

WitnessKit 3

God and Religions

Integrating the Worldviews of the Old and New Testaments,
Guided by the Book

Letter to the Hebrews

Class 25

Hebrews Chapter 12— Reasons to
Persevere in Faith

A verse to read together:

Hebrews 2:18

“For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”

Our last lesson revealed a great cloud of witnesses to faith.

Faith is...

Substance: REAL
Means of obtaining good testimony
Choice of belief regarding origins
Means of obtaining righteousness
The way to please God
The way to escape condemnation
The means of eternal life and purpose

The source of strength and endurance

The power to wait for God's promises.

Means of enduring difficulties successfully and dying well.

The way to experience God's power on earth—even in apparent defeat.

Faith is Important.



Faith is the key to receiving salvation as a free gift.

Faith is the key to receiving power to accomplish God's good purposes in this life.

The example of the cloud of witness from the Hebrew Scriptures should encourage us to persevere in faith.

We should persevere in faith—even when persecuted—because of

Finding Power to Endure

1. The power of good examples.
2. The benefits of God's correction in our lives.
3. The commands to persevere.
4. The power of a bad example.
5. The power of the New Covenant
6. The same powerful God as the Old Covenant's.
7. The eternity we face.

Hebrews Chapter 12: The power of good examples.

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge cloud of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. **2** We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now He is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. (NLT)

Hebrews Chapter 12: The power of good examples.

How do we run the race with endurance?

First we must set aside every weight, such as persecution, or the cares and busyness of life, and every sin that so easily trips us.

Then we must get moving and stay moving.

While we are in motion, we look toward Jesus and the way He managed to deal with the pressure as He was preparing for the cross.

How Did Jesus Face the Cross?

1. He looked past the cross to the joy of delivering all of us from eternal death.
2. He despised the shame. He did not let the shame of the execution, or the shame of separation from God the Father due to the weight of our sin, keep Him from doing the right thing.
3. He accomplished the goal. He is now interceding for us in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father.

Hebrews Chapter 12: The power of good examples.

³ For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. ⁴ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

We have a saying, “When there’s life, there’s hope.” We have not yet faced anything as difficult as what Christ faced. We need to keep that in mind during times of stress and hostility.

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Hebrews Chapter 12: The benefits of God's correction in our lives.

⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: *"My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; ⁶ For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."*

Benefit #1: Correction proves God loves us. All of us are sinners, and we all need improvement. Whether pressure is deserved, as in chastening, or undeserved, as in persecution, God can use it for our good.

Hebrews Chapter 12: The benefits of God's correction in our lives.

- ⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.
- Benefit #2: Correction proves we're God's children. God is our heavenly Father, and He has our best interest at heart.

Hebrews Chapter 12: The benefits of God's correction in our lives.

⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness.

Benefit #3: Correction makes us partakers of God's holiness.

Hebrews Chapter 12: The benefits of God's correction in our lives.

- ¹¹ Now 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.
- Benefit #4: Correction yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Notice

- God's goals for our correction are all GOOD GOALS.
- He is not trying to humiliate us.
- He is not trying to make us grovel.
- He is working for our good—proving He loves us, proving we are His children, making us holy like He is, giving us the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

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Hebrews Chapter 12: The commands to persevere.

¹² Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be *dislocated*, but rather be healed.

We need God's strength for the troubles of life—not a weak, insipid faith. We need a strong faith that **nothing marching out of the gates of hell** can shake.

Isaiah 35:3-4

³ Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees. ⁴ Say to those *who are* fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come *with* vengeance, *With* the recompense of God; He will come and save you."
(NKJV)

Hebrews Chapter 12: The commands to persevere.

- 14** Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:
- 15** 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.

Hebrews Chapter 12: The commands to persevere

What are we commanded to pursue, and what are we commanded to avoid?

□ Pursue:

- ▣ Peace with all people—Romans 12:18.
- ▣ Holiness—necessary for seeing the LORD.
- ▣ Looking carefully—examining our own lives.

□ Avoid:

- ▣ Falling short of the grace of God.
- ▣ All roots of bitterness.

Romans 12:18.

- ¹⁸ If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Romans 12:18 (NKJV)
- ¹⁴ Pursue peace with all *people*—Hebrews 12:14.
- We are responsible to pursue peace, and are accountable to God for our part of that pursuit. We are not responsible for the other parties' responses.*
- Sometimes that pursuit involves “peace through strength.”*

What is the root of bitterness

The author of Hebrews mentioned here?

Hebrews Chapter 12: The commands to persevere

We often hear this passage treated as though an unforgiving spirit toward others is the root of bitterness—and in the context of pursuing holiness, that may be appropriate. Holding a grudge interferes with our prayer life, and a grudge interferes with being able to be at peace with others.

