike your tents. One battle is fought, but a yet stronger foe bars the way immediately in front. It is suicidal to rest on your oars; to do so will expose you to the inevitable backward drift.

The best way to leave behind is to press forward. The Spirit of God bids us “run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus.” He is our Forerunner, always before us, always leading us on. His crest, like the plume of Henry of Navarre, is always in the very thick of the fight. Let the soul follow hard after Him, and it will become almost oblivious to what it leaves behind. The boy who is running for the goal, in his eagerness to win the prize, strips himself of one and another article of clothing. He will not count their worth, so long as he may win the prize. So run that ye may attain! Apprehend that for which you were apprehended! Lay hold on the

outstretched crown of life!

PRAYER - Most gracious God, quicken me by Thy Holy Spirit, that I may run in the way Thou hast marked out for me. May I ever be kept looking off unto Jesus. AMEN. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

Hebrews 12:1 The Power Of Sin

I was having lunch with a pastor-friend when the discussion sadly turned to a mutual friend in ministry who had failed morally. As we grieved together over this fallen comrade, now out of ministry, I wondered aloud, "I know anyone can be tempted and anyone can stumble, but he's a smart guy. How could he think he could get away with it?" Without blinking, my friend responded, "Sin makes us stupid." It was an abrupt statement intended to get my attention, and it worked.

I have often thought of that statement in the ensuing years, and I continue to affirm the wisdom of those words. How else can you explain the actions of King David, the man after God's own heart turned adulterer and murderer? Or the reckless choices of Samson? Or the public denials of Christ by Peter, the most public of Jesus' disciples? We are flawed people who are vulnerable to temptation and to the foolishness of mind that can rationalize and justify almost any course of action if we try hard enough.

If we are to have a measure of victory over the power of sin, it will come only as we lean on the strength and wisdom of Christ (Rom. 7:24-25). As His grace strengthens our hearts and minds, we can overcome our own worst inclination to make foolish choices. —Bill Crowder

The price of sin is very high

Though now it may seem low;

And if we let it go unchecked,

Its crippling power will grow. —Fitzhugh

God's Spirit is your power source—don't let sin break the connection.

Hebrews 12:1 Foolish Baggage

In 1845, the ill-fated Franklin Expedition sailed from England to find a passage across the Arctic Ocean.

The crew loaded their two sailing ships with a lot of things they didn't need: a 1,200-volume library, fine china, crystal goblets, and sterling silverware for each officer with his initials engraved on the handles. Amazingly, each ship took only a 12-day supply of coal for their auxiliary steam engines.

The ships became trapped in vast frozen plains of ice. After several months, Lord Franklin died. The men decided to trek to safety in small groups, but none of them survived.

One story is especially heartbreaking. Two officers pulled a large sled more than 65 miles across the treacherous ice. When rescuers found their bodies, they discovered that the sled was filled with table silver.

Those men contributed to their own demise by carrying what they didn't need. But don't we sometimes do the same? Don't we drag baggage through life that we don't need? Evil thoughts that hinder us. Bad habits that drag us down. Grudges that we won't let go.

Let's determine to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us" (Hebrews 12:1). —David C. Egner

The world has lost its transient lure—

Its evil spell I shun;

I've set my course for higher things

Till earth's brief race is run. —Bosch

Keep out of your life anything that would crowd Christ out of your heart.

Hebrews 12:1 Weight Loss

The army of Alexander the Great was advancing on Persia. At one critical point, it appeared that his troops might be defeated. The soldiers had taken so much plunder from their previous campaigns that they had become weighted down and were losing their

effectiveness in combat.

Alexander commanded that all the spoils be thrown into a heap and burned. The men complained bitterly but soon saw the wisdom of the order. Someone wrote, "It was as if wings had been given to them—they walked lightly again." Victory was assured.

As soldiers of Christ, we must rid ourselves of anything that hinders us in the conflict with our spiritual enemy. To fight the battle effectively, we must be clad only with the armor of God (Ephesians 6:11-17).

The Bible also likens Christians to runners. To win the race, we must "lay aside every weight" that would drag us down and rob us of our strength and endurance (Hebrews 12:1). This weight may be an excessive desire for possessions, the captivating love of money, an endless pursuit of pleasure, slavery to sinful passions, or a burdensome legalism.

Yes, if we are to fight the good fight of faith and run the spiritual race with endurance, the watchword must be: Off with the weight!

—Richard De Haan

Fight the good fight with all thy might!

Christ is thy strength and Christ thy right;

Lay hold on life and it shall be

Thy joy and crown eternally. —Monsell

If your Christian life is a drag, worldly weights may be holding you back.

Hebrews 12:1 Patient Endurance

The purposes of God often develop slowly because His grand designs are never hurried. The great New England preacher Phillips Brooks was noted for his poise and quiet manner. At times, however, even he suffered moments of frustration and irritability. One day a friend saw him feverishly pacing the floor like a caged lion. "What's the trouble, Mr. Brooks?" he asked.

"The trouble is that I'm in a hurry, but God isn't!" Haven't we felt the same way many times?

Some of the greatest missionaries of history devotedly spread the seed of God's Word and yet had to wait long periods before seeing the fruit of their efforts. William Carey, for example, labored 7 years before the first Hindu convert was brought to Christ in Burma, and Adoniram Judson toiled 7 years before his faithful preaching was rewarded. In western Africa, it was 14 years before one convert was received into the Christian church. In New Zealand, it took 9 years; and in Tahiti, it was 16 years before the first harvest of souls began.

Thomas a Kempis described that kind of patience in these words: "He deserves not the name of patient who is only willing to suffer as much as he thinks proper, and for whom he pleases. The truly patient man asks (nothing) from whom he suffers, (whether) his superior, his equal, or his inferior... But from whomever, or how much, or how often wrong is done to him, he accepts it all as from the hand of God, and counts it gain!"

Hebrews 12:1 Still Climbing

Few experiences match the challenge and exhilaration of mountain climbing. Those who participate in this exercise of endurance and skill like to compare peaks and share experiences. When European climbers get together to swap stories, they often tell of passing a certain grave along the trail to a famous peak. On the marker is a man's name and this inscription: He died climbing.

To me, mountain climbing is a picture of the life of faith. Throughout our lives we are to continue moving upward--learning more about God, growing in our relationship with Christ, becoming stronger in our battle with temptation, pushing ahead in telling the lost about Christ.

The author of Hebrews put it this way: "Let us run with endurance." The words with endurance may be translated "with perseverance," or more commonly, "to the end."

Joshua was just such a man of God. His "climb" began in Egypt and ended in the Promised Land. He won great battles. We are told that "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua" (Josh. 24:31). At the close of his life, Joshua was still urging Israel to serve God faithfully (v.23).

Lord Jesus, help us to serve You faithfully. May we still be climbing to the very end. --DCE

I want to scale the utmost height
And catch a glimpse of glory bright;
But still I'll pray till heaven I've found,
"Lord, lead me on to higher ground." --Oatman
Faith grows stronger as we climb higher

Hebrews 12:1 Unsung Heroes

They may never be publicly applauded. Only a handful of people may praise them. In fact, they may be criticized and written off as foolish or even weak-minded. Yet they are the unsung heroes who serve as the salt that saves society from total corruption.

Michael Weed of the Institute for Biblical Studies in Austin, Texas, identifies some of these individuals who won't get TV coverage but who ought to be in humanity's Hall of Fame. One such person, "though viciously slandered and misunderstood, refuses to become discouraged or to fight back." Another is the "person who, in spite of bitter disappointments, still praises God as the Giver of all good gifts."

God has many heroes who are unsung on earth. Hebrews 11:35-40 lists some of the unidentified heroes. The author does not give their names, but they are recorded individually in the Book of Life (Phil. 4:3).

We may not be called on to spend our days in sacrificial service or to suffer courageous martyrdom. But in our places of responsibility we can choose to be faithful followers of Christ. We may not hear the applause of this world, but we will someday be rewarded in heaven. --VCG

Look not to the people around you,
Nor wait for their laurels of praise;
Enough that the Savior has found you
And taught you to serve all your days. --Hess
Your name in heaven is not based on
your fame on earth.

Hebrews 12:1 Learning Patience

To those Christians who are always in a hurry, here's some good advice from the 19th-century preacher A.B. Simpson:

"Beloved, have you ever thought that someday you will not have anything to try you, or anyone to vex you again? There will be no opportunity in heaven to learn or to show the spirit of patience, forbearance, and longsuffering. If you are to practice these things, it must be now." Yes, each day affords countless opportunities to learn patience. Let's not waste them.

Commenting on our need for this virtue, M.H. Lount has said, "God's best gifts come slowly. We could not use them if they did not. Many a man, called of God to... a work in which he is pouring out his life, is convinced that the Lord means to bring his efforts to a successful conclusion. Nevertheless, even such a confident worker grows discouraged at times and worries because results do not come as rapidly as he would desire. But growth and strength in waiting are results often greater than the end so impatiently longed for. Paul had time to realize this as he lay in prison. Moses must have asked, 'Why?' many times during the delays in Midian and in the wilderness. Jesus Himself experienced the discipline of delay in His silent years before His great public ministry began."

God wants us to see results as we work for Him, but His first concern is our growth. That's why He often withholds success until we have learned patience. The Lord teaches us this needed lesson through the blessed discipline of delay.

Hebrews 12:1 How To Treat Halloween

The word Halloween comes from All Hallows Eve, which was the evening before a religious holiday in Medieval England that became known as All Saints' Day. It was a time set aside by the church to commemorate its saints.

Today's celebration of Halloween, however, is more closely related to pagan customs that originated in ancient Europe. The Druids

believed that the spirits of the dead returned to their former haunts during the night of October 31, so they lit torches and set out food for these unwelcome visitors. They did this out of fear, thinking they would be harmed if they didn't.

The Bible warns against all dabbling in the occult and preoccupation with witches and ghosts. What then can Christians do? One enterprising pastor had a special gathering in which he asked some of the church people to come dressed in the costumes of Bible heroes and the great saints of church history. In a dramatic way they were calling to mind the sufficiency of God's grace in the lives of His people.

Yes, the example set by that great "cloud of witnesses" in Hebrews 12:1 encourages our faith. Remembering them on Halloween can remind us of the triumph of trusting the Lord. —Herbert Vander Lugt

Faith of our fathers, living still

In spite of dungeon, fire, and sword—

O how our hearts beat high with joy

Whene'er we hear that glorious word! —Faber

The greatest gift anyone can give us is a godly example.

Hebrews 12:1 Good Courage

George Matheson wrote, "We commonly associate patience with lying down. We think of it as the angel that guards the couch of the invalid. Yet there is a patience that I believe to be harder -- the patience that can run. To lie down in the time of grief, to be quiet under the stroke of adverse fortune, implies a great strength; but I know of something that implies a strength greater still: it is the power to work under stress; to have a great weight at your heart and still run; to have a deep anguish in your spirit and still perform the daily tasks. It is a Christ-like thing! The hardest thing is that most of us are called to exercise our patience, not in the sickbed but in the street." To wait is hard, to do it with "good courage" is harder!

Hebrews 12:1 Keep Running!

