

**Text:** Hebrews 12:1-2

**Title:** Living with Enduring Faith

**Truth:** If you want to have enduring faith, look to two sources of help.

**Date/Location:** Sunday October 16, 2011 at FBC

## Introduction

The first ten chapters of Hebrews build the case concerning Christ's once-for-all sacrifice that eliminates the need for any other expiatory sacrifices for sin. This is the pinnacle of the argument of the book, concluded at Hebrews 10:18. The author next moves to exhortations based on this great doctrine, including the need to hold fast and avoid apostasy.

Chapter 11 defines Biblical faith and identifies a multiplicity of examples in the lives of the OT saints. The point of the chapter is evident from verses 2 and 39 which teach us that the saints obtained a good testimony by their faith. In other words, God had given them a good report card. God, if called to the witness stand, would give an A rating to their faith and speak well of them.

We can receive the same word of commendation and favor from the one true and living God by living in faith. And that is what we are morally obligated to do. The next verses tell us why we should do so, and what our focus should be in the life of faith. We can learn how to have enduring faith by considering the OT saints, and by looking to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

## I. Live Like the Old Testament Believers – by Faith, v. 1

*We also* draws us into the middle of the fray as far as “faith in action” from chapter 11. *Therefore* and *since* give the conclusion and application of chapter 11, namely that we should live in faith like the OT saints did. In fact, we have something better than they had, which gives us even more incentive to live with full trust in God.

### 1. The Cloud of Witnesses

- A. The idea of witnesses has *nothing* to do with the OT saints being spectators in some heavenly grandstands, cheering us on to victory in our run on the track of life. The witnesses we are talking about are not witnesses who are seeing us.

You've heard it before, maybe even said it: “Grandpa is looking down from heaven and smiling at us” as if he is one of those “witnesses.” Nowhere in the Bible does it suggest that happens.

- B. OT believers were witnesses in the manner of 11:2 and 11:39, which is the martyr kind of witness. They are like the Acts 1:8 witness. They were looking to God. They were witnesses testifying of their faith and the grace of God in salvation in their lives. If called to the witness stand, they would testify their certainty and conviction about God.
- C. These witnesses form a metaphorical *cloud*. There are so many examples that you can't help but notice them like a heavy fog.
- D. We do not live in faith because they are watching us and we want their approval. Rather, we do so because God is watching us and we want Him to give good report about us. We run with endurance because they have testified to us that biblical faith is the real deal; so we should continue in it as well.

They were witnesses of their faith in God; God was testifying about them; and now we are supposed to be watching them! We are actually considering them, instead of them looking at us.

## 2. The Exhortation to Run

“Let us” is basically a command – to run and put off encumbrances.

- A. Running is an athletic metaphor for the Christian life. Acts 20:24, 1 Cor. 9:24, and 2 Timothy 4:7 all use the race metaphor. The idea is that we who are Christians are supposed to live with the kind of effort that will produce a victory in the long run; not to be lazy and lag behind and make all kinds of excuses.

There is no idea that any real Christian is sitting on the sidelines of the race. All are to be wholehearted participants in the race. The assumption is that we are “all in,” and that we need endurance.

- B. Removing Weights. We must lay aside every weight. This means to remove anything that is bulky or a hindrance or impediment to living the Christian life.

Weights are things that slow down progress when you are trying to run. For the runner, this would include heavy boots, ankle and wrist weights, excess or heavy clothing, obesity, and so forth. Weights are called out separately from sin, so I take it that weights can be sins, but they can also be things that are not outright wickedness. For the Christian, weights would include things we do that, in some amount may be fine, but in too high of an amount are bad. Perhaps they are hobbies. Perhaps they are anxieties or goals or dreams. Perhaps they are past baggage that

we are using as an excuse. Maybe it is family ties that you don't want to "harm" by being too open about your faith. Maybe it is tradition or ties to an old faith (Judaism for the Jewish audience of Hebrews), or ties to old friends and so forth.

C. Removing Sin. We must lay aside the sin which so easily ensnares us.

- i. This refers to any and all sin, not just some particular sin. I have sin. You have sin. Whatever sins are ensnaring us, we need to work to rid ourselves of them. We need to have *less* sin.
- ii. We need to have more sensitivity to sin. Think about what God is displeased with in your life. (By the way, sin is a major topic in the Bible. It is mentioned in over one thousand verses. How you can be in a Christian church and not talk much about sin is beyond me!)
- iii. Whether that sin is lust or unbelief or whatever, it is a *threat* to our Christian life and our hope to please God.
- iv. These sins "easily" ensnare us. They don't have to make any effort to do it, nor do we. It can just creep up on us and snare us from serving God and living a life of faith for Him most effectively. Chapter 11 showed us a number of examples of being ensnared. Look at David and Samson and Jephthah and Gideon. Note the times they lacked in faith and judgment and fell into sin.

D. Running with endurance is another way of saying the message of the book of Hebrews—that we must have a persevering faith in Jesus in order to be saved. The kind of faith that saves—the persevering kind—also runs with endurance in the race of the Christian life. The idea is to keep living the Christian life with great trust in God, persevering in steadfastness even in the face of difficulty.

E. The race is set before us by God. It is not "fate" or "the way things were meant to be" in some generic sense. God appoints our steps. The basic character of the race is the same for all believers. That is, it is living with certainty and conviction about God and what He has revealed in His Word.

## II. Focus on the Lord Jesus Christ, v. 2

The focus of the race and the end point is Jesus. He is the one who is the originator and perfecter or finisher of our faith. There is a cloud of witnesses, but He is the Sun shining brightly in the center of that cloud.

1. Author of Faith. This means originator or founder. It also has somewhat the idea of a forerunner or pioneer in that He, like the OT saints, had to endure through severe trials and thus became the ultimate example of doing so. We can look to Him as one who knows our struggle.
2. Finisher of Faith. This means that Jesus brings the faith to its full measure. There is no one who can make subsequent improvements on what He has done. He has provided the objective basis for our personal faith.
3. The joy set before Him refers to the joyful outcome of his voluntary redemptive work, glory for God and a company of redeemed people forever saved and in the presence of God sharing in Christ's glory. At the prospect of that, He went about to accomplish His saving work.
4. He endured the cross. It is clear that the cross was something that had to be endured. It was terrible. We are called to have an enduring faith. He endured as well. Moses endured (11:27). The OT saints endured.
5. Jesus despised the shame. "Despising the shame" means that he disregarded the ignominy associated with the death of a common criminal. It does not mean he hated the idea of going through with the atonement. Like Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than Egypt, so also Christ himself esteemed the joy of the outcome of His crosswork greater than the shame He had to endure.
6. He has sat down – we already looked at the sitting idea in terms of his finishing the work of salvation, compared to the priests who "stand" daily ministering at the temple. See Hebrews 1:3 and 10:11-12.

## Conclusion

The endurance that is called for in our race is in the context of hostility and persecution (12:3), sin (12:1, 4), and even the chastening hand of the Lord's discipline (12:5-7).

If everything was good, there would hardly be a need to "endure" through the pleasantness and enjoyment! Look at Jesus' example. Look at the OT believers. That's how to have a good testimony!

By the way, "look and live" is true. But to "keeping looking" is also necessary. Stay focused upon Christ.

MAP