

Living by Faith, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 10: Running with Endurance: Looking to Jesus

Hebrews 12:1-3

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson stands at a hinge in the letter to the Hebrews, and it carries serious doctrinal weight. The great roll call of faith in chapter 11 was never an end in itself. The word 'therefore' at the opening of chapter 12 turns the whole gallery of witnesses into a summons: because so many have run and finished by faith, now you run. The doctrinal stakes here gather around two truths. First, the Christian life is a race that demands endurance, which plainly implies that one can fail to endure, can grow weary, and can fall away. This passage will not allow a teaching that says perseverance is automatic or guaranteed apart from continued faith. The call to lay aside sin and run with endurance is a real call to a real people who could really quit. Second, and supremely, this passage fixes our eyes on Jesus as the founder and perfecter of faith, the one who ran the race perfectly and who now reigns, seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Give particular care to the doctrine of Christ in this lesson, and especially at Question 9. Jesus is the author or pioneer of faith, the one who opened and blazed the trail, and He is the perfecter of faith, the one who carried it to its appointed end without failure. He is not merely an example among the witnesses of chapter 11; He is the object toward whom every runner looks. The text says He is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God. That seating is reign. Christ is King now, ruling from heaven, not a monarch waiting for some future earthly throne. The kingdom was established and Christ enthroned when He was exalted (Acts 2:33-36; Ephesians 1:20-22), and He reigns until every enemy is put under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:25). Teach this confidently and joyfully. The One we look to is not only our example but our enthroned Lord.

Beyond the doctrine, this lesson is aimed straight at the weary heart. Many in any class are tired. Some are carrying weights they have grown so used to that they no longer notice them. Some are tangled in a besetting sin that trips them again and again. Some are quietly tempted to give up. The spiritual-formation aim is to help each student lay down what hinders, to recover patient endurance for the long race, and above all to learn the discipline of looking to Jesus when strength runs low. Help the class consider Christ, the One who endured such hostility, so that they may not grow weary or lose heart. The goal is not merely to grit one's teeth harder, but to lift one's eyes higher.

Question 1

Student Question: *Hebrews 12:1 says we are 'surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.' Who are these witnesses, and how does the long chapter of faith that comes just before this verse (Hebrews 11) shape the way we are meant to understand and respond to their example?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Start by reading the 'therefore' as the bridge it is. The cloud of witnesses is the company of the faithful just named in chapter 11, from Abel through the prophets and the persecuted. The writer is not introducing strangers; he is gathering everyone the class has been studying for nine lessons and saying, in effect, look at them all together, and now run.

Clarify the word 'witnesses.' The picture is of a stadium filled with those who have already finished the race, but the primary sense is that their lives bear witness to us, testifying that faith in God is well placed and that the race can be run to the end. Be careful here not to drift into the idea that the dead are watching us or that we should pray to them or seek their help. Scripture does not teach communion with the departed in that sense. Their testimony reaches us through the inspired record of what God did in and through them.

Draw out the encouragement the writer intends. These were not supermen; they were ordinary people with weaknesses, and chapter 11 does not hide their failures. Yet they trusted God and finished. Their example tells the tired believer, you are not the first to run this hard road, and by faith it can be done.

Turn the class toward response. The right response to such a crowd is not to sit in the stands admiring them, but to lay aside hindrances and run. Examples in Scripture are given to be followed, not merely studied (Hebrews 13:7). Set up the rest of the lesson by noting that the chief one we are to look to is named in the very next verse.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cloud of witnesses identified as the faithful of Hebrews 11
- The 'therefore' connecting the examples of faith to our own race
- Witnesses as those whose lives testify that faith in God is well placed
- A guard against the error of praying to or seeking communion with the departed
- The right response to godly examples: imitation, not mere admiration (Hebrews 13:7)
- Encouragement that ordinary, flawed people finished the race by faith

Discussion Prompts

- How does it change the way you run to know that a great crowd has already finished this race by faith?
- Why is it important to say their lives witness to us, rather than that they are watching us?
- What is the difference between admiring an example and actually imitating it?

Question 2

Student Question: *The writer urges us to 'lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely.' Is there a particular weight, or a sin that clings to you, that you sense is slowing you down in the race right now? What makes it so hard to set down?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Help the class see the distinction the verse makes. There are 'weights' and there is 'sin.' A weight is not necessarily sinful in itself; it is anything that hinders the race, any excess baggage that slows us down. A sin that clings closely is the besetting sin, the one that wraps around the legs and trips us repeatedly. A wise runner deals with both.