You may have heard the story of John Stephen Akhwari, the marathon runner from Tanzania who finished last at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. No last-place finisher in a marathon ever finished quite so last.

Injured along the way, he hobbled into the stadium with his leg bloodied and bandaged. It was more than an hour after the rest of the runners had completed the race. Only a few spectators were left in the stands when Akhwari finally crossed the finish line.

When asked why he continued to run despite the pain, Akhwari replied, "My country did not send me to Mexico City to start the race. They sent me here to finish."

The attitude of that athlete ought to be our attitude as we grow older. There is a "race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1), and we are to keep running until we reach the finish line.

No one is too old to serve God. We must keep growing, maturing, and serving to the end of our days. To idle away our last years is to rob the church of the choicest gifts God has given us to share. There is service to be rendered. There is still much to be done.

So let's keep running "with endurance." Let's finish the course—and finish strong. —David H. Roper

It will be worth it all when we see Jesus,

Life's trials will seem so small when we see Christ;

One glimpse of His dear face all sorrow will erase,

So bravely run the race till we see Christ. —Rusthoi

It's always too soon to quit.

Hebrews 12:1 Weighed Down Or Way Up?

A former commander of the Imperial Russian Navy said that he went to London during World War I for training. There he learned how to fly one of three dirigibles that Russia had bought from England.

But first he had to learn to fly a balloon. He recalled getting into the gondola and seeing all four sides covered with sandbags. To begin the ascent, sand was released until the huge balloon slowly lifted off the ground. As more sand went over the side, the craft ascended higher.

The man then applied this to our relationship with the Lord: "Now that I'm a Christian, I understand that when God begins to clean up my heart, I get closer and closer to Him."

Hebrews 12:1 and 1 John 2:15 express that same spiritual truth. Carrying this world's weight hampers our fellowship with the Lord and keeps our hearts from rising in love for Him. John wrote that we cannot love the world and love God at the same time. How often we have proven from experience just how true that is!

Selfish attitudes, besetting sins, and worldly cares keep us from getting off the ground spiritually. But when we lay them aside, we experience the uplifting joy of fellowship with the Father. --MRD II

I want to live above the world,

Though Satan's darts at me are hurled;

For faith has caught the joyful sound,

The song of saints on higher ground. --Oatman

If you're not as close to God as you used to be, guess who moved.

Hebrews 12:1 WINNING THE RACE

On May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister became the first man in history to run a mile in less than 4 minutes. Within 2 months, John Landy eclipsed the record by 1.4 seconds. On August 7, 1954, the two met together for a historic race. As they moved into the last lap, Landy held the lead. It looked as if he would win, but as he neared the finish he was haunted by the question, "Where is Bannister?" As he turned to look, Bannister took the lead. Landy later told a Time magazine reporter, "If I hadn't looked back, I would have won!"

One of the most descriptive pictures of the Christian life in the Bible is of an athlete competing in a race. First Corinthians 9:24-27 tells us that discipline is the key to winning. In Hebrews 12:1-2, we are encouraged to lay aside anything that might hinder our spiritual advancement and to stay focused on Christ. And in Philippians 3:12-13, the apostle Paul said, "I press on... forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead."

Lord, give us endurance as we run this race of life. Help us not to wallow in past failures, but to be disciplined and to shun sinful ways. May we fix our eyes on the eternal goal set before us and keep looking unto Jesus. -- Henry G. Bosch

Run the straight race through God's good grace,

Lift up thine eyes and seek His face;

Life with its way before us lies,

Christ is the path and Christ the prize. -- Monsell

You can't make spiritual progress by looking back.

Hebrews 12:1 BARNYARD DUCKS

Does the following anonymous poem describe how you feel?

My soul is like a barnyard duck
Muddling in the barnyard muck,

Fat and lazy with useless wings;
But sometimes, when the northwind sings

And wild ducks fly overhead,
It ponders something lost and dead,

Then cocks a wary, bewildered eye
And makes a feeble attempt to fly.

It's quite content with the state it's in,
But it's not the duck it might have been.

Are you haunted by the fear that you'll never be what God meant you to be? That you're preoccupied with the trinkets of this passing world? Are you "living in the barnyard" when you could be soaring?

Do you really want to fly? Do you long to soar above the pettiness and insignificance of the barnyard muck?

You can! Put aside the sin and worldly weights that are holding you down (Heb. 12:1) and get busy with the tasks the Lord has for you. Only in Christ do we find the fulfillment He longs for each of us to enjoy.

Remember that Jesus came to set you free and let you soar as you look for His coming (Ti. 2:11-13). Isn't it time you got out of the mud and did some flying? -- Haddon W. Robinson

In this world but never of it,

Help me, Lord, to live this day

Free from all that would entangle,

Of the dazzle and array. -- Graves

If your Christian life is a drag, worldly weights are probably to blame.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Looking To Jesus

Leslie Dunkin told about a dog he had when he was a boy. His father would occasionally test the dog's obedience. He would place a tempting piece of meat on the floor and give the command, "No!" The dog, who must have had a strong urge to go for the meat, was placed in a most difficult situation—to obey or disobey his master's command.

Dunkin said, "The dog never looked at the meat. He seemed to feel that if he did, the temptation to disobey would be too great. So he looked steadily at my father's face." Dunkin then made this spiritual application: "There is a lesson for us all. Always look up to the Master's face."

Yes, that's good advice. God, of course, will not tempt us to do wrong (James 1:13). We do encounter many temptations, though, and if we keep our eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus we will be able to overcome them. When confronted by enticements that could easily overwhelm us, we need to look to Christ and follow His direction. "Seeing" Him and "hearing" Him as He is revealed in the Scriptures will give us the discernment to know what's right, and the desire and strength to obey Him.

Are you battling temptation? Keep your eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus. He will give you victory. —Richard De Haan

The only way to overcome

Temptations that we face

Is just to focus on the Lord,

Who strengthens by His grace. —Sper

To master temptation, keep your eyes on the Master.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Keep on Swimming

From the booklet Bits and Pieces comes an interesting story about Florence Chadwick, the first woman to swim the English Channel in both directions. On the Fourth of July in 1951, she attempted to swim from Catalina Island to the California coast. The challenge was not so much the distance, but the bone-chilling waters of the Pacific. To complicate matters, a dense fog lay over the entire area, making it impossible for her to see land. After about 15 hours in the water, and within a half mile of her goal, Chadwick gave up. Later she told a reporter, "Look, I'm not excusing myself. But if I could have seen land, I might have made it." Not long afterward she attempted the feat again.

Once more a misty veil obscured the coastline and she couldn't see the shore. But this time she made it because she kept reminding herself that land was there. With that confidence she bravely swam on and achieved her goal. In fact, she broke the men's record by 2 hours!

Hebrews 12:1-2 The Race

In 1992 the Summer Olympic Games were held in Barcelona, Spain. One of the runners in the 400-meter race was an English athlete named Derek Redmond. He had trained for years to compete in the Olympics. But while sprinting in a qualifying heat, he suddenly pulled a hamstring and crumpled to the track in pain.

Determined to go on, Derek struggled to his feet. He was hobbling toward the finish line when his father scaled the retaining wall and jumped onto the track. Before anyone could stop him, Jim Redmond reached his son. The young runner leaned on his father's shoulder as he staggered to complete the race. The entire crowd stood and cheered the two men on. When they crossed the finish line, it was as if the runner, his father, and the spectators had done it together.

The writer of Hebrews encourages us to run the race of faith and persevere to the end, following the example of those who have gone before us. It takes all of our spiritual stamina to complete it, but we don't run the course alone. Christ Himself helps us toward the finish line. Therefore, "let us lay aside every weight, and ... run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1). — Haddon W. Robinson

Run the straight race thru God's good grace,

Lift up thine eyes and seek His face;

Life with its way before us lies,

Christ is the path and Christ the prize. --Monsell

We are judged by how we finish, not by how we start.

Hebrews 12:1 - J C Philpot - "Therefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Hebrews 12:1

Every fervent desire of your soul after the Lord Jesus Christ; every inward movement of faith, and hope, and love toward his blessed name; every sense of your misery and danger as a poor, guilty, lost, condemned sinner, whereby you flee from the wrath to come; every escaping out of the world and out of sin for your very life, with every breathing of your heart into the bosom of God, that he would have mercy upon you and bless you--all these inward acts of the believing heart in its striving after salvation as a felt, enjoyed reality, as the prize of our high calling, are pointed out by the emblem--"running the race set before us."

The Christian sees and feels that there is a prize to be obtained, which is eternal life; a victory to be gained, which is victory over death and hell; and he sees the certain consequences if this prize is not obtained, this victory not won--an eternity of misery. He sees, therefore, let others think and say what they may, he must run if all others stand still, he must fight if all others are overcome. But to do this or any part of this a man must have the life of God in his soul. To begin to run is of divine grace and power; to keep on he must have continual supplies communicated out of the fullness of a covenant Head; and to be enabled to persevere to the end so as to win the prize, he must have the strength of Christ continually made perfect in his weakness. But he does win; he is made more than conqueror through Him who loved him. Jesus has engaged that he shall not be defeated; for the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong; but the lame take the prey; and not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.

Hebrews 12:2 - J C Philpot - "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." Hebrews 12:2

No one can ever run the race set before him, except by looking unto Jesus. He is at the head of the race; he stands at the goal; holding the crown of victory in his hand, which he puts upon the head of the successful runner. And we can only run on as we view Jesus by the eye of faith at the right hand of the Father opening his blessed arms to receive us into his own bosom at the end of the race.

Nor indeed can any one really look to him but by the special gift and grace of God. He must be revealed to the soul by the power of God; we must behold his glorious Godhead and his suffering manhood by the eye of faith; and we must view him as the incarnate God; the only Mediator between God and man. We must see the efficacy of his atoning blood to purge a guilty conscience; the blessedness of his obedience to justify a needy, naked soul; the sweetness of his dying love as an inward balm and cordial against all the thousand ills and sorrows of life. We must see his glory, as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth; his suitability to every need and woe; his infinite compassion to the vilest and worst of sinners; his wondrous patient forbearance of our sins and backslidings; his unchanging love, stronger than death itself; his readiness to hear; his willingness to bless; and his ability to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him.

Thus the heavenly runner looks not to the course however long, nor to the ground however rough, not to his own exertions however multiplied, nor to his own strength whether much or little; nor to applauding friends nor condemning foes; but wholly and solely to the incarnate Son of God. Jesus draws him onward with his invincible grace. Every glance of his beauteous Person renews the flame of holy love; every sight of his blood and righteousness kindles desires to experience more of their efficacy and blessedness; and every touch of his sacred finger melts the heart into conformity to his suffering image. This is the life of a Christian--day by day, to be running a race for eternity; and as speeding onward to a heavenly goal, to manifest his sincerity and earnestness by continually breathing forth the yearnings of his soul after divine realities, and to be pressing forward more and more toward the Lord Jesus Christ, as giving him a heavenly crown when he has finished his course with joy.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Where To Look

Let's see. What is the crisis of the day? It could be terrorism and its random threat. Or the economy and the fear that we will run out of money before we run out of time. Maybe it's a personal crisis with no foreseeable solution—a tragedy or a failure too great to bear.

