Hebrews 12:1-11 Inductive Bible Study Notes and Discussion Questions

Outline: Hebrews 12:1-11

I. Run the race with endurance (1-3)

II. God disciplines His sons (4-11)

I. Verses 1-3

Discussion Questions

What is the “therefore” there for?

Explain the phrase “we have so great a cloud of witnesses.” Who are they? Are they watching us?

What is the difference between an encumbrance and sin? What kinds of things could be encumbrances, but perhaps not sin?

What impression do you have of the word “entangle?”

How does sin slow us down?

What is the race that we are in? What does it mean that this race is “set before us?”

What kind of race needs endurance?

How can we fix our eyes on Jesus?

What does it mean that He is the “author” of our faith? How about “perfector?”

What do you think was the joy that was set before Him?

How does considering the persecution Jesus faced help us not to grow weary?

Cross-References

On Endurance:

Romans 5:3-4

Colossians 1:11

Romans 12:12

James 5:11

Romans 15:5
Teaching Points

Therefore – Hebrews 12:1-2 are very popular verses. They are often memorized. When we memorize individual verses, one result is that we may often overlook the context. In this passage the context of what we have studied in Hebrews 11 is very important. Hebrews 11 lays the foundation. The author encourages his audience with examples of faithful believers. Then he challenges them to take to heart the good lessons learned from the OT saints and push forward in their own walk with the Lord.

So great a cloud of witnesses – All the saints in Hebrews 11 have passed out of this world. They leave behind their legacy of faith and God’s grace. They may or may not actively “witness” us from heaven, but this is not the main point. The main point is that their good examples should spur us on. Their lives demonstrated that it was not impossible to face the trials and adversities in this world and conquer them by faith. Hebrews 11 showed us that they were not “super-believers” in that they never sin, but that they were faithful believers who chose to have faith in God even when it wasn’t easy. Imagine a baseball player playing in Fenway Park. He is a rookie getting ready to play his first game. His coach reminds him of all the baseball greats of the past who have stood in that same spot beside home plate getting ready to swing for the fences. This inspires that rookie baseball player to do his absolute best to try to follow in the footsteps of the baseball heroes of the past. This is something like what I think the author is doing. He is inspiring believers and encouraging them that it is in fact possible to live faithful lives even in the midst of a crooked and dark generation.

Lay aside every encumbrance – An encumbrance is not necessarily a sin. In a race an encumbrance is something that slows an athlete down. As a child, I listened to Patch the Pirate audio stories. These were stories which featured Christian songs combined with stories designed to teach Biblical character quality. One of these stories was about a marathon race. One of the runners in the marathon took a large backpack to the starting line. Inside he had a CD player in case he got board. He had a portable fan to cool himself off with. He had an extra set of clothes to change into when his first set got sweaty. If the story was modern he of course would have a digital camera, an Ipad, and a smart phone so that he could keep in touch with his friends during the race. Are any of these bad things? Not necessarily. In the right situation, they could be considered good things. But they are unnecessary. They slow him down and encumber him. We must remember that we too are in a race. Our life is short. It is meaningless, but we have a purpose and a goal. We should always keep our goal before us. Do not allow “good” things to keep you from the best thing. Do not allow anything to distract you from what you know God wants you to do. It is very easy to fill our schedules with things that are not the most productive. Sometimes we need to evaluate and consider what activities we may need to cut out so that we can be the most productive. We should also be willing to say “no” at times if people ask us to do things that may encumber us (for example I will often say “no” to people who ask me to tutor them in English.)

And the sin which so easily entangles us – This aspect is easy to understand. Sin is sneaky. It is so easy to begin tolerating it. Sin builds up a wall in between us and God and keeps us from being effective in our service for Him. Be quick to recognize sin and repent of it.

Let us run with endurance – The Christian life is not a sprint, but a marathon. Each of the saints in Hebrews 11 faced many challenges, trials, and temptations. Sometimes they stumbled along the way, but they got back up again and finally they finished the race. Unfortunately there are many professing believers who fall away. It is rare to see believers serve God faithfully over the whole course of their life. Stats tell us that most Christian workers (pastors or missionaries) leave the ministry at some point (that doesn’t necessarily mean they don’t finish the Christian race, but it is a reminder that it is hard to
keep on keeping on.) How can we get more endurance? How can we face trials triumphantly?

Fixing our eyes on Jesus – This verse has the answer. We should not be like Peter who took his eyes of Jesus when walking on the water and saw the crashing waves around him. Then his faith faltered and he began to sink. The same thing will happen to us if we begin to focus on the circumstances and the world around us instead of on Jesus. In what practical ways can we fix our eyes on Jesus everyday?

Jesus is our example – He perfects our faith. But before we were even born into this world, He already lived out the perfect example of endurance. During his whole ministry He was doubted, scoffed, mocked, challenged, and persecuted. Finally he was tried and sentenced to death, the most shameful, humiliating, and painful death imaginable. He endured all of this. Why? For the joy set before him. He did it because of the reward/result at the end of the tunnel. What is that referring to? This passage does not say, but I believe it was for His bride. You might hear a groom say he would do whatever it takes to get married to his bride. Jacob was like this. He was willing to work 14 years for Rachel. The church is the bride of Christ. Jesus’ death redeemed us to Himself. Our salvation was worthy enough that Jesus would face every indignation and suffering to His task through until He achieved our salvation. After He accomplished it, He sat down at the right hand of God. What an example!