Invite honest, gentle reflection rather than public confession of specifics. The aim is for each person to identify in their own heart what is slowing them. Weights might be good things held too tightly: a career, a hobby, an entanglement, an anxiety, a relationship, a screen. The besetting sin is often the familiar one we have made peace with.

Address why these things are so hard to lay down. We grow comfortable with our weights; we rationalize them; we fear life without them. The besetting sin clings because we have fed it and because the enemy knows exactly where we are weak. Naming a thing honestly is the first step toward laying it aside.

Point to hope and to grace. We do not lay these aside by sheer willpower alone, but as those looking to Jesus (the very next verse). Real change comes as we keep our eyes on Him and walk in step with His Spirit. Encourage the class that a weight named today can be a weight surrendered this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between a weight (a hindrance) and a clinging, besetting sin
- Good things that become weights when held too tightly
- Honest self-examination about what is slowing the race (2 Corinthians 13:5)
- Why besetting sins cling: comfort, rationalization, and the enemy's strategy
- Laying aside hindrances as we look to Jesus, not by willpower alone
- Naming a hindrance honestly as the first step toward surrendering it

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between a weight and a sin, and why deal with both?
- What makes a besetting sin so hard to lay down once we have grown used to it?
- How does looking to Jesus help us lay aside what willpower alone cannot?

Question 3

Student Question: *The Christian life is pictured as a race to be run 'with endurance,' not a sprint to be finished quickly. What does this image teach us about the nature of following Christ over a lifetime, and what does it imply about the danger of growing weary and quitting (compare Hebrews 10:36; Galatians 6:9)?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Draw out the kind of race in view. The Greek word behind 'race' is one from which we get 'agony,' and the call is to endurance, the long obedience of a distance runner, not the brief burst of a sprinter. Following Christ is a lifetime, not a moment. This guards the class against the notion that the Christian life is a single decision rather than a sustained walk.

Bring in Hebrews 10:36 plainly: 'you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.' Endurance is necessary, not optional. The promise is received by those who keep running. This is one of the doctrinal anchors of the lesson.

Address the danger the question raises, and do so faithfully. The very command to endure assumes that one can fail to endure, can grow weary, can give up and fall away. Scripture warns repeatedly against drifting, hardening, and turning back (Hebrews 2:1; 3:12; 6:11-12). This passage does not support the idea that a believer is guaranteed to persevere no matter what; it summons believers to persevere. Teach this clearly but pastorally, holding together both the seriousness of the warning and the sufficiency of God's grace for all who keep looking to Christ.

Encourage with Galatians 6:9: we will reap if we do not give up. The weariness is real, but so is the harvest. The remedy for weariness is coming in verses 2 and 3, in considering Jesus. Set that up here.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Christian life as a long-distance race requiring endurance, not a sprint
- Following Christ as a sustained walk, not a single past decision
- Endurance as necessary to receive the promise (Hebrews 10:36)
- The real possibility of growing weary, giving up, and falling away (Hebrews 3:12)
- The biblical warnings against drifting and turning back
- The certain harvest for those who do not give up (Galatians 6:9)

Discussion Prompts

- What does the image of a long race teach us that the image of a single decision cannot?
- Why does the command to endure imply that one can fail to endure?
- What keeps a runner going when the race is longer and harder than expected?

Question 4

Student Question: *Think honestly about your own pace. Are you running the race with patient endurance, or have you slowed to a walk, or even stopped? What is one thing that has helped you keep going when you wanted to give up?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question follows naturally from the doctrine of endurance. Create a climate of honesty and grace. Most believers go through seasons of slowing down, and naming it without shame is healthier than pretending. The goal is not guilt but honest assessment and renewed resolve.

Help the class diagnose the causes of a slowed pace. Sometimes it is unconfessed sin, sometimes accumulated weights, sometimes weariness or discouragement, sometimes the slow drift of neglected habits. Different causes call for different remedies, and naming the cause is half the cure.

Then turn to what has actually helped. Invite students to share concrete means of grace that have kept them running: Scripture, prayer, the Lord's Supper, the assembling of the church, the encouragement of a brother or sister, remembering God's past faithfulness. This both encourages the discouraged and points everyone back to the ordinary disciplines God uses to sustain endurance.