Before we fall under the weight of our accumulated fears, we would do well to look back to a 20th-century woman who bore sadness, pain, and heartache with grace.

Corrie ten Boom lived through the hellish life of Nazi concentration camps—a place where hope was lost for most people. She survived to tell her story of unfaltering faith and tight-fisted hope in God.

She saw the face of evil up close and personal. She saw some of the most inhumane acts man can do to man. And when she came out of it all, she said this: "If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. But if you look at Christ, you'll be at rest."

Where are you looking? Are you focusing on the world and its dangers? Are you gazing at yourself, hoping to find your own answers? Or are you looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith? (Hebrews 12:1-2). In an uncertain world, we must keep looking to Him.—Dave Branon

Looking to Jesus, my spirit is blest,

The world is in turmoil, in Him I have rest;

The sea of my life around me may roar,

When I look to Jesus, I hear it no more. —Anon.

When your world is falling apart, trust Jesus to hold it together.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Always Pointing West

In *The Complete Disciple*, Paul W. Powell describes a picture of a rugged wagon train painted by a famous artist of the American West. It is night, and the wagons have been drawn into a circle for protection. The men are gathered around the campfire, and the wagon master has a map spread out before him. On the map a heavy black line traces the zigzag course they have followed. They had swung north a little, then south, but always toward the west. An argument seems to have erupted about which way to go next. But the leader, with weary determination, has placed one finger on the end of the black line. With his other arm he is pointing toward the shadowy mountains. He seems to be saying, "We may have to go south around a mountain, or north across a river, but our direction will always be west."

Every Christian should have a similar resolve. Running the Christian race is not always easy. High mountains may stand in our way as we continue on the course God has marked out. Difficult circumstances and temptations may cause us to veer in one direction or another. But if we keep our eyes on the goal by "looking unto Jesus," we will not stray from the path He has outlined. As we stay true to the Lord, we will keep heading toward our goal.

And whenever distractions or temptations cause us to stray off course and lose our way, we can look again to Jesus, confess our sin, and He will help us to keep our eyes on the goal. —D.C.E.

An obstacle cannot stop us if we keep our eyes on the goal.

Hebrews 12:1-16 The Great Overcomer

Who is not inspired by the competitor who makes a comeback after being down and seemingly out of the running! The runner who stumbles while coming off the starting blocks but moves gradually into the lead stirs the imagination of us all. The team that can come from behind in the last moments to win excites us even more than the team that constantly wins by scoring big in the first part of the game.

Jesus made the most amazing comeback the world has ever seen. After being humiliated, insulted, spit upon, whipped, beaten, and nailed to a cross, His executioners claimed victory and declared Him dead. A military guard secured His tomb. How could anyone be more down and out than that?

Yet the struggle was not over; it was only the beginning. Three days later, He rose from the grave and reappeared as the victor over sin, death, and hell—a comeback like no other in all of history.

Are you feeling out of the running today? Have you stumbled badly? Think about Jesus' suffering. Ponder His resurrection. Ask Him to give you the victory. Just imagine what He has to offer you, no matter how far down you are now!

No one has overcome like our Lord. —Mart De Haan

The great example is our Lord

Of overcoming power;

The strength that brought Him from the grave

Gives hope in life's dark hour. —Branon

Jesus died to save us and lives to keep us.

Hebrews 12:2 Shame

Have you ever felt ashamed? Perhaps you feel shame now. You have lied or you have slandered a friend. Perhaps you have broken a vow or betrayed a trust. You have sinned and you know it. You are guilty and you feel ashamed.

When you sin, guilt and shame are the appropriate emotions to feel. You need to confess to God and to those whom you have offended what you have done and how wrong it was. Don't shrug off your sin or carry it as a terrible secret. Don't explain it away as the result of circumstances or the seduction of the devil. When you see your sin for what it is and what it has done to others, you ought to be ashamed.

Guilt and shame can be good if they drive you to the Savior. When Jesus carried your sin to the cross, He also carried your shame. He "endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). He now sits enthroned in heaven, but it cost Him dearly. He hung on a Roman execution rack, naked and humiliated. Jesus endured shame--our shame.

When you give yourself to Jesus, who triumphed over death and experienced the shame caused by your sin, you will not only have forgiveness for what you have done, but it will be the beginning of the end of your shame. --HWR

Calvary covers it all,

My past with its sin and stain;

My guilt and despair Jesus took on Him there,

And Calvary covers it all. --Taylor

A judge may suspend a sentence, but only God can remove our guilt.

Hebrews 12:2 Morning and evening : Daily readings (June 28 AM).

It is ever the Holy Spirit's work to turn our eyes away from self to Jesus; but Satan's work is just the opposite of this, for he is constantly trying to make us regard ourselves instead of Christ. He insinuates, "Your sins are too great for pardon; you have no faith; you do not repent enough; you will never be able to continue to the end; you have not the joy of his children; you have such a wavering hold of Jesus." All these are thoughts about self, and we shall never find comfort or assurance by looking within. But the Holy Spirit turns our eyes entirely away from self: he tells us that we are nothing, but that "Christ is all in all." Remember, therefore, it is not thy hold of Christ that saves thee—it is Christ; it is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee—it is Christ; it is not even faith in Christ, though that be the instrument—it is Christ's blood and merits; therefore, look not so much to thy hand with which thou art grasping Christ, as to Christ; look not to thy hope, but to Jesus, the source of thy hope; look not to thy faith, but to Jesus, the author and

finisher of thy faith. We shall never find happiness by looking at our prayers, our doings, or our feelings; it is what Jesus is, not what we are, that gives rest to the soul. If we would at once overcome Satan and have peace with God, it must be by "looking unto Jesus." Keep thine eye simply on him; let his death, his sufferings, his merits, his glories, his intercession, be fresh upon thy mind; when thou wakest in the morning look to him; when thou liest down at night look to him. Oh! let not thy hopes or fears come between thee and Jesus; follow hard after him, and he will never fail thee.

"My hope is built on nothing less

Than Jesus' blood and righteousness:

I dare not trust the sweetest frame,

But wholly lean on Jesus' name."

(Spurgeon, C. H.)

Hebrews 12:2 REPRODUCTIONS IN MINIATURE

Many years ago the "High School Christian" related the following pointed incident: A young unknown artist wanted to copy a large beautiful picture that hung in a palace at Rome. While people were permitted to visit this royal gallery, they of course were not allowed to take a chair and easel and sit there and paint for long periods of time. The ambitious young man, however, did make one such attempt, but was told to move. He therefore decided to copy from memory the massive painting, and repro-duce it in miniature. Hour after hour he would spend before the masterpiece until he could shut his eyes and see it in all its lovely detail. Then, hurrying home, he would begin to paint. Each day as he gazed on the picture, he saw some new loveliness. At last his small copy of that outstanding canvas was finished. The people who came to see it said, "Oh, this is so beautiful we must go and see the large, original picture," and then they would hurry off to the palace.

Christian, would you like to be like that artist? By grace you can be, for you can give to others a miniature view of the loveliest Person in the universe — the Lord Jesus Christ. To do so, however, you must spend much time with Him each day reading His Word, listening to His voice, and heeding His blessed ad-monitions. Then, as time passes, you will become more like Him as the Holy Spirit impresses the Savior's graces on your character and life. As a result, others will come to see that the Lord you serve is such a wonderful Person they will want to know Him too.

May the Lord help us to become so conformed to the image of His Son that we will be blessed reproductions in miniature of Him who is altogether lovely!

Oh, to be like Thee, blessed Redeemer,

This is my constant longing and prayer.

Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures,

Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear. — T. O. Chisholm

Be sure you have the "mind of Christ," for the thoughts you think irradiate you as though you were a transparent vase! —Maeterlinck

Hebrews 12:2 Easily Distracted

My son Steven is just beginning to learn the game of soccer. So we spend quite a bit of time kicking the ball around in the front yard. As I've tried to convey to Steven the little I know about the sport, he has developed some of his own strategy. For instance, he said, "I know how to get past my man. When I'm dribbling the ball, I can say, 'Hey, look over there!' When he does, I can dribble past him!"

As simplistic as this strategy of distraction sounds, it's similar to a scheme satan uses on Christians --and it works. He has developed hundreds of ways to say, "Hey, look over there!" All he has to do is distract us, and he has us doing something other than glorifying God.

One of the goals we should have as we strive to live for the Lord is to keep "looking unto Jesus" (Heb. 12:2). We look away from Jesus when we put our attention on others to criticize them. We

look away when we let everyday concerns make us worry. We look away when we neglect His Word.

Satan is the great distractor. Let's ignore his urgings and keep our eyes on Jesus. When we do, we will find it easier to live in a way that glorifies God. Then we won't be doing Satan's will (2 Tim. 2:26). -- JDB

There's victory for you over sin and its shame:

Look only to Jesus, there's power in His name.

The devil can't harm you nor cause you to sin;

By trusting the Savior the victory you'll win.- Anon.

Satan's ploys are no match for the Savior's power.

Hebrews 12:3 A Sacrifice Remembered

A white wall in the Veterans Memorial Museum in Branson, Missouri, bears the names of 406,000 US soldiers who died in World War II. Each name points beyond itself to the larger cause for which they died.

Nearly every nation has monuments to its fallen soldiers and a day to remember those who died fighting for their country. Whether or not we agree with their ideals, we do well to ponder their courage and sacrifice.

Hebrews 11 lists a number of heroes who lived and died courageously "by faith." Near the end of the chapter, the list changes from the names of individuals to groups of believers whose experiences ranged from miraculous deliverance to torture and death because they refused to compromise their faith in God.

Individually and collectively, they remind us that the spiritual battle is not over. One paraphrase of Hebrews 12:1 says, "Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it" (The Message by Eugene Peterson).

As we recall every sacrifice made on our behalf and every example of spiritual courage, let's determine to keep our eyes on Jesus and to join the parade of faithful veterans of the faith. —DCM —David C. McCasland

As we remember those who've gone before

And think about the sacrifice they made,

We cannot help but think about our Lord,

Who gave His life—our ransom fully paid. —Hess

Let's never forget that others have died so that we might live.

Hebrews 12:3 A Hole in the Head

Private Raymond Cote was in Germany with the 12th Infantry after World War II. During maneuvers, he was put on sentry duty to guard some pontoons on the banks of the Rhine. Because of an oversight, he was not relieved for 6 days. He knew the general order that states: "To quit my post only when properly relieved." So he stayed on duty day and night even when it rained heavily. Sympathetic farmers gave him food and milk. When he finally was relieved and got back to his outfit, his commanding officer praised his "strong sense of duty." But some of his buddies wisecracked that Cote had "a hole in his head."

Followers of the Savior also need a strong determination to carry out faithfully whatever duty the Commanding Officer may assign. It may involve much discomfort, perhaps causing people to regard us as having a hole in the head. But our faithful Commander, whose head was lacerated by a crown of thorns, also had holes in His hands, feet, and side because He did His Father's will.

What will strengthen us to remain faithful when tempted to quit some God-assigned post before our Lord properly relieves us? It is the thought of "Him who endures such hostility from sinners against Himself" (Heb. 12:3). - VCG

I would be true, for there are those who trust me;

I would be pure, for there are those who care.