The context of the whole passage is choosing to endure in faith, no matter what. The root of bitterness is described in a faith context in the Hebrew scriptures.

The author was quoting from Deuteronomy 29:14-18.

- ¹⁴ "I make this covenant and this oath, not with you alone, ¹⁵ but with *him* who stands here with us today before the LORD our God, as well as with *him* who *is* not here with us today ¹⁶ (for you know that we dwelt in the land of Egypt and that we came through the nations which you passed by, ¹⁷ and you saw their abominations and their idols which *were* among them--wood and stone and silver and gold);

Deuteronomy 29:14-18

- ¹⁸ so that there may not be among you man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go *and* serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood; (NKJV)

Here we see that

- The root of bitterness consists of turning away from God to serve idols of some form. Serving the idols would produce bitter fruit—eternally.
- Those idols do not have to be made of metal or wood or stone. They can be something like Esau did, described in the next verses—valuing the temporary above the eternal.
- Esau is our bad example. Bad examples are helpful if we DETERMINE not to follow them.

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Hebrews 12: The power of a bad example.

16 Make sure that no one is immoral or godless like Esau, who traded his birthright as the firstborn son for a single meal. **17** You know that afterward, when he wanted his father's blessing, he was rejected. It was too late for repentance, even though he begged with bitter tears.

Hebrews 12:16-17 (NLT)

The Birthright

- The recipient of the birthright among brothers had a double portion of the inheritance and the duty of caring for the aging parents in their old age.
- In addition, he had the prestige of being the head of the extended family in his generation.
- As head of that family, he had **a calling** to be one who would intercede in prayer for his extended family. He had a calling to pass the heritage of faith to his children. The birthright included **a spiritual calling**.

The Birthright

- Esau gave that up for a bowl of bean soup.
- Because he did not value his calling, he experienced spiritual loss that was irreversible.
- Hebrews 12:17 **“For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.”** (NKJV)

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Hebrews Chapter 12: The power of the New Covenant

¹⁸ For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard *it* begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore.

Hebrews Chapter 12: The power of the New Covenant

²⁰ (For they could not endure what was commanded: *"And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow."* ²¹ And so terrifying was the sight *that* Moses said, *"I am exceedingly afraid and trembling."*)

Hebrews Chapter 12: The power of the New Covenant

²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, ²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel.

Accessible Power



The power of the New Covenant is accessible. We can enter God's presence through the blood of Jesus. We can access His perfection and His perfect wisdom for the needs of the moment. We can access His strength to persevere. We can call upon Him to help us whatever the need.

Notice that we are already
registered in heaven.



The New Covenant has a registration list—the Lamb's Book of Life. We are already registered there!

When we reach heaven, we who have been made just or righteous by faith—by receiving Messiah's righteousness—we will then be made perfect. Now we press on toward that high calling.

We press on by seeking God's help moment by moment to empower us for accomplishing good.

Now we press on toward that high calling.

Philippians 3:12 “Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold on that for which I also was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”

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Hebrews Chapter 12: The same powerful God as the Old Covenant's.

- ²⁵ See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more *shall we not escape* if we turn away from Him who *speaks* from heaven,
²⁶ whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "*Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.*"

Fear of God=Beginning of Wisdom



Here we see again that the root of bitterness consists of turning away from God. We must fear turning away from Him. We must fear offending Him. We must fear consequences of such a wrong choice. That is the only acceptable kind of fear regarding our own spiritual lives.

We have a responsibility to seek God with all our hearts and to follow Him forever.

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Hebrews Chapter 12: The eternity we face.

- ²⁷ Now this, "*Yet once more,*" indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.
- ²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.
- ²⁹ For our God *is* a consuming fire.

The things that cannot be shaken!

God has an eternal city prepared for us. We talked last lesson about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as they called themselves pilgrims on earth, looking toward that eternal city.

The earth as we know it will not last forever. God's city will.

The things that cannot be shaken!

Isaiah 54:11-14 gives hints about that city.

“Behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems, And lay your foundations with sapphires.

¹² I will make your pinnacles of rubies, Your gates of crystal (glowing gems), And all your walls of precious stones. ¹³ All your children *shall be* taught by the LORD, And great *shall be* the peace of your children. ¹⁴ In righteousness you shall be established; You shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; And from terror, for it shall not come near you.” (NKJV)

The most rare and precious things on earth will be the common building stones of heaven.



What should we do?

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.