Close with hope. A runner who has slowed to a walk has not lost the race; the call of this passage is simply to lift the eyes and run again. No matter the pace, the next step can be taken looking to Jesus.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest self-assessment of one's spiritual pace
- Common causes of a slowed pace: sin, weights, weariness, neglected habits
- The ordinary means of grace that sustain endurance: word, prayer, the Lord's Supper, the assembly
- The encouragement of fellow believers in keeping us running (Hebrews 10:24-25)
- Hope for the believer who has slowed but not stopped
- Renewed resolve rather than guilt as the aim of self-examination

Discussion Prompts

- How would you honestly describe your pace in the race right now?
- What tends to slow you down, and what tends to renew your strength?
- What is one practice that has helped you keep going when you wanted to quit?

Question 5

Student Question: *The verse tells us to run 'the race that is set before us.' What does it mean that God has marked out a particular course for each of us, and how does this guard us against comparing our race to someone else's (compare 1 Corinthians 9:24-27)?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Focus on the phrase 'set before us.' The course is appointed, laid out by God for each runner. We do not choose the terrain, the length, or the obstacles; we are called to run faithfully the course God has marked for us. This brings both comfort and responsibility: comfort that our path is known to God, responsibility that we must actually run it.

Use this to confront the trap of comparison. Because each course differs, comparing our race to another's is both foolish and faith-eroding. Some run a course marked by suffering, some by obscurity, some by visible fruit, some by long hidden faithfulness. The question is never whether our race looks like another's, but whether we are running our own with endurance.

Bring in 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, where Paul speaks of running to win, exercising self-control, disciplining his body. Endurance is not passive drifting; it is purposeful, disciplined running with the prize in view. The runner trains, denies himself, and keeps his eyes on the goal.

Apply it pastorally. Comparison breeds either pride or despair, and both pull our eyes off the track. The remedy is to accept the course God has set, run it with all our heart, and leave the comparing to Him who alone sees every runner's road.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The race as a course appointed by God for each believer
- Comfort and responsibility in running the course set before us
- The trap of comparison, breeding pride or despair
- Faithfulness measured by running our own race, not matching another's
- Endurance as disciplined, purposeful running (1 Corinthians 9:24–27)
- Leaving the judging and comparing of races to God

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God has set a particular race before you?
- How does comparison with others pull our eyes off our own track?
- What kind of discipline and self-control does running to win require?

Question 6

Student Question: *Where are you tempted to compare your race to another believer's, either in pride or in discouragement? How might fixing your eyes on Jesus instead free you from that comparison?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This personal question presses the previous one into the heart. Comparison is nearly universal and quietly corrosive. Help the class see its two faces: pride when we judge ourselves ahead of others, and discouragement when we judge ourselves behind. Both are forms of looking sideways instead of upward.

Invite honesty about where comparison bites. It may be over visible ministry, family, finances, gifts, reputation, or the appearance of others' spiritual lives. Social media has multiplied the temptation by parading edited highlight reels of other people's races before us constantly.

Show how looking to Jesus dissolves comparison. When our eyes are fixed on Christ, the standard is no longer the runner beside us but the Lord ahead of us. Before Him, pride has nothing to boast in and discouragement finds a Savior who runs with us. The cure for sideways glances is a steady upward gaze.

Close by turning comparison into freedom. The believer who looks to Jesus is freed to rejoice in others' progress rather than envy it, and freed to run their own course without the crushing weight of measuring up. That freedom is part of what it means to run unhindered.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The two faces of comparison: pride and discouragement
- Comparison as looking sideways rather than upward
- Modern pressures, including social media, that multiply comparison
- Christ as the true standard that dissolves both pride and despair
- Freedom to rejoice in others' progress rather than envy it
- Looking to Jesus as the cure for the sideways glance

Discussion Prompts

- When are you most tempted to compare your race to someone else's?
- Does your comparison usually take the form of pride or of discouragement?
- How would fixing your eyes on Jesus change the way you see other runners?

Question 7

Student Question: *Verse 2 says Jesus endured the cross 'for the joy that was set before him, despising the shame.' What was the joy set before Christ, and how can the joy ahead of us give us strength to endure hardship and shame for His name now (compare Hebrews 11:24-26)?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the astonishing phrase 'for the joy that was set before him.' Just as a course was set before us, a joy was set before Christ. He endured the cross with His eyes fixed on what lay beyond it. The joy included the glory of accomplishing the Father's will, the redemption of a people for Himself, and His own exaltation to the Father's right hand. He looked through the cross to the joy on the other side.