I would be strong, for there is much to suffer;

I would be brave, for there is much to dare.--Walter

To remain faithful where God has placed you, give God first place in your heart.

Hebrews 12:2-3 Remembrance Day

I was in London's Heathrow Airport waiting for a connecting flight to the US. An announcement came over the public address system stating that it was "Remembrance Day" in the UK, the day on which people honored those who had died for their country in times of war. The announcement further said that at 11:00 a.m. there would be 2 minutes of silence and that it would be appreciated if everyone kept that in mind. Thousands of people from all over the world stood in silence as a tribute to the fallen soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen of the UK.

The desire to remember those who gave their lives for their country is noble. Yet, as meaningful as that is, it cannot compare to the privilege that belongs to us when we approach the Lord's Table. As we celebrate Communion, we are obeying Christ's command that we remember His death (Luke 22:19) and to do it "till He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). When He sacrificed His life for us, He provided the forgiveness of sins that sets us free and secures for us an eternal home in heaven.

Rather than letting the Lord's Supper become routine, make every opportunity at the Table a true "Remembrance Day" by honoring Him till He comes. —Bill Crowder

Thank You, Lord, for dying for me

On the cross of Calvary;

Help me always to remember

What You did to set me free. —Sper

Remembering Christ's death for us should cause us to live for Him.

Hebrews 12:3 Are You Struggling?

I was in my second year of widowhood and I was struggling. Morning after morning my prayer-life consisted of one daily sigh: "Lord, I shouldn't be struggling like this!" "And why not?" His still, small voice asked me from within one morning.

Then the answer came—unrecognized pride! Somehow I had thought that a person of my spiritual maturity should be beyond such struggle. What a ridiculous thought! I had never been a widow before and needed the freedom to be a true learner—even a struggling learner.

At the same time, I was reminded of the story of a man who took home a cocoon so he could watch the emperor moth emerge. As the moth struggled to get through the tiny opening, the man enlarged it with a snip of his scissors. The moth emerged easily—but its wings were shriveled. The struggle through the narrow opening is God's way to force fluid from its body into its wings. The "merciful" snip, in reality, was cruel.

Hebrews 12 describes the Christian life as a race that involves endurance, discipline, and correction. We never get beyond the need of a holy striving against self and sin. Sometimes the struggle is exactly what we need to become what God intends us to be.—Joanie Yoder

When God allows His chastening hand

To give us little rest,

His only purpose is our good—

He wants for us His best. —D. De Haan

We experience God's strength in the strain of our struggle.

Hebrews 12:3 Roughed Up To Grow Up

Many Christians have to be lovingly roughed up before they will grow up. Although the heavenly Father never allows His children to suffer needlessly, sometimes He lets them experience hard knocks so they'll become mature believers.

The need for "bad weather" to stimulate growth can be seen in nature. Scientists say that the seeds of some desert bushes must be damaged by a storm before they will germinate. They are covered with hard shells that keep out water. This allows them to lie dormant on the sand for several seasons until conditions are right for growth.

When heavy rains finally come, the little seeds are carried away in a flash flood. They are banged against sand, gravel, and rocks as they rush down the slopes. Eventually they settle in a depression where the soil has become damp to a depth of several feet. Only then do they begin to grow, for moisture is absorbed through the nicks and scratches they picked up on their downhill plunge.

Similarly, difficulties may be needed to wake up a sleeping saint. This may hurt for a while, but if we yield to the Lord we will find that life's bruises can mark the beginning of spiritual advances. We may prefer to remain "seeds," but He wants us to become "fruitful trees." —Mart De Haan

Should Thy mercy send me sorrow, toil, and woe,

Or should pain attend me on my path below,

Grant that I may never fail Thy hand to see,

Grant that I may ever cast my care on Thee. —Montgomery

There are no gains without pains

Hebrews 12:5 Life Without Regret

A woman unknowingly allowed some valuable family jewels to be sold for 10 cents. It happened after she took the jewels out of a bank safety deposit box to wear to a wedding. The bank was closed when she got home, so she put the jewels in an old shaving case and forgot about them. One day, she gave the shaving case to a friend who was collecting items for a garage sale. By the time the woman realized what she had done, the precious gems had been sold to an unknown buyer for a dime.

In a sense, her pain is similar to Esau's. He too discovered what it's like to realize suddenly that something of great value has been lost (Genesis 25:29-34). His wrong decision and subsequent sorrow can be a lesson for Christians. Hebrews 12 teaches that if we become bitter over the correction that comes our way because of our sin, we will lose the benefits of God's disciplining hand (v.5). And that kind of loss is far greater than trading expensive jewels for almost nothing.

How can we avoid this unnecessary loss? When we sin, we must be willing to learn from God's correction (v.11), show courage (vv.12-13), and renew our spiritual vitality (v.14). If we respond to our Father's chastening hand, we can enjoy a life without regret. —MRD II —Mart De Haan

If you've rebelled and turned away

From what you know is true,

Submit to God, He will forgive—

He still has work for you. —Sper

You can't put your sins behind you until you face them.

Hebrews 12:5-6 Always For Us

Naomi, her husband, and their two sons left Israel and moved to Moab because of a famine (Ruth 1:1-2). One son married Ruth, the other married Orpah. Eventually Naomi's husband and sons died (vv.3,5), so she decided to return to Israel. But she felt that her daughters-in-law would be better off staying in Moab (vv.6-13). She tried to dissuade them from going with her by saying, "No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me!" (v.13).

Was Naomi right in her thinking about God? Perhaps the family had displayed a lack of faith by moving to pagan Moab, but God certainly was not against her. He proved this by wonderfully providing for her and Ruth after they returned to Israel. (Read the rest of the book—it's short.)

You may be unemployed, terminally ill, have a disabled child, or care for a loved one with Alzheimer's. God hasn't promised to keep us from such problems. But He has proven that He is always "for us" as Christians by what He did through Jesus (Romans 5:8-9). Nothing, not even death, can separate us from His love (8:35-39).

The Lord is never "against us," not even when He chastens us (Hebrews 12:5-6). He is always for us! —Herbert Vander Lugt

Our God is always there for us—

Receiving every prayer,

Delighting in our words of praise,

Responding with His care. —Sper

The One who died to save you will never be against you.

Hebrews 12:5-11 Half-Baked Christians

The prophet Hosea used the tribe of Ephraim as a poetic representation of the northern kingdom of Israel. In a colorful admonition, he wrote that Ephraim had become "a cake unturned" (Hosea 7:8).

In today's terminology, the prophet might have said that Ephraim was "half-baked." The people were like a pancake burned on one side but raw on the other. Although they took advantage of the Lord's goodness, they did not seek Him with their heart. When they needed help, they turned to other sources (vv.10-11,14-16). They had become tasteless and useless to God, so He was forced to judge them.

Jesus echoed the words of the prophet. Although He had gentle words for penitent sinners, He gave a scathing rebuke to the haughty and self-righteous who wanted to live as they pleased. He was furious at two-faced religious leaders who talked a good talk but turned around and exploited their followers (Matthew 23:13-30).

God is never soft on sin. He sent His only Son to redeem us from sin's penalty (John 3:16). Let's not be half-baked Christians, claiming God's forgiveness but still living as we please. The only fitting response to God's mercy and grace is to serve Him in humility and love.—Haddon W. Robinson

Thinking It Through

What is the basis of our salvation? (Ephesians 2:8-9).

How are we to respond to God's grace? (v.10).

How does God correct His children? (Hebrews 12:5-11).

God's grace is not license to live as we please—it's liberty to please God.

Hebrews 12:5-11 Bad Weather

Scientists tell us that the seeds of certain types of desert bushes must be damaged by a storm before they will germinate. Covered by hard shells that keep out water, these seeds can lie dormant on the sand for several seasons until conditions are right for growth. When heavy rains finally bring flash floods, the little seeds are banged against sand, gravel, and rocks as they rush down the slopes. Eventually they settle in a depression where the soil is damp several feet deep. Able to absorb water through the nicks and scratches they acquired on their downhill plunge, they finally begin to grow.

Sometimes Christians are like those seeds. We need bad weather to stimulate our spiritual development. We do not take life seriously until something drastic happens. Although the heavenly Father never allows His children to suffer needlessly, sometimes He lets us experience nicks and scratches that let the water of His Word seep in and soften our hearts.

An unexpected stay in the hospital, stacks of unpaid bills, or family disruption can quickly awaken a sleeping saint. Such difficulties hurt for a while, but if we yield to the Lord we will find that life's bruises can mark the beginning of spiritual advances. Occasionally God will let us be roughed up to grow up. We may prefer to remain seeds, but He wants us to become fruitful trees. —M.R.D.II

There are no gains without pains.

Hebrews 12:6 The Correction of Love - James Smith 1842

"The Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes every one He accepts as a son." Hebrews 12:6

Afflicted Christian, you are perhaps tempted to think that God cannot love you — or He would not so deeply try you. But the reverse is the case — if He did not love you, He might perhaps refuse to try you. But because He loves you, and is a Father to you — therefore He corrects you. All of the Lord's children need correction. Many of them will not grow without very severe discipline — consequently your heavenly Father says, "I will melt them, and try them." "I will turn my hand upon you, and will purge away your

dross; and take away all your tin."

Look to the generations of old, and see if the Lord's people in every age have not been an afflicted people. Look at Job, at the prophets, at Lazarus; God tenderly loved them — and yet how severely He tried them. He has commanded an earthly parent to chasten His son while there is hope, and not to let his soul spare for his crying — and by this rule He proceeds. He chastens us — that he may not destroy us. There is infinite mercy in your present trial — as dreadful as it may appear to you. There was an absolute necessity for it, for He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve His redeemed children.

He takes pleasure in the spiritual prosperity of His people — and therefore He uses means to promote it. He has received you as a son, and He is now . . .

using His paternal authority;
manifesting His infinite wisdom;
fulfilling His gracious covenant;
making good His precious promises;
and displaying His unutterable love!

Do not listen to Satan, who would suggest hard thoughts of God. Do not question His love, or doubt His word — but plead with Him at His throne, and He will give you an answer of peace. He is now waiting to be gracious to you. He says to you, "Let me hear your voice!" Arise therefore, and call upon your God. Every one who is . . .

adopted into His family;
quickened by His grace;
and united to Jesus —
is made to pass under the rod, and prove the truth of the Scripture which says, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous — but the Lord delivers him out of them all."

He chastens you, not for His own pleasure or gratification — but for your profit — that you might be a partaker of His holiness. What a gracious design is this — every way worthy of God. It affords full proof of His infinite wisdom, care, and love!

Think within yourself:

I could not do without this affliction;
it is sent in love;
it is intended to do me good;
it is a proof that I am a child of God
— and you will then think rightly.

Do not despise the chastening of the Lord, by thinking that you could have done as well without it; or that there was no necessity for it. Depend upon it, you must either be . . .

pained — or ruined;
tried — or injured;
corrected — or lost.

Do not faint when the Lord rebukes you. He has promised you, that as your day is — so shall your strength be. He says to you, "Do not fear — for I am with you; do not be afraid — for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand!" Isaiah 41:10. Precious promise of a faithful God! He made it in love. He has not forgotten it — no, He intends to make it good. Yes, He is now making it good to you — as tried and afflicted as you are.

