

After naming many heroes of faith in chapter 11, the writer of Hebrews now declares that these heroes form a “great cloud of witnesses” that testify to us about the value of faith in God despite the suffering we may have to endure as a result. He goes on to show us that God has a purpose in allowing such suffering in our lives even though He could protect us from it.

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1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

**“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about [surrounded] with so great a cloud of witnesses”** – The “great cloud of witnesses” refers to the heroes of faith the writer of Hebrews mentioned in the previous chapter. In a court of law, a witness gives a testimony of what they experienced (what they saw, heard, smelled, etc.) and this great cloud of witnesses testify to us about their experiences in faith. The writer wants us to be encouraged to trust God and live in faith despite the apparent evidences that appear to contradict the promises of God and any suffering we might have to endure.

**“let us lay aside every weight”** – The writer now uses the imagery of a runner running a race to describe how we should live our lives by faith. An athlete running a race would remove all excess weight that might slow him down or exhaust him prematurely. As Christians with our trust in Jesus Christ, we should remove anything from our lives that might cause our faith to waver.

**“and the sin which doth so easily beset [to easily or skillfully surround] us”** – Some commentators suggest that the writer is talking about a sin that hinders our faith like a garment that surrounds us and hinders our movement. This sin might be different for each person. Others point to the fact that the writer is writing to Jews, whose sin that so easily hinders their faith in Christ is the temptation to return to the Levitical sacrifices.

**“and let us run with patience [endurance]”** – The race set before is not a sprint and so we should be prepared to run for a long time. Laying aside all hindrances to our faith will help us stay in the race as well as trusting God for the strength and guidance we need.

**“the race [contest; struggle] that is set before [to be appointed] us”** – The Greek word for “race” is *agon* and our English word “agony” is derived from it. The word generically refers to the Greek games, although in this context the writer is referring to a race. The struggles we have to face in life’s race are unique to us, but they are the one’s that God has appointed to us. Therefore we should trust that God will assist us in this race that He has appointed for us to run. The testimony of the “great cloud of witnesses” tells us that it will be worth it in the end.

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2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

**“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith”** – We should always look to Jesus for strength and encouragement. Here, the writer is urging us to look to Jesus’ example of faith as He looked beyond His immediate circumstances to what His Father had promised Him.

**“who for the joy that was set before [appointed] him endured the cross, despising [to think little of] the shame”** – Jesus looked beyond the shame of the cross, realizing that it was nothing compared to the joy that was appointed to Him on the other side of His time of suffering. We should see the struggles in our own life the same way. **Rom. 8:18** “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” The joy appointed to Jesus was the accomplishing of His Father’s will, the glory that would be restored to Him, and joy of the many souls that would be saved because of His sacrifice on the cross.

**“and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”** – After enduring the shame of the cross, Jesus was able to assume the place of glory and honor that He had before His incarnation. **John 17:5** “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” Jesus was the example of faith that we should look to and follow.

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3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

**“For consider him that endured such contradiction [opposition] of sinners against himself”** – No man has suffered more opposition at the hands of sinful men than Jesus Christ and the writer of Hebrews wants us to consider that in comparison to what we have to suffer. Despite the opposition He had to endure, He still trusted His Father and remained faithful.

**“lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds”** – If we are considering giving up because of the persecutions we are suffering, we should remember what Jesus endured for us.

**“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin”** – Sin is the root cause of all suffering and it is always contrary to the will of God. Anyone striving to live for God is automatically striving against sin. The writer is pointing out that his readers are still alive and so they have not “resisted unto blood.” Jesus gave His life for us but the readers of this epistle have not yet had to suffer bloodshed.

5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: 6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

God could prevent His children from ever having to suffer and yet He doesn't. The writer quotes Proverbs 3:11-12 to show us that God allows suffering and problems to occur in our lives in order to correct and educate us when we need it. Sometimes God even sends problems our way in order to teach us to trust Him and not ourselves as He did with Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-10). God allows suffering in our lives in order to help us grow in our faith and to produce Christ-likeness in us. **James 1:3-4** "*Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*" As the writer tells us in the next verses, God does this because He loves us and we should not "despise" (think little of) it.

7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? 8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

A sure sign that you are a child of God is if He chastens you when you sin. The writer points out that a father will chasten all of his sons because he wants to produce proper behavior in each of them. Thus, if God never chastens you then you must not be a son and are a child of someone else (Satan). We should appreciate the fact that God chastens us because it shows that He loves us and that we are indeed His children.

9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected *us*, and we gave *them* reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they verily for a few days chastened *us* after their own pleasure; but he for *our* profit, that *we* might be partakers of his holiness.

**"Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence"** – Our natural fathers had to correct us as children and we honored them and respected their authority by obeying them.

**"shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?"** – If we submitted to the authority of our natural fathers, should we not be even more ready to submit ourselves to the authority and correction of our Heavenly Father? To rebel against the chastisement of our Heavenly Father may shorten our lives. **1 Cor. 5:5** (speaking of Christians who refuse to repent of their sins) "*To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*"

**"For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure [opinion; judgment]"** – The phrase "a few days" in this context seems to refer to our childhood, which is "a few days" compared to the rest of our lives. Our fathers chastened us as they saw fit according to their own judgment. However, at times their judgment may have been biased or flawed so that their chastening on those occasions may not have been appropriate (too harsh or too lenient). Occasionally the chastening may have been for the benefit of our fathers because we have been getting on their nerves or embarrassing them with our childish foolishness.

**"but he for our profit [help; benefit], that we might be partakers of his holiness"** – In contrast to our natural fathers, our Heavenly Father's chastening is always for our benefit, in order to help us become more like Him in holiness.

11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

**"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous [painful; sorrowful]"** – Unfortunately the stubbornness of the human heart means that pain is often the best teacher. For that reason the chastening of God often brings pain and/or sorrow. Chastening is not meant to be pleasant or else we would never learn from our mistakes. We will never learn to do better if we are always protected from the consequences of our sins. Parents are not doing their children any favors if they constantly shield them from the punishment of authority figures (teachers, employers, police, etc.) and allow them to escape the consequences of their sin. Children need to learn that sin has consequences and God is the perfect parent because His chastening teaches us this very thing.

**"nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable [relating to peace; peaceful] fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby"** – Even though God's chastening is unpleasant, we should appreciate the fruit that it produces once it is over. The writer describes it as "peaceable" (peaceful) fruit, in contrast to the pain and sorrow of the chastening. It is also described as "fruit of righteousness." After chastening, we doing righteousness because we have learned that righteousness is best. That righteousness yields peace because we no longer need to be chastened. This peace that comes from righteousness is only available to those who have been "exercised" by the chastening. Those who have not been through the chastening will have not learned the consequences of their sin and will still be engaging in it. Thus we should appreciate that God loves us enough to deal with us as sons and chasten us when we need it (v. 7). He is teaching us to be more like Him.

**Verses 12-17:** In light of God's purpose in chastening, we should endeavor to live righteous and holy lives for God so that we will not need to be chastened. The writer lists various examples of how we should shun evil and embrace righteous living.