Homework

In 3 sets

I Thessalonians 5:21



But examine everything carefully;
hold fast to that which is good.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

In the last class, we studied two out of three barriers which must be removed to have true fellowship with God. Those three barriers are

- 1. Unbelief
- 2. Sin, and
- 3. Failure to forgive others.

Removing Barrier Number Three: An unforgiving attitude toward others

This is the barrier that interferes with getting rid of the entire sin barrier.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

- It is possible to make initial progress in repentance and faith, but to reach a roadblock when God begins to deal with this area of un-forgiveness toward others in one's life.
- Removing this barrier brings real freedom. For some of us, this is the most difficult task of all. How can we forgive others?
- It is important to understand this as a process rather than an instant decision. It is also best to take issues one at a time.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

- It is possible to be in church attendance for many years without ever learning HOW to forgive others.
- Forgiveness on God's part may be instantly accomplished when we repent and ask forgiveness.
- Sometimes with us, forgiveness from the heart takes some time, because we are not as good as we should be. It is a process, and it is not obvious how to begin. It is more than saying "I forgive you." There is a heart-shift involved. Here are some steps to take.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

- 1. Face the hurt. Ask God to show you, hurt by hurt, which matters have become shackles to your spirit. Take them one at a time and ask Him to help you through the task of forgiving them. Start with one you think is manageable first, and then move toward the tough ones. Repeat the entire process for each one.
- 2. Allow yourself to feel the hurt mentally in its full force while God is listening, knowing that He hates evil and that all power for good comes from Him. (James 1:17) It is perfectly compatible with forgiving others to ask God to stop them from continuing to harm, and to ask His protection from their harm for oneself and others.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

Anger toward evil is compatible with forgiveness where there is repentance, and with openness toward the possibility of repentance.

Define evil for what it is. You are forgiving, not excusing. God hates evil and He wants us to hate evil. God loves good and He wants us to love good.

You cannot overcome the hurt until you face the **BADNESS** of it. God did not want the hurt for you. God only wants what is good.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

3. Remind yourself of who you are according to God's assessment. He places extraordinary value on your life and being. Read Psalm 139 and recognize that you are His creation and He loves you. He loves you enough to die for you, and He promises never to forsake you if you are a member of His family. This step is important to counter the difficulty of the task of forgiving serious hurts. (John 1:9-14, Hebrews 13:5, Psalm 37:28, Psalm 9:9-10)

Homework Class 25 Set 1

- 4. Taking one hurt at a time, choose by an act of the will to forgive each one, and ask God to forgive the ones who hurt you. God will not forgive them without their repentance. You are not “letting them off the hook,” but rather are interceding for their good. God will work on them toward repentance as they are able to receive His prompting and according to the need. (II Corinthians 7:10) God and only God knows which individuals are the “hopeless cases.” We can relinquish them to Him for appropriate action as well.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

5. Ask God to give you insights about them as to why they hurt you, if He knows that will help. But even if they acted out of cruelty, you must forgive them. If the hurt was due to a misunderstanding, ask Him to help you see that and to correct it. If you need to rebuke them, ask for His direction about that. They may be clueless about the particular area of right and wrong that impacted your life. If they are closed to your rebuke, God knows that and He can provide someone else for that task who will be more effective.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

6. Forgiving enemies does not mean trusting them, especially if you have seen no repentance on their part or you believe the hurt was malicious. Forgiving them does mean trusting God to deal with them appropriately, and wanting Him to deal with them for their eternal good. Loving one's enemies includes wanting their lives to be transformed by God's goodness. This is where forgiveness is "taking up your cross daily to follow Jesus." Jesus suffered on the cross in order to forgive those who deserved no forgiveness.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

7. Sometimes there is a “hurt behind the hurt” that will come to mind as you deal with another issue. Take time to go through the process with that hurt as well. When you feel injured far beyond the actual item that was done to you by one person, that is a clue to a pile of hurt you need to forgive that your mind associates with that item. When people over-react to you, that may be a hint of a similar problem in their lives.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

8. Some hurts are so severe or so often repeated as to require confrontation. (Leviticus 19:17-18, Matthew 18:15-35) The confrontation must be conducted with the intention to forgive if that possibility exists. A confrontation conducted in God's power will be more effective than a confrontation in one's own strength alone. This advice is more about attitude and endurance than about the exact form of confrontation, which may vary with the needs of a situation. A confrontation without forgiveness won't work.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

- A confrontation with the determination to motivate for change can still be done in an attitude of forgiveness, even where legal steps or military service is included in the responsibilities. It is possible to fight one's enemies and to hate and to be very angry about what they stand for, without hating them. (Psalm 83 is an example of this attitude – imprecation against violent aggressors, but with the desire that their punishment cause them to seek God's name, and recognition that they deserve hell if they never repent.)