The rod which afflicts you, is in the hand of Jesus! In that hand which was once bored and nailed to the cross for your redemption! In the hand of the Friend who loves at all times; and who is a Brother born for adversity. Will Jesus who suffered, bled, and died to redeem you — ever hurt you? Surely not! His heart is too tender! His love is too great! "He will not break the bruised reed — and He will not quench the smoking flax!" He will bind up the broken heart, and comfort the sorrowful spirit.

You say, "He is sorely trying me!" True — but He is only making you fit to partake of the inheritance of the saints in light. They are . . .

loving strokes,
valuable trials,
blessed afflictions!

As sharp they may be — short they must be. And after you have suffered a little while, He will make you perfect in every good work

to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight.

Humble yourself then under the mighty hand of God;

mourn before Him;
surrender all to Him;
plead with Him;
justify Him —
and the rod will soon fall from His hand, the scourging will soon be over, and peaceable fruits of righteousness
will make their appearance.

Look up to your God, and say:

Submissive to your will, my God,
I all to you resign;
I bow before your chastening rod,
And mourn, but not repine.

Why should my foolish heart complain,
When wisdom, truth, and love,
Direct the stroke, inflict the pain,
And point to joys above?

How short are all my sufferings here!
How needful every cross!
Away then, my unbelieving fear,
Nor call my gain, my loss.

Hebrews 12:6

Winds Of Love

A farmer had a weather vane on his barn, on which was written "God is love." When friends asked why, the farmer said, "This is to remind me that no matter which way the wind blows, God is love."

When the warm "south wind" with its soothing and balmy breezes brings showers of blessing, God is love. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17).

When the cold "north wind" of trial and testing sweeps down upon you, God is love. "All things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

When the "west wind" blows hard upon you with its punishing intent, God is love. "Whom the Lord loves He chastens" (Hebrews 12:6).

When the "east wind" threatens to sweep away all that you have, God is love. "God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory" (Philippians 4:19).

Perhaps you are discouraged and downhearted. If so, remember, God still cares for you. What you are experiencing has either been sent or it has been allowed by Him for your good.

Yes, no matter which way the wind is blowing, God is love. —Richard De Haan

God is love: His mercy brightens

All the path in which we rove;

Bliss He wakes and woe He lightens—

God is wisdom, God is love. —Bowring

No affliction would trouble us if we knew God's reason for permitting it.

Hebrews 12:6 The Making Of Us

When my husband was a child, his mother sometimes scolded and disciplined him for disobeying her. During one such scolding he said to her imploringly, "You must be nice to your little boy!" His words touched her tender heart. But because she loved him, she continued his discipline and training. Years later as a missionary, Bill was grateful for her tough love, for it was the making of him.

God also disciplines and trains His erring sons and daughters. He may do so directly (1 Corinthians 11:29-32), or He may allow life's hardships to melt us, mold us, and make us more like Jesus. In Hebrews 12:6, we're assured that "whom the Lord loves He chastens." Yet God's chastening doesn't feel very loving. Sometimes we even think it's ruining us. But God's discipline is the very thing that will save us from the ruin of our selfish, stubborn ways.

Although we're unlikely to enjoy God's discipline, we're told that it trains us for right and holy living (vv.7-11). Rather than resisting God's correction, we can yield to Him, confident that His goal is our spiritual growth. Whatever our circumstances, God knows the seriousness of our difficulties and is working powerfully behind the scenes for our good.

His tough love is the making of us.

—Joanie Yoder

God's loving hand of discipline

May give us little rest;

His only purpose is our good —

He wants for us what's best. —D. De Haan

God's discipline is designed to make us like His Son.

Hebrews 12:7-11 Pain's Purpose

Affliction, when we accept it with patience and humility, can lead us to a deeper, fuller life. "Before I was afflicted I went astray," David wrote, "but now I keep Your Word" (Psalm 119:67). And again, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes" (v.71).

Pain, far from being an obstacle to our spiritual growth, can actually be the pathway to it. If we allow pain to train us, it can lead us closer to God and into His Word. It is often the means by which our Father graciously shapes us to be like His Son, gradually giving us the courage, compassion, contentment, and tranquility we long and pray for. Without pain, God would not accomplish all that He desires to do in and through us.

Are you one whom God is instructing through suffering and pain? By His grace, you can endure His instruction patiently (2 Corinthians 12:9). He can make the trial a blessing and use it to draw you into His heart and into His Word. He can also teach you the lessons He intends for you to learn, and give you His peace in the midst of your difficulties.

The Bible tells us, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials" (James 1:2). God is making more out of you than you ever thought possible. —David H. Roper

Through trials we learn to overcome,

Through Christ our victories are won;

Come lay your burdens at His feet

And find this inner peace so sweet. —Halsey

Christ can transform painful trials into glorious triumphs.

Hebrews 12:9-11 Ripples On The Pond

A young boy made a toy boat and then went to sail it on a pond. While he was playing with it along the water's edge, the boat floated out beyond his reach. In his distress he asked an older boy to help him. Without saying a word, the older child picked up some stones and started to throw them toward the boat.

The little boy became upset, for he thought that the one he had turned to for help was being mean. Soon, though, he noticed that instead of hitting the boat, each stone was directed beyond it, making a small ripple that moved the vessel a little nearer to the

shore. Every throw of the stone was planned, and at last the treasured toy was brought back to his waiting hands.

Sometimes it seems as if God allows circumstances into our lives that are harming us and are without sense or plan. We may be sure, though, that these waves of trial are intended to bring us nearer to Himself, to encourage us to set our minds "on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). Because we are prone to drift away from Him, the Lord must discipline us to get us back on the right course (Hebrews 12:9-11).

How are you responding to life's difficulties? They are God's loving way of drawing you closer to Him. —HGB —Henry G. Bosch

Lightly hold earth's joys so transient,

Lightly hold to things of clay,

Grasp perfections everlasting,

Where Christ dwells in heaven's day! —Bosch

God uses the waves of trial to draw us closer to Himself.

Hebrews 12:11 Blue-ribbon Christians

While visiting New England, I was presented with a tin of pure Vermont maple syrup. It was given to me by a man who consistently had won blue ribbons for his product.

Producing syrup of that quality is no easy task. Its richness, flavor, and color depend on many factors: the tree from which the sap is drawn, the time it is collected, the existing weather conditions, and the skill of the one who controls the boiling and filtering process. A blue-ribbon award is the result of a carefully controlled procedure from start to finish.

This reminds me of the way the Lord refines the lives of His children. Even now, He is working on us. The fires of affliction and trial may be painful for a time, but afterward they will result in great blessing and reward (Hebrews 12:11).

I remember well when my brother and I collected some sap from our maple trees in the back yard. We put it in a big tub on a burner in the basement, and then promptly forgot all about it. Many hours later Mother almost fainted when she opened the basement door and was greeted by billowing clouds of smoke. How thankful we can be that God never forgets us in that way. He knows just the right amount of heat necessary to make us blue-ribbon Christians! —RWD —Richard De Haan

All God's testings have a purpose—

Someday you will see the light;

All He asks is that you trust Him,

Walk by faith and not by sight. —Zoller

God sends trials not to impair us but to improve us.

Hebrews 12:11 The Making Of You

Scottish author George MacDonald told this story of a woman who had experienced a great tragedy in her life: "The heartache was so crushing and her sorrow so bitter that the one in distress exclaimed, 'I wish I'd never been made.' With spiritual discernment, her friend answered, 'My dear, you are not fully made yet; you're only being made, and this is the Maker's process!'"

MacDonald wisely concluded, "We can let God take our troubles and make out of them a garment of Christian fortitude which will not only warm our souls but also serve to inspire others."

This is true for all of our trials-- even when we are being corrected by God for our sin. The author of Hebrews wrote, "No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:11).

Does it seem as though everything in life is going against you? As you face disillusionment, take heart! If you're a child of God, all things are working together for good, and He is conforming you "to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:28-29). God's lessons through trials can be the making of you! --RWD

For all the heartaches and the tears,

For gloomy days and fruitless years

I do give thanks, for now I know

These were the things that helped me grow. --Anon.

God may have to break us in order to make us.

Hebrews 12:11 Pain And Gain

Years ago I was an extremely anxious Christian. When I began spiraling downward emotionally, God didn't intervene, for He knew I needed to reach the end of myself. When I finally hit rock bottom, the "rock" on which I fell was Jesus Christ.

The Lord immediately began rebuilding me, applying truths from His Word to teach me trust and faith. Gradually He changed me into the joyful, God-dependent person He intended me to be. Through this painful but profitable experience, I learned that when God disciplines us, our greatest gain isn't what we get but what we become.

In Hebrews 12, we read that our heavenly Father loves us too dearly to let us remain immature. Like any loving father, He disciplines, corrects, and trains us—often through difficult situations. God uses our times of struggle to help us grow and make us more holy (vv.10-11).

Many people are motivated to live for health, wealth, and ease, and they try to avoid pain at all costs. But the abundant life that God intends for His people isn't trouble-free. Growth and change are often unsettling, but the gain is worth the pain.—Joanie Yoder

We shrink from the purging and pruning,

Forgetting the Gardener who knows:

The deeper the cutting and paring

The richer the cluster that grows. —Anon.

God uses setbacks to move us forward.

Hebrews 12:11 Pain Is Not Pointless

During times of hardship, I often feel like whining, "Who needs this pain? I certainly don't!" But Isaiah 28 and my own experience tell me this is a shortsighted reaction. Not that we need hardship just for its own sake, but we do need to be changed and to mature. In God's hand, hardship can be an effective tool to bring about our much-needed growth.

In verses 23-28, we read the prophet's "poetic parable," written to help the people of Israel understand how God works and what He intended to accomplish in their lives through tough times. A farmer is portrayed skillfully plowing the ground, planting his crops, and threshing the harvest. If the soil could talk, it might have whined, "Who needs this painful plowing?" But the pain is not pointless. Isaiah said that the farmer is taught by God to work in measured and well-timed ways, handling delicate crops with care and others more vigorously, but always with a sure harvest in view.

Our reassurance during tough times is that the farmer's God is our God, "who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance" (v.29). His dealings with us are always thoughtful and purposeful, producing in us "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:11).—Joanie Yoder

God has a purpose in our heartaches—

The Savior always knows what's best;

We learn so many precious lessons

In every sorrow, trial, and test. —Jarvis

When you trust in God, pain is an opportunity for progress.