Note the word 'despising the shame.' Crucifixion was the most shameful death the ancient world could devise, and Jesus bore that shame deliberately. He did not deny that it was

shameful; He counted it as nothing compared to the joy and the worth of what He was accomplishing. The shame was real, but it did not have the final word.

Connect this to the believer's endurance and to Moses in Hebrews 11:24–26, who chose mistreatment with God's people over the fleeting pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking to the reward. The same logic carries the Christian: present hardship and shame are bearable when we keep the coming joy in view.

Apply it to the class. Following Christ may bring ridicule, loss, or the disapproval of others. The remedy for fear of shame is not to pretend the shame is unreal, but to weigh it against the joy and reward set before us, as both our Lord and Moses did. We endure the cross of today by looking to the joy of tomorrow.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The joy set before Christ: the Father's will accomplished, a people redeemed, His own exaltation
- Despising the shame: counting real shame as nothing before greater joy
- Enduring present hardship by keeping the coming joy and reward in view
- Moses choosing reproach for Christ over Egypt's treasures by looking to the reward (Hebrews 11:24–26)
- The fear of shame answered not by denial but by weighing it against joy
- Christ's pattern as the model for bearing reproach for His name

Discussion Prompts

- What was the joy set before Jesus as He endured the cross?
- How does keeping a future joy in view change the way we bear present hardship?
- Where might following Christ cost you the approval of others, and how does His example help?

Question 8

Student Question: *Is there a place in your life where following Christ has cost you something, or might cost you the approval and comfort of others? How does the example of Jesus, who endured the shame for the joy beyond it, speak to that cost?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-reflective question brings the cost of discipleship home. Help the class name real costs honestly. For some it is strained relationships, lost opportunities, or being thought odd or narrow. For others it is the daily, quiet cost of saying no to what everyone else says yes to. Some in the class may face sharper costs than others.

Validate that the cost is real. Jesus never pretended the cross was painless or the shame imaginary. Following Him genuinely costs something, and it is no mark of weak faith to feel that cost. The question is what we do with it.

Point to the pattern of Jesus. He endured by looking past the cost to the joy beyond. The believer who counts the cost only, without counting the joy, will be crushed by it. The believer who weighs the cost against the joy set before us can endure with hope. The reproach is for a moment; the joy is forever.

Encourage concrete faithfulness. Ask each student to consider one specific area where they may be shrinking back from the cost, and to bring it under the example of Christ. Pray for courage to bear small shame now for the sake of great joy then.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest reckoning with the real costs of following Christ
- The cost as a normal part of discipleship, not a sign of weak faith
- The danger of counting the cost without counting the joy
- Christ's example of enduring shame for the joy beyond it
- Courage to bear present reproach for the sake of future joy
- Bringing a specific area of shrinking back under the example of Christ

Discussion Prompts

- Where has following Christ already cost you something?
- Where might it cost you the approval or comfort of others going forward?
- How does Jesus enduring shame for the joy ahead speak to that cost?

Question 9

Student Question: *Hebrews 12:2 calls Jesus 'the founder and perfecter of our faith,' and says that 'for the joy that was set before him' He 'endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.'* What does it mean that Jesus is both the author and the perfecter of our faith, how is His endurance the supreme example for us, and what is the significance of the truth that He is now seated and reigning at God's right hand?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal summit of the lesson, so slow down and give it the room it deserves. Everything in the passage has been building to one command: looking to Jesus. He is named as 'the founder and perfecter of our faith.' The word translated 'founder' (also rendered author, pioneer, or originator) pictures one who goes first and opens the way, a trailblazer who leads others through. Jesus did not merely point to the path of faith; He ran it ahead of us and opened it for us. The word 'perfecter' means He carried faith all the way to its appointed completion,

running the race flawlessly to the very end. He is the beginning and the goal of the life of faith, the one who started it and the one who finished it perfectly.

Show how this sets Jesus apart from the cloud of witnesses in chapter 11. They are examples; He is the example, and far more. Every one of them ran by faith, but each of them stumbled somewhere, and none of them perfected the race. Jesus alone ran without sin, endured without wavering, and finished without failure. So while we are encouraged by the witnesses, we look to Jesus. He is not merely one more runner in the stands; He is the One at the front of the race and now upon the throne.

Then dwell on His endurance as our supreme example. The very next verse (12:3) tells us to consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that we may not grow weary or fainthearted. When our strength fails, the remedy is to consider Christ: His patience under hostility, His steadiness under the weight of the cross, His refusal to turn back. He endured more than we will ever be asked to endure, and He did it for us. To look to Him is to draw strength to keep running.