Homework Class 25 Set 1

9. Forgiving does not mean going back for more pain from those who hurt you and who are unrepentant. II Corinthians 11:20 indicates that this would be a bad idea. On the other hand, one should not fear their intimidation, because God is stronger than the one trying to cause hurt. (I Peter 3:9-18)
Sometimes other Christians may be simplistic about this, so don't worry about what they say. Just do the right thing.
10. Forgiving one's enemies may require time.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

- Once you have forgiven all the hurts of the past, you will find forgiving daily hurts much easier. Plus you will have proof of God's work in your life as He gives relief from a burden you did not need to carry. You will begin to see yourself as God sees you, and that is amazing. (Ephesians 2:5-10, Zephaniah 3:15-20) You should also begin to feel a sense of God's forgiveness as you confess your own sins one by one to Him. This step of forgiving others opens the heart to positive feelings.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

Set a limited time per day for dealing with these things. Then move on and postpone more for another day. If you are making progress, that pleases God. He knows your limits. He can even intervene when a situation is too much for you, and it is fine within the scope of forgiveness to ask for that.

People who have led fairly sheltered lives may not realize what a difficult task this is, but God fully realizes it. In fact, He suffered all your hurts on the cross. He has already experienced your suffering. He truly understands.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

If this is your first time to begin this process, you may have a huge pile of hurts you need to forgive. More may even come to mind as you work your way through the pile. Often other people do not understand what you are dealing with, and talking about it only makes things worse—and sometimes MUCH worse. God understands—talk to Him about it instead of other people.

When you truly desire that God will forgive the person who hurt you, you have truly forgiven. Until that point, keep asking for His help.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

Much of the time, people who hurt you don't think they have done anything wrong. There are people who are motivated to respect strength and despise weakness. Often they will test people for strength, and treat people badly if they think those people are weak. This is especially true of people who have maturity problems.

If you wait until they repent and ask forgiveness before you forgive, you will NEVER have a clear pathway with God. Forgive them anyway, for your own sake.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

And the sad part about that is that you will become more like them if you refuse to forgive them—because you are testing them and finding them failures.

The solution is to forgive them anyway, and to ask God to forgive them and to pressure them toward repentance.

It is permissible to ask God to “bless and keep them far away from you!” like the rabbi said about the Czar in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Homework Class 25 Set 1

This is not about “writing people off.” Quite the opposite! When you are free of hidden hurts—and forgiving is freeing—you are stronger for dealing with potential new difficulties. Often this is exactly the step that makes further interaction possible.

This can also be helpful for dealing with new people you find annoying, because they may be reminding you of some other person’s fault that you need to forgive.

Homework Class 25 Set 2

- **Trust:**
- At some point in this process, you will feel God' Spirit nudging you toward completely trusting Him with the rest of your life and your eternity. You will also find that His terms for coming into your life involve your acceptance of Jesus as Savior. He will save you from your sins. (Romans 3:23-25) His terms also involve accepting Him as LORD and King, because that is who He is. To accept Him on lesser terms would be a farce. If this is a sticking point with you, ask Him to help you with it. None of this is possible without His help. (Romans 10:8-13, John 1:9-18, Revelation 3:20)

Homework Class 25 Set 2

- **VICTORY:**
- When you reach the point that you are where God wants you to be in this process – with your life under the authority of His kingdom – walking in forgiveness regarding self and others – and endeavoring with His help to keep a clear conscience – Then the barriers are gone and His power will be available in your life to achieve His good agenda for you. Then you will be free to ask and expect clear answers to prayer. (I John 5:10-15)

Homework Class 25 Set 2

- If there is a sin in your life that you feel could not possibly be a sin, because you cannot seem to have victory over it, the process outlined above will be the narrow, difficult path to that victory. Paraphrasing Matthew 7:13-14, “Broad is the path that leads to destruction, and many people go that way. Narrow is the path that leads to life, and few there are who find it.” May God bless every step of your search!

Homework Class 25 Set 3

- John chapters 14 through 17 reveal Jesus' teaching to His disciples from the time of the Last Supper to the Garden of Gethsemane. Knowing that His time was short, He had very important things to say to them and to us. So the last few days of this course, we will look at those words.
- Today, read John chapter 14. Write down the promises you see in this chapter that you believe apply to you.

Homework Class 25 Set 3

- Write down truths about Jesus Christ that you see in this chapter.
- Write down truths about the Holy Spirit that you see in this chapter.
- Write down truths about people who love God that you see in this chapter.