Hebrews 12:11 Morning and evening : Daily readings (May 18 PM)

How happy are tried Christians, afterwards. No calm more deep than that which succeeds a storm. Who has not rejoiced in clear shinings after rain? Victorious banquets are for well-exercised soldiers. After killing the lion we eat the honey; after climbing the Hill

Difficulty, we sit down in the harbour to rest; after traversing the Valley of Humiliation, after fighting with Apollyon, the shining one appears, with the healing branch from the tree of life. Our sorrows, like the passing keels of the vessels upon the sea, leave a silver line of holy light behind them "afterwards." It is peace, sweet, deep peace, which follows the horrible turmoil which once reigned in our tormented, guilty souls. See, then, the happy estate of a Christian! He has his best things last, and he therefore in this world receives his worst things first. But even his worst things are "afterward" good things, harsh ploughings yielding joyful harvests. Even now he grows rich by his losses, he rises by his falls, he lives by dying, and becomes full by being emptied; if, then, his grievous afflictions yield him so much peaceable fruit in this life, what shall be the full vintage of joy "afterwards" in heaven? If his dark nights are as bright as the world's days, what shall his days be? If even his starlight is more splendid than the sun, what must his sunlight be? If he can sing in a dungeon, how sweetly will he sing in heaven! If he can praise the Lord in the fires, how will he extol him before the eternal throne! If evil be good to him now, what will the overflowing goodness of God be to him then? Oh, blessed "afterward!" Who would not be a Christian? Who would not bear the present cross for the crown which cometh afterwards? But herein is work for patience, for the rest is not for to-day, nor the triumph for the present, but "afterward." Wait, O soul, and let patience have her perfect work. (Spurgeon, C. H.)

Hebrews 12:11 Out Of The Thorns

The gorse bush is a shrub that was imported from Europe and now grows wild in the Pacific Northwest. It has dense, dark green shoots, and in springtime it provides a dazzling display of fragrant, vibrant yellow flowers. But it's best known by hikers and fishermen for its vicious spines.

Remarkably, the flowers grow right out of the thorns.

Missionary and artist Lilius Trotter wrote, "The whole year round the thorn has been hardening and sharpening. Spring comes—the thorn does not drop off, it does not soften. There it is as uncompromising as ever, but half-way up appear two brown fuzzy balls, mere specks at first, that break at last—straight out of last year's thorn—into a blaze of golden glory."

So it is with the suffering that accompanies God's chastening. Just when our situation seems hopeless and hardest to bear, tiny signs of life appear that will soon burst into bloom. Take the toughest issue, the most difficult place. There, God in His grace can cause His beauty to be seen in you.

No chastening seems pleasant at the time, "Yet when it is all over we can see that it has quietly produced the fruit of real goodness in the characters of those who have accepted it in the right spirit" (Hebrews 12:11 Phillips).—David H. Roper

For all the heartaches and the tears,

For gloomy days and fruitless years

I do give thanks, for now I know

These were the things that helped me grow! —Crandlemire

God's hand of discipline is a hand of love

Hebrews 12:11 No Pain, No Gain

Christian educator and author Howard Hendricks cautions parents not to bribe or threaten their children to get them to obey. What they need is firm, loving, and at times painful discipline.

Hendricks recalls being in a home where a bright-eyed grade-schooler sat across the table from him.

"Sally, eat your potatoes," said her mother in a proper parental tone.

"Sally, if you don't eat your potatoes, you won't get any dessert!"

Sally winked at Hendricks. Sure enough, mother removed the potatoes and brought Sally some ice cream. He saw this as a case of parents obeying their children rather than "Children, obey your parents" (Ephesians 6:1).

Many parents are afraid to do what they know is best for their youngsters. They're afraid their children will turn against them and think they don't love them. Hendricks says, "Your primary concern is not what they think of you now, but what they will think 20 years from now."

Even our loving heavenly Father's correction is painful, yet afterward (perhaps years later) "it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness in those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11). As loving parents, dare we have less long-term vision than our

heavenly Father has? —JEY —Joanie Yoder

As parents we must have this goal:

To teach our children self-control;

For firm and loving discipline

Can keep them from the ways of sin. —D. De Haan

The surest way to make life hard for your children is to make it soft for them.

Hebrews 12:11 Tough Love

In our city's largest public school district, any student who gets caught with a weapon or drugs on campus faces mandatory expulsion. The director of discipline can expel a student immediately. But he also frequently takes the offender through an intense 90-minute session designed to force the student to come to grips with his destructive behavior. Many young adults, looking back, have said that without the director's confrontation they would have ended up in jail.

Discipline! No one likes it, but we all need it. And because God loves us as His children, He never skimps on our spiritual training. Instead of a quick slap on the wrist, our correction may include the agonizing experience of being confronted with who we are and why we behave the way we do. Hebrews 12 summarizes the process with refreshing honesty: "No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (v.11).

We are told not to despise the Lord's chastening and not to be discouraged when He rebukes us, because it all flows from His love (vv.5-6). Without God's tough love, where would we be today? —DCM —David C. McCasland

Because our Father's heart is grieved

Each time we go astray,

He lifts His chastening hand in love

To help us choose His way. —D. De Haan

God is never cruel in His correction.

Hebrews 12:13 Road Builders

The cover of a recent Our Daily Bread pictures a leaf-strewn road through the mountains of Vermont. Those who use the road can enjoy a smooth and beautiful ride over difficult terrain. To make this possible, others had to work hard to chart the route, clear the trees, and level the rough spots.

In a way, all Christians are road builders. We are paving the way of faith for the next generation. The faithfulness of our lives may determine how difficult their journey will be. Will they have to repair the damage we have done to the road? Will they be able to build new roads for others to find the way to God?

To be good road builders, we must heed the advice found in God's Word. The author of Hebrews instructed us to live in peace and be holy (12:14), to make sure no one misses the grace of God, and not to permit a root of bitterness to grow and cause trouble (v.15).

Those of us who have come to Jesus owe gratitude to those who have made "straight paths" for our walk of faith (v.13). In turn, we must remember those who will follow us and make straight paths for them. Let's practice our faith in a way that makes it easy for others to come to Jesus and to follow Him. What kind of road builder are you?

—Julie Ackerman Link

Oh, may all who come behind us find us faithful;

May the fire of our devotion light their way;

May the footprints that we leave lead them to believe,

And the lives we live inspire them to obey. —Mohr

A life lived for God leaves a lasting legacy.

Hebrews 12:14-15 Good Dads

Columnist Leonard Pitts Jr. grew up with a father he describes as physically present but emotionally absent. In his first book on parenting, Pitts openly chronicles his struggle to come to terms with his alcoholic father and the climate of fear he had created in their home. Pitts challenges all men to resolve the resentment toward their absent or abusive fathers instead of passing it on to the next generation.

There's a passage in Hebrews 12 that applies to all Christians, but it has special relevance to dads. It reads: "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled" (vv.14-15).

Think of what could happen in our families if we emptied our hearts of bitterness and made peaceful relationships our goal! If we have been blessed with a wise and loving father, we should be grateful and follow his example. But if our father has failed us, we must rely on God's grace, resolve our anger toward him, and strive to be the kind of dad we never had. It won't be easy, but with our heavenly Father as a perfect example, we can learn to be good dads. —David C. McCasland

A faithful father leads by love

With tender firmness from above,

For he himself has learned from God

The lessons of His chastening rod. --DJD

A good father reflects the love of the heavenly Father.

Hebrews 12:15 Purge Out The Poison

My friend and I were standing in the parking lot of a restaurant where we had just finished lunch. While we were discussing the damage a bitter spirit can cause, he took out his New Testament and solemnly read Hebrews 12:15 to me: "Looking carefully ... lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled."

In the six long decades since our conversation, the sad truth of that warning has been repeatedly verified by my experiences in pastoral ministry. Bitterness is a poison, and if not purged out by prayer, confession, and forgiveness, it does great emotional damage and destroys relationships. A little grudge that festers can become a devastating malignancy of soul. That's why the advice in Hebrews must be diligently heeded.

Have you been holding fast to the memory of some insult, some event, some criticism? As Paul put it in Ephesians 4:26, "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath." Take the proper steps to resolve the problem right away.

Holding a grudge poisons our spiritual lives. With the Holy Spirit's help, let's uproot any bitterness right now. It's amazing how joyful our lives will be when we allow God to purge out the poison of bitterness. --VCG

Thinking It Through

What are we to do when someone sins

against us? (Lk. 17:3-4). According to Jesus,

how many times are we to forgive? (Mt. 18:21-22).

To get rid of weeds of anger, dig out the bitter roots.

Hebrews 12:16 What's Worth Keeping?

A story is told of a man who loved old books. He met an acquaintance who had just thrown away a Bible that had been stored in the attic of his ancestral home for generations. "I couldn't read it," the friend explained. "Somebody named Guten-something had printed it." "Not Gutenberg!" the book lover exclaimed in horror. "That Bible was one of the first books ever printed. A copy just sold for over

two million dollars!"

His friend was unimpressed. "Mine wouldn't have brought a dollar. Some fellow named Martin Luther had scribbled all over it in German."

This fictitious story shows how a person can treat as worthless that which is valuable. That's what Esau did. Although he was a nice enough fellow, Esau was a "profane" man because he sold his spiritual birthright "for one morsel of food" (Hebrews 12:16). Only when it was too late to undo his wretched bargain did he realize that he had sacrificed the permanent on the altar of the immediate.

We had better be careful of the "bargains" we make in life. Our culture places a high price on what is worthless and throws away as worthless what is of eternal value.

Ask the Lord to help you discern what's worth keeping and what is best discarded.

—Haddon W. Robinson

The little choices we must make

Will chart the course of life we take;

We either choose the path of light

Or wander off in darkest night. —D. De Haan

Why pay the high price for this world's bargains when eternal life is free?

Hebrews 12:17 LOST OPPORTUNITIES

THE GREEKS represented Opportunity as bald, with no lock of hair by which she could be laid hold of as she turned away and fled. Every one has opportunity, but there is often no symptom of its approach, no sign of its departure; when once it is missed, it rarely comes again! It is said that Queen Victoria once gave a comparatively unknown painter the opportunity of a private sitting. She came at the exact time that was arranged, but he was five minutes late, and he lost his opportunity!

Esau bartered his birthright! What cared he for the spiritual prerogative of the first-born to act as the priest of the clan, and to stand in the possible lineal descent of the Messiah. He craved what would satisfy and please his senses. But when he had sold his birthright, he was held to the transaction. "He found no place of repentance" does not mean that he wished to and could not, but that the die was cast, the decision was deemed final. It is within the range of every one to do an act, to make a choice, to barter away the spiritual for the Material so absolutely, that the decision is held irrevocable. Let us take care lest we be betrayed by passion into an act which may affect our entire destiny.

The outstretched wing of God's love would have sheltered Jerusalem from its impending fate, but she refused Him in His servants and His Son, and her day of opportunity passed!

Even so, salvation waits for us all, and there is hope and opportunity for us to repent as long as the day of grace is not closed, but let us not forget, as McCheyne said, that Christ gives last knocks. The present is your time of hope, of a fresh beginning, of a new opportunity. Open the door of your life to Christ and make Him King. He offers you your chance, rise to it; do your very best, find your niche of service in His Kingdom, and set yourself to follow Him with all your heart, and mind, and strength.

PRAYER

O Lord, let us not serve Thee with the spirit of bondage as slaves, but with the cheerfulness and gladness of children, delighting ourselves in Thee and rejoicing in Thy work. AMEN. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

Hebrews 12:18 - J C Philpot - Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe." Hebrews 12:18

Grace is the very foundation of the kingdom which cannot be moved. It is all of grace, from first to last. By grace we are saved; by grace we are called; by grace we are what we are. In order, therefore, to maintain our interest clear in the kingdom which cannot be shaken, we must hold grace fast; for as soon we cease to do this, we lose our comfortable prospects of this kingdom, and of our own participation in it and its heavenly blessings. It is a kingdom of present grace and of future glory, therefore built wholly upon grace and not upon merit; wholly upon the favor of God and not upon the works of the creature. As long, then, as we hold fast grace, we hold the kingdom; for the kingdom stands in grace.