Now handle the seated and reigning Christ with care, for it is doctrinally vital. The text says He 'is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.' A seated King is a reigning King. Christ did not merely die and rise; He ascended and was enthroned. On the day of Pentecost Peter proclaimed that God exalted Jesus to His right hand and made Him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:33–36), and Paul writes that God seated Him at His right hand far above all rule and authority and put all things under His feet (Ephesians 1:20–22). Christ reigns now. He is King now. The kingdom is not a future earthly political reign yet to be set up; it was established when Christ was exalted, and He reigns from heaven until the last enemy is destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:25). Guard the class gently but clearly against any teaching that postpones Christ's reign to a coming thousand-year earthly throne. The throne is occupied. The King is seated. Our Lord reigns.

Let the doctrine fuel the heart, which is the writer's whole purpose. The One we look to is not a distant figure or a defeated martyr; He is the trailblazer who opened the way, the perfecter who finished the course, and the reigning Lord who sits upon the throne of the universe. To fix our eyes on a King who has already won is the deepest secret of endurance. We run toward a finish line where our victorious Lord already stands, and He is bringing many sons and daughters to glory (Hebrews 2:10). This is why the weary do not have to quit: our eyes are on the enthroned Christ.

Be ready also to connect His lordship to the gospel response, as the heritage of sound teaching does. Because Jesus is Lord and Christ, the proper response to Him is faith that obeys: believing He is the Christ, the Son of God, repenting, confessing Him, and being baptized into Him, then living faithfully under His reign (Acts 2:36–38; Romans 6:3–4). The race of endurance is run by those who are already in Christ and who keep looking to their reigning King.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as the founder, author, and pioneer of faith, who opened and blazed the way
- Jesus as the perfecter of faith, who ran the race flawlessly to its appointed end
- Christ set apart from the witnesses of chapter 11 as the one we look to, not merely admire
- The endurance of Christ as the supreme example and source of strength for the weary (Hebrews 12:3)
- The seated Christ as the reigning Christ, exalted to the right hand of God (Acts 2:33–36; Ephesians 1:20–22)
- Christ reigning now, with the kingdom already established, against any future earthly thousand-year reign (1 Corinthians 15:25)
- Looking to the enthroned, victorious King as the deepest secret of endurance

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Jesus is both the author and the perfecter of our faith?
- How does Christ's own endurance give strength to a weary believer?
- What is the significance of Jesus being seated and reigning at God's right hand right now?

Question 10

Student Question: *Looking back over Hebrews 12:1–3 as a whole, name one concrete way you sense the Lord forming endurance in you right now. What is one weight you will lay aside, or one habit of looking to Jesus you will take up, so that you do not grow weary or fainthearted?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the whole passage and turns it toward formation. Remind the class of the movement of the text: surrounded by witnesses, we lay aside weights and sin, we run with endurance the race set before us, and above all we look to Jesus, our reigning Lord, considering Him so that we do not lose heart. Now ask each student to bring it down to one concrete thing.

Press for specificity over generality. Endurance is formed in particulars. The concrete step might be laying aside a named weight, breaking with a besetting sin, restoring a neglected discipline, or taking up a deliberate habit of looking to Jesus, such as daily time in the Gospels, prayer when weary, or considering Christ before the day's pressures begin.

Frame this as spiritual formation, not mere self-improvement. The Lord Himself is forming endurance in His people, often through the very hardships that make us weary. Help students see their current trials not only as obstacles but as the very track on which God is shaping Christlike endurance in them (James 1:2–4; Romans 5:3–4).

Close in hope and prayer. The promise of the passage is that those who consider Jesus will not grow weary or fainthearted. Pray over the specific steps named, asking the reigning Lord to give strength for the race, and lift the whole class's eyes to the One who has already finished and now sits upon the throne.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal application of the call to lay aside weights and run with endurance
- Concrete, specific steps rather than vague resolutions
- Taking up the habit of looking to Jesus as the means of endurance
- Trials as the track on which God forms Christlike endurance (James 1:2–4; Romans 5:3–4)
- Spiritual formation as God’s work in us, not merely self-improvement
- The promise that those who consider Jesus will not grow weary or lose heart

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you sense the Lord forming endurance in you right now?
- What is one weight you will lay aside this week?
- What habit of looking to Jesus will you take up so you do not grow weary?