**Application** – Verse 3. We should consider this example. We should think about it and meditate on it. What should we do because of Jesus’ example? We should not grow weary or lose heart. We should persevere. Is there anything you know God is calling you to do, but perhaps you are growing weary or losing heart about it? In light of this passage, what should you do?

II. Verses 4-11

**Discussion Questions**

What does verse 4 mean?

Why does God discipline His sons? What is the purpose? What does this teach us about the nature of discipline?

In what ways might God discipline us? If we suffer trials or hardships, does that mean we are being disciplined? How can discern whether a specific circumstance is discipline or not?

Can you think of any people in the Bible who experienced discipline from the Lord?

What does 7b imply about the father/son relationship?

How should we respond to discipline?

Since fathers discipline according to what they think is “best,” how can a father have true discernment about this issue?

What applications does this passage have for parents? How about for children? How about for believers?

**Cross-References**
On Discipline:

Proverbs 12:1 – Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge.

Proverbs 6:23 – The reproofs of discipline are the way of life.

Proverbs 13:1 – A wise son hears his fathers’ instruction.

On persecution:

2 Timothy 3:12

Philippians 1:29

Romans 8:18

Jeremiah 29:11-14 – The goal of discipline.

**Teaching Points**

Verse 4 – None of those reading Hebrews 12 had yet given their lives (been martyred) for their belief. They had not paid the ultimate price or been tested with the ultimate test yet. If the saints in Hebrews 11 could endure to the end, some to the point of giving their lives for their faith, we should too.

Verses 5-6 – Some of his readers had forgotten about God’s discipline. Perhaps they were surprised to face the consequences of sin. Maybe they had been taught that belief in God guaranteed a life of health, wealth, and happiness. Many believers today have forgotten or ignored this as well. Perhaps they go to a church that focuses on God’s love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness. At the very beginning of his teaching on discipline, however, the author first reminds us that the motivation of discipline is love. Teaching about God’s discipline is not incompatible with teaching about God’s love. Rather it shows us another aspect of God’s love and the depth of His love. Perhaps the most important exhortation for us in these verses is “do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord.” We should not cast it aside. The book of Proverbs warns us that fools don’t listen to instruction or accept reproof. The wise person will take to heart discipline from the Lord and change their behavior. At the same time it tells us not to faint when we face it. We shouldn’t collapse under it or give up. We shouldn’t be surprised when we do face discipline. Instead of fainting (ie: I can’t bear it! I can’t take it anymore!), we should take it as a reminder that we are His son and correct the issue that needs dealing with.

The trials we face may be discipline from God – It seems that verse 7 is indicating that the suffering these believers were facing was discipline from God. Discipline could have two meanings. One is “punishment for the purpose of correction” against one who has sinned. The other is like training. (Ie: He is very disciplined. He gets up every morning at 5:00 to go swimming.) Parents may discipline their children in both aspects. So these sufferings may have been as a direct result of their sin, or perhaps they fall into the more general category of trials which God used to train them to endure and to strengthen their faith.

What son is there whom his father does not discipline? – The main thrust of this passage is not teaching parents to discipline their children. However, this is a secondary application of this passage. This phrase implies that all parents SHOULD do this. At that time in history, probably most of them did. The
implication is clear. See Ephesians 6:4. If parents love their children they must discipline them. Why is it loving TO discipline when the world these days say that this is unloving? One reason for not disciplining is that it is not convenient. Or the parent does not enjoy it. It pains the parent emotionally. Basically it is easier not to. Love is willing to do what is necessary, no matter how difficult, and inconvenient, for the good of others.

Verse 8 – This verse tells us that if we are never disciplined by God then we don’t belong to Him.

Verse 9a – This verse implies that children will respect parents who faithfully discipline them. The world is afraid that disciplining children will hurt the parents’ relationship with them, that it will create a wall of resentment. But this is not true. Kids will have a sense of security when they know the boundaries and these boundaries are consistently enforced. They will see their parents’ love through the way that they discipline even when in their flesh they don’t want to. I can say from personal experience that I am glad my parents’ disciplined it and it never scarred my relationship with them in the slightest.

Verse 9b – This phrase shows us how we should apply this passage. We must subject ourselves to God. That means that we must accept correction from Him, and submit ourselves to His authority from our hearts. This whole passage shows us clearly one aspect of our relationship with God. Yes, Jesus called His disciples friends. Yes, God answers our prayers. But He is not a powerful Santa Clause in the sky. He is not our chum. He is our authority. We are to submit ourselves to Him and respect Him from the heart.

Verses 10-11 – These verses tell us the purpose of discipline. God’s discipline is not punitive. The goal is not to shame us (like the father who screams at his child’s face or the mother who hangs a sign “I am a thief, do not believe me because I stole” sign from her kids’ neck and then tells him to stand on the street corner). The goal is not to hurt us. The goal is not to seek revenge. The goal is not to be an outlet for anger (like the father who angrily beats his child and then “feels better” after his anger is released onto his child). The goal is correction. This point cannot be overstated. For parents that means that discipline must be combined with clear teaching and aimed at the heart, not the external behavior. For us, this teaching is comforting. It reminds us that God doesn’t discipline us because it feels good or He enjoys it. It is always for our good, so that we will become more and more holy.

Discuss verse 11 – Experiencing or giving discipline is not fun. It’s tough and sad. But it bears fruit. It corrects. It accomplishes its purpose as it changes people’s hearts and lives. Notice the word “trained”. This a continuous process not a “one and done.”

Application – What applications can we make from this? In what ways does God discipline us? How should parents apply this? What should we do when we face sufferings or trials that might be discipline from God?