But why should this exhortation be needed? Is it not very easy to hold fast grace? Yes, very, when there is nothing to test it; and that is the way that most hold it—in the head, not in the heart. But the real partakers of the life of God are tempted on every hand to renounce their hold of grace, through the power of the world, the strength of sin, the subtlety of their unwearied adversary, the unbelief, infidelity, and despondency of their wretched heart. Thus sometimes we are tempted to look away from the kingdom which cannot be shaken, and descend to lower things; to stand either upon that earth which has been shaken under our feet, or that heaven, that Pharisee's heaven which has been shaken over our heads, and thus get lost and bewildered among the wreck and ruin of those things which have been shaken and are removed.

The Apostle therefore exhorts us to hold fast that grace whereby in the first instance we came to have a saving interest in the kingdom not to be shaken; whereby we were introduced into an experimental knowledge and possession of it; and whereby alone we can maintain a firm hold of it to the end. Whatever you do, then, however low you may sink and fall, never relinquish your firm hold of grace. It will never be more precious than when clasped by a dying hand, and clung to with expiring breath.

Hebrews 12:22 Thoughts Of Heaven

Cartoonists often depict those who have gone to heaven as white-robed, ghostly forms floating among the clouds or sitting on golden stairs playing harps. What a far cry from the picture we find in the Bible!

In 1 Corinthians 15, we read that our resurrection bodies, although not subject to death, will be real and tangible—not mere apparitions. And Revelation 21:1-5 tells us that God will bring about "a new heaven and a new earth." He will bring down "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12:22), and set it upon the new earth as the "New Jerusalem." It is described as having streets, walls, gates, and even a river and trees (Revelation 22:1-5).

Life in that city will be wonderful, free from all the debilitating effects of sin. There will be no more death, sorrow, mourning, and pain, for God will make "all things new." But best of all, He Himself will come to live among us, making possible a new level of intimacy with Him.

It's difficult to envision such an existence, but what an exciting prospect! It is all possible because of what Jesus did when He died for us on the cross. This should motivate us to worship Him, live godly lives, and tell others how they too can be assured of a glorious future. —Herbert Vander Lugt

The more we love Jesus the more we'll long for heaven.

Hebrews 12:22 Ye are come unto Mount Sion.

These poor Hebrew Christians, outcast from their Temple, and soon to see their beloved city vanish from the earth, were sore at heart. What a contrast was presented by the bare room in which they celebrated the simple supper and the splendid Temple with its magnificent rites! What a tiny rill their hymns were, compared with the mighty torrent of Temple psalmody! What a handful of worshippers, compared with the multitudes that congregated from all the world! Sometimes it seemed as though the contrast were unbearable.

Then said the Holy Ghost, lift up your eyes and see. Ye are not the lonely, isolated handful ye suppose. Every time you offer your prayer and sing your hymns ye are joining with the spirits of the perfected just, with numberless holy angels, and with vast multitudes in heaven and on earth who are ever adoring Christ. You climb the temple of Worship, of which the steps are prayers and the gates praise, and as you do so, on either hand go myriads of happy and holy spirits; and those surely are specially near whom you "have loved long since and lost awhile."

What special blessing these thoughts will bring to the bedridden, who for many years have not entered the courts of God's house; to the aged, and lonely, and exiled! We never worship God alone. As soon as we begin to pray, we say, Our Father which art in heaven, forgive our sins; give us our daily bread. We need not die to pass within thy gates,

O Jerusalem, city of God! Already we tread thy golden pavement, and hear the music of the waters of life, and press to our wounds the leaves of thy tree. (Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily)

Hebrews 12:22-23 Invisible Companions

One Sunday morning while traveling in West Virginia, we visited a small church in a tiny village. Only 15 people were present, yet they radiated joy as they sang. And the pastor preached from the Bible with enthusiasm. But I couldn't shake a feeling of sympathy for him and his people. With little chance for growth, it looked like a discouraging ministry.

But the testimony of a young seminarian showed me how wrong I was! Assigned to minister in a small village chapel, he was dismayed when only two people stayed for the communion service. As he read from the liturgy, he came to the words: "Therefore, with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we worship and adore Thy glorious name." That sentence changed everything for him. In his heart he said, "God forgive me. I did not know I was in that great company."

When we came to Christ in faith, we joined an invisible host of companions, what the writer of Hebrews says is an "innumerable company of angels," and "the general assembly and church of the firstborn" (12:22-23). Keep this amazing reality in mind as you worship God. It will give great meaning to every service, whether thousands of fellow worshipers are present, or just two or three. — Herbert Vander Lugt

Glory to God, and praise and love

Be ever, ever given

By saints below and saints above,

The church in earth and heaven. —Wesley

When Christians worship here on earth, the hosts of heaven are worshipping with them.

Hebrews 12:22-24 OUR HERITAGE AND OUR GOAL

WE ARE far from being perfect. When in our deepest moments, we ascend into the Holiest, on the wings of faith and prayer, we pass through a vast host of sympathetic spirits, all of whom are devoted to the same Lord and Master, and are joining in the same act of worship. Many of them have known and helped us in our earthly life, and they have been sent forth to minister to us, and to help us on our way. "Ye are come to the spirits of just men made perfect."

We are also come unto God, the Judge of all. When Moses stood before God on the Mount, he said: "I exceedingly fear and quake." But we may come with boldness to the footstool of the Eternal Throne, though our God is a consuming fire, for in Christ Jesus we stand accepted. He is the Mediator of the New Covenant, and His Blood speaks better things than that of Abel. That blood cried against Cain. But the Blood of Jesus cries on our behalf; it has opened the way into the Holiest; has cleansed us from our sins; has ratified the New Covenant, and is the Pledge of our redemption.

Therefore, although we realise our sinfulness and imperfection, let us arise into the unseen, and join with the One Church of the Redeemed in heaven and on earth. We are come to it in the purpose of God, and by the all-sufficing work of Christ our Lord, but let us see to it that we come also in our spiritual realization, communion, and fellowship.

We are members of the Church Universal, citizens of the Heavenly City. Heirs of that precious Redemption, which has severed us from things that are seen, and made us part of that blessed throng that no man can number—"the general Assembly and Church of the First-born, which are written in heaven." Neither life, nor death, nor rite, nor church-order, can divide those who are for ever one with each other because they are one with Christ. Nothing but sin and obtuseness of soul can exclude us from living fellowship with saints of all communions and sects, denominations and ages.

PRAYER - Accept our thanks, O God, for this foretaste of the bliss of Paradise. To Thee we would pour forth our tribute of adoring love, and join with angels and the spirits of the Redeemed in worship. Unto Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb, be blessing and honour, glory and dominion, for ever. AMEN. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

Hebrews 12:22-23 Born Here!

For many years, a popular bumper sticker in Colorado bore a single word—NATIVE. It proclaimed to every new arrival, "You just moved in, but I was born here. This is my state, my heritage, and I belong."

Our nationality, citizenship, and sense of belonging are usually determined by birth. This was especially true for the Israelites in Old Testament times. They were not only the people of Israel but the people of God.

It may seem surprising, then, to read in Psalm 87 that people of rival Gentile nations will one day be treated as if they had been "born" in Zion (vv.4-5). Herbert Lockyer says of this passage: "Whether some were born in Egypt or came from Ethiopia, all [will be] equally honored as home-born sons of the city of God. The proud from Egypt, the worldly from Babylon, the wrathful from Philistia, the covetous from Tyre [will be] brought under the regenerating, transforming power of the Spirit of God." That is, they will be spiritually reborn.

Through faith in Jesus, we too are born again (John 3:1-18). We are now citizens of "the city of the living God, the heavenly

Jerusalem," and our names are "registered in heaven" (Hebrews 12:22-23). Praise God! We have been born into His family with all of the accompanying privileges! —DCM

What a blessing to be born again!

To be made new, set free from sin;

What a prospect, to live in heaven,

As God's own child, cleansed and forgiven! —Fitzhugh

Jesus was born to die, so we could be born again.

Hebrews 12:22-24 The Church Indestructible

The chief executive of a large and successful chain of stores made a striking statement about the future of his company. He said that a hundred years from now it would be either greatly changed or nonexistent.

The same can be said about every human organization. Leaders come and go, consumer desires change, manufacturing methods evolve. As a result, companies either change or they don't survive.

According to Jesus, this will never happen to His church. Some individual churches may go out of existence, but the "gates of Hades" will never prevail against the church that Jesus is building. When He referred to "My church" (Matthew 16:18), He had in mind all believers—past, present, and future. Paul called this vast group the "body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27).

The moment we trust in Jesus, we become members of His body, the church. And when Jesus used the phrase "the gates of Hades," He was referring to death, for Hades is the abode of the dead. One by one believers die and pass through those "gates," but this neither changes nor diminishes the church. They simply join those who are already victors in the "heavenly Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Praise God, the church is indestructible! —Herbert Vander Lugt

Christ is made the sure foundation,

Christ the head and cornerstone;

Chosen of the Lord and precious,

Binding all the church in one. —Neale

The Church, rooted by God, can never be uprooted by man.

Hebrews 12:23 Morning and evening : Daily readings (May 15 PM)

Recollect that there are two kinds of perfection which the Christian needs—the perfection of justification in the person of Jesus, and the perfection of sanctification wrought in him by the Holy Spirit. At present, corruption yet remains even in the breasts of the regenerate—experience soon teaches us this. Within us are still lusts and evil imaginations. But I rejoice to know that the day is coming when God shall finish the work which he has begun; and he shall present my soul, not only perfect in Christ, but perfect through the Spirit, without spot or blemish, or any such thing. Can it be true that this poor sinful heart of mine is to become holy even as God is holy? Can it be that this spirit, which often cries, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this sin and death?" shall get rid of sin and death—that I shall have no evil things to vex my ears, and no unholy thoughts to disturb my peace? Oh, happy hour! may it be hastened! When I cross the Jordan, the work of sanctification will be finished; but not till that moment shall I even claim perfection in myself. Then my spirit shall have its last baptism in the Holy Spirit's fire. Methinks I long to die to receive that last and final purification which shall usher me into heaven. Not an angel more pure than I shall be, for I shall be able to say, in a double sense, "I am clean," through Jesus' blood, and through the Spirit's work. Oh, how should we extol the power of the Holy Ghost in thus making us fit to stand before our Father in heaven! Yet let not the hope of perfection hereafter make us content with imperfection now. If it does this, our hope cannot be genuine; for a good hope is a purifying thing, even now. The work of grace must be abiding in us now or it cannot be perfected then. Let us pray to "be filled with the Spirit," that we may bring forth increasingly the fruits of righteousness. (Spurgeon, C. H.)

Hebrews 12:25-29 Earthquake Power

Have you ever been through an earthquake? Several years ago a mild quake awoke me with the swaying and trembling of the house. It was not severe and did not greatly disturb me. I am told that a really severe earthquake is a fearful experience. Much of the fear, however, may depend on the view one takes of the phenomenon.

During an earthquake that occurred many years ago, the inhabitants of a village were extremely alarmed. Yet they were also surprised at the calmness exhibited by an old woman whom they all knew. Eventually one of them asked the woman, "Aren't you afraid?" "No," she answered. "I rejoice to know that I have a God who can shake the world!" She had no fear because of her confidence in her God, who could rattle the world in His hand.

There is a future "shaking," a final universal earthquake coming. In Hebrews 12 we read, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven" (v.26). So great will this cataclysm be that Isaiah tells us "the earth will move out of her place" (Isa. 13:13). In that day we'll be safe with our Lord, and we'll be glad that He who shakes the universe is our God and our Savior. —M.R. De Haan

Great God of wonders! All Thy ways

Are matchless, Godlike, and divine;

But the fair glories of Thy grace

More Godlike and unrivaled shine. --Davies

Nothing can shake those who are secure in God's hands

Hebrews 12:24 Morning and evening : Daily readings (April 17 AM)

Reader, have you come to the blood of sprinkling? The question is not whether you have come to a knowledge of doctrine, or an observance of ceremonies, or to a certain form of experience, but have you come to the blood of Jesus? The blood of Jesus is the life of all vital godliness. If you have truly come to Jesus, we know how you came—the Holy Spirit sweetly brought you there. You came to the blood of sprinkling with no merits of your own. Guilty, lost, and helpless, you came to take that blood, and that blood alone, as your everlasting hope. You came to the cross of Christ, with a trembling and an aching heart; and oh! what a precious sound it was to you to hear the voice of the blood of Jesus! The dropping of his blood is as the music of heaven to the penitent sons of earth. We are full of sin, but the Saviour bids us lift our eyes to him, and as we gaze upon his streaming wounds, each drop of blood, as it falls, cries, "It is finished; I have made an end of sin; I have brought in everlasting righteousness." Oh! sweet language of the precious blood of Jesus! If you have come to that blood once, you will come to it constantly. Your life will be "Looking unto Jesus." Your whole conduct will be epitomized in this—"To whom coming." Not to whom I have come, but to whom I am always coming. If thou hast ever come to the blood of sprinkling, thou wilt feel thy need of coming to it every day. He who does not desire to wash in it every day, has never washed in it at all. The believer ever feels it to be his joy and privilege that there is still a fountain opened. Past experiences are doubtful food for Christians; a present coming to Christ alone can give us joy and comfort. This morning let us sprinkle our door-post fresh with blood, and then feast upon the Lamb, assured that the destroying angel must pass us by. (Spurgeon, C. H.)

Hebrews 12:25-29 He Is A Fire

On December 5, 2002, the headline announced:

Ring Of Fire Encircles Sydney

A firestorm was raging outside the Australian city. Many people feared that this bushfire would prove to be Sydney's worst in decades. Fanned by strong winds, high temperatures, and low humidity, the fire jumped across roads and rivers, consuming everything in its path.

When we think about the destructive power of that kind of inferno, we gain a better understanding of the startling words of Hebrews 12:29, "Our God is a consuming fire."

Why did the author of Hebrews use such graphic imagery to describe the Lord? In his letter he was dealing with spiritual life-and-death issues—what his readers believed and the reality of their faith. Their response would reveal whether they were investing their lives in the kingdom that will last forever, or in the one destined for destruction.

We too need to remember that this world and all we possess are only temporary. If our faith and hope are in Jesus Christ, we are part of a kingdom that cannot be destroyed (v.28). Knowing that our days on earth are numbered and that "our God is a consuming fire," let us serve Him and invest in things that are imperishable.

—Albert Lee

Our God is a consuming fire

And will destroy earth's temporal things;

He seeks to purify our lives

For service to the King of kings. —D. De Haan

Hold tightly to what is eternal and loosely to what is temporal.

Hebrews 12:25,29 Revelation And Response

I tried to tell Felix about my faith. He was polite, but he said he would rather not discuss religion. His goal in life was to be a decent person and to find as much enjoyment as he could. He had concluded that death ends everything. He said he was happy with his beliefs.

Apparently Felix refused to think seriously about God's revelation of Himself in nature (Job 38; Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:20) and within his own conscience (Rom. 1:18-21; 2:14-16).

God has revealed Himself in the created world, in our inner nature, and in the Bible. All people are responsible for what they do with God's self-disclosure. We can rationalize away His revelation in the created world. We can refuse the inner witness of our conscience. We can reject the Bible. But those responses lead to hell.

The best and most appropriate response to God's revelation is awe, acknowledgment of sin, and confession. This leads to forgiveness, inner peace, and everlasting life.

If you've rejected God's revelation of Himself, repent and turn to Him before it's too late. If you've decided to open your heart to Jesus Christ, you can be sure you'll be welcomed into His presence for all eternity. --HVL

The Lord reveals Himself to you

In many different ways;

So don't reject and turn away;

Instead, give Him your praise. --Sper

Sooner or later you'll have to face God.

Hebrews 12:27 Morning and evening : Daily readings (June 22 PM)

We have many things in our possession at the present moment which can be shaken, and it ill becomes a Christian man to set much store by them, for there is nothing stable beneath these rolling skies; change is written upon all things. Yet, we have certain "things which cannot be shaken," and I invite you this evening to think of them, that if the things which can be shaken should all be taken away, you may derive real comfort from the things that cannot be shaken, which will remain. Whatever your losses have been, or may be, you enjoy present salvation. You are standing at the foot of his cross, trusting alone in the merit of Jesus' precious blood, and no rise or fall of the markets can interfere with your salvation in him; no breaking of banks, no failures and bankruptcies can touch that. Then you are a child of God this evening. God is your Father. No change of circumstances can ever rob you of that. Although by losses brought to poverty, and stripped bare, you can say, "He is my Father still. In my Father's house are many mansions; therefore will I not be troubled." You have another permanent blessing, namely, the love of Jesus Christ. He who is God and Man loves you with all the strength of his affectionate nature—nothing can affect that. The fig tree may not blossom, and the flocks may cease from the field, it matters not to the man who can sing, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his." Our best portion and richest heritage we cannot lose. Whatever troubles come, let us play the man; let us show that we are not such little children as to be cast down by what may happen in this poor fleeting state of time. Our country is Immanuel's land, our hope is above the sky, and therefore, calm as the summer's ocean; we will see the wreck of everything earthborn, and yet rejoice in the God of our salvation. (Spurgeon, C. H.).

Hebrews 12:28 Temporary Or Eternal

The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World were wonderful indeed! These impressive creations of human genius include the Tomb of

Mausolos, built in 350 bc; the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus; the Hanging Gardens of Babylon; King Ptolemy's lighthouse near Alexandria; the 100-foot statue of Apollo called the Colossus of Rhodes; the 40-foot statue of Zeus in the city of Olympia; and the great pyramids of Egypt.

Six of these remarkable achievements have been destroyed--Ptolemy's lighthouse by an earthquake, and the other five demolished by plunderers. Only the pyramids remain to fill us with awe.

We may marvel over these Seven Wonders, but we must never forget that everything in our world is temporary. I remember looking at the skyline of New York City from the stern of a ferryboat and recalling the lines of a hymn: "These all shall perish, stone on stone; but not Thy kingdom nor Thy throne."

The writer of Hebrews said, "Since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us ... serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (12:28). These words and the words of Psalm 102 help us to keep the temporary and the eternal in perspective. —Vernon C Grounds

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day,

Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;

Change and decay in all around I see--

O Thou who changest not, abide with me! --Lyte

Hold tightly to what is eternal and loosely to what is temporal

Hebrews 12:28 Frozen Snowball

Baseball pitcher Tug McGraw had a wonderful philosophy of pitching. He called it his "frozen snowball" theory. "If I come in to pitch with the bases loaded," Tug explained, "and heavy hitter Willie Stargell is at bat, there's no reason I want to throw the ball. But eventually I have to pitch. So I remind myself that in a few billion years the earth will become a frozen snowball hurtling through space, and nobody's going to care what Willie Stargell did with the bases loaded!"

The Bible tells us the earth will someday "melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10). Yet McGraw's point is valid: We need to keep life in perspective. Most of the things we worry about have no eternal significance.

The writer of Hebrews was concerned about our perspective. Throughout the book, he keeps our eyes focused on heaven and away from earth. Unless our minds are on heaven, we will have little eternal influence on earth.

There will come a time when the earth will be shaken, and things that once seemed permanent will be gone (Hebrews 12:27). What you fear most today will be forgotten like yesterday's headlines. What really matters is what you do today that has a touch of eternity about it.—Haddon W. Robinson

O for a heart that is willing to serve,

Laboring while it is day!

Nothing is lost that is done for the Lord,

He will reward and repay. —Anon.

The one who lives for this life only will have eternity to regret it.

Hebrews 12:29 I'm Afraid Of God

Many times I have talked to people about our need to fear God. I've heard them respond something like this: "You're not really afraid of God, are you? I'd never believe in that kind of God."

Yes, I am afraid of God, and I'm not afraid to admit it. I also fear water. That doesn't mean I don't love to fish and swim. But I never want to forget the life-taking power of a river, a lake, or an ocean.

In a more personal way, I remember as a boy fearing my dad. I loved him and knew he loved me and was concerned for my good. But I respected his authority as my father, and I was afraid of the corrective measures he would take if I did wrong.

The same is true in my relationship with God. I stand in awe of Him and His holiness. And because I do, I love Him and want to be close to Him. I desire to love what He loves and hate what He hates. I want to live with the awareness that He is to be feared more than anyone. Satan and people may destroy the body, but God is "a consuming fire" who can "destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt. 10:28).

Only as we fear God do we truly love Him. And only as that love grows will it guarantee that our fear of God is the right kind of fear.
—Mart De Haan

To fear the Lord means giving Him

Our reverence, trust, and awe,

Acknowledging His sovereignty,

Submitting to His law. --Hess

Fear God and you will have nothing else to fear.

Hebrews 12:29 Living In The Fire

Just before darkness settled, the Israelites who stood on the walls of Jerusalem saw with dismay the mighty Assyrian army surrounding the city. But at dawn the enemy camp was deserted, and thousands of dead soldiers lay scattered on the ground. What awe and gratitude must have filled the hearts of godly Israelites—but the wicked were terrified!

The prophet Isaiah portrays trembling sinners asking how they can live with "the devouring fire" and "everlasting burnings" (Isaiah 33:14). These phrases do not refer to hell, but to our holy God. Those hypocrites were really asking, "Who can live with Him?" Isaiah's answer was simple: "He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly" (v.15). It wasn't enough just to participate in religious ritual; Isaiah was reminding them that to live in the presence of the consuming fire they had to obey God.

Hebrews 12:29 reminds us that "our God is a consuming fire." How is it possible, then, to have a close relationship with Him? Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23).

If we trust Jesus as our Savior and seek to please Him, we need not fear living in the fire of His holiness. —HVL —Herbert Vander Lugt

No sinner can endure God's fire,

His holiness consumes all sin;

But Jesus took our punishment—

Now we can have His peace within. —D. De Haan

God's holiness reveals what is good by consuming what is evil.