



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond

V25 N20

May 14, 2023

MOTHER'S DAY

"Finish the Race"

Hebrews 12:1-13

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Faithfulness

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

"Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man."

Proverbs 3:3-4



How are Christians to view hardship?

According to Hebrews 10:25, some in the church were tempted to drop out in order to escape the hardships and persecutions experienced by those who publicly professed faith in Christ. To them the writer says, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (NIV©1984). We gain insight into the kinds of things these Jewish believers were suffering at the hands of organized Judaism from what he wrote in verses 32-35. "Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded."

People still drop out of church, even committed evangelicals, but for a multitude of lesser reasons. In fact, hardship and persecution don't make the list of "15 Reasons Why Committed Christians Do Not Attend Church" by Scott Ball, Vice President and a Lead Guide with The Malphurs Group. Before looking at the reasons Ball cites in his article, an observation is in order. Churches have more than one congregation. Some congregants attend worship services every Sunday, some three times a month, some two, and so on. Some congregants attend only occasionally, a few times a year. Practically everyone attends on Easter and at Christmas, which explains why attendance is much higher on those occasions.

That said, the point of the article is simple: however frequently people attend church, they are attending less frequently than they once did. The author writes: "There is a growing body of research revealing that many long-time Christian people are deciding not to attend church services

any longer. We are familiar with the term the 'nones' in reference to people with no religious affiliation. However, there is a growing number of 'dones,' committed Christians who have given up on church. Some suggest that people who quit church are not true Christians, or they are not being faithful to God. That may or may not be true. Certainly, there are those whom (for whatever reason) have walked away from God and have, therefore, left the Church. However, many genuine believers are shifting their church attendance patterns. The purpose of this article is to address 15 common reasons committed Christians provide for why they do not attend church services."

Here are the reasons why committed Christians do not attend church. See what you think of them:

1. *I can get better preaching from a podcast.*
2. *I can worship on my own.*
3. *I can study the Bible on my own.*
4. *I have Christian friends that are my "church."*
5. *I have to work on Sundays.*
6. *I have family obligations on the weekends.*
7. *I feel like church is boring.*
8. *I don't feel like there is a place for my child or teenager.*
9. *I don't feel like going to church makes a difference in my life.*
10. *I don't know of any "good" churches near me.*
11. *I'm not sure I believe the same things anymore.*
12. *I'm offended by the church's position on sexuality.*
13. *I've been hurt by church members.*
14. *I don't trust church leadership.*
15. *I don't feel like there is a place for me to lead.*

The author's comments on each of these are well worth reading, and I would encourage you to do so. The article is available online (<https://malphursgroup.com/15-reasons-why-committed-christians-do-not-attend-church>).



EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

Read Hebrews 12:1-13

1 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

4 *In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,*

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

6 *because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."*

7 *Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? 8 If you are not disciplined – and everyone undergoes discipline – then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirit and live!*

10 *They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*

12 *Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.*

13 *"Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.*

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Box "therefore" indicating *result* in vv. 1, 12.
- Box "since" indicating *reason* in v. 1.
- Circle "witnesses" in v. 1.
- Circle "throw off" in v. 1.
- Circle "perseverance" in v. 1.
- Underline "pioneer and perfecter" in v. 2.
- Bracket "at the right hand" in v. 2.
- Circle the words "so that" indicating *purpose* in v. 3.
- Circle "discipline/s/ed" in vv. 5-11.
- Underline "hardship as discipline" in v. 7.
- Circle "legitimate" in v. 8.
- Bracket "feeble arms and weak knees" in v. 12.
- Bracket "level paths" in v. 13.

Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 13. What one word would you use to describe the **TONE** of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the **THEME** of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. *Identify* the “witnesses” and *explain why* they are called “witnesses” (v. 1).

 2. *Identify and interpret* the *metaphor* used in verse 1.

 3. *What* are we readers to “throw off” (v. 1) and *why*?

 4. Put the meaning of “Jesus, the *pioneer and perfecter* of faith” in your own words.

 5. Jesus is presented as our *example* (vv. 2-3). How so?

 6. *Discipline* appears as a *noun* and a *verb* repeatedly in verses 5-11. Define *discipline* based on what you read in these verses.

 7. Describe the relationship of “hardship” to “discipline” (v. 7).

 8. “Discipline” *feels* bad but *is really good*. Summarize why (cf. vv. 8-11).

 9. In verses 12-13, the writer returns to the *metaphor* he used in verse 1. Interpret the references to “feeble arms,” “weak knees,” and “level paths” in the context of that metaphor.

 10. **Discussion:** Talk about how this passage affects your view of the hardships you face.
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Commentary On The Text

Biblical authors have a variety of tools in their literary toolboxes that can be used to nail down a point. *Metaphor*, *analogy*, and *example* are three that the writer of the book of Hebrews uses in 12:1-13. One commentator writes: “In verses 1-2 he begins the chapter with the image of a race in order to exhort his readers to ‘run with perseverance,’ laying aside impediments to endurance and keeping a focus on Jesus as the pacesetter. This *metaphor* of a race resumes briefly in verses 12-13, emphasizing especially the disciplined endurance required of a long-distance runner. An *analogy* to another form of discipline, that offered by a parent, forms the core of 12:3-11, where the author expounds Proverbs 3:11-12. He uses this Old Testament text to weave a tight-knit argument why believers should embrace their hardships as an expression of God’s love and acceptance. Just as an earthly parent uses what the child perceives to be unpleasant circumstances to bring about a desired end, so God, who deserves even more respect than an earthly parent, disciplines his true children to bring about holiness” (George H. Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews*, 396). Included in his opening metaphor is an appeal to the *example* set by Jesus. “Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart,” he writes (v. 3).

The writer’s opening *metaphor* suggests that living the Christian life is like running a marathon. And in light of the examples set by those who have lived the faith life before us, that “great cloud of witnesses” the writer references, we must, in the words of *The Message*, “Strip down, start running—and never quit!” The analogy is pretty straightforward. We need to empty our pockets of every weight. Better yet, we need to put on our running shorts, the ones that don’t have pockets; no one runs in pants with full pockets. “Throw off everything that hinders,” is how the writer puts it. Moreover, we need to reconsider our values, and put aside the kinds of wrongheaded thinking and foolish behavior that will only impede us. The writer refers to these kinds of things as “the sin that so easily entangles.” And we must focus on running with perseverance, so we can complete the race and say with Paul, “I have finished the race, I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return” (2Ti 4:7 NLT). In order to finish strong, we must run with our minds on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith and our example, so when we grow weary and are tempted to drop out, we’ll remember how he persevered in the face of hardship and opposition beyond anything we’ve ever experienced,

and remember how in the end he was seated at the right hand of God. If we keep in mind what God has in store for us, we’ll run with endurance.

What follows is an *analogy* that compares God’s treatment of his children with a father’s treatment of his. The writer opens his analogy with a quotation from followed by an exposition of Proverbs 3:11-12. Apparently his readers, first generation converts from Judaism, interpreted the hardship they experienced at the hands of their fellow Jews (see J. Dwight Pentecost, *A Faith that Endures*, 13-22) as an indication of God’s indifference, enticing some to “give up meeting together” (10:25) and return to the synagogue. The author writes to convince them that quite the opposite is true, arguing that Proverbs 3:11-12 proves God is treating them like a father treats his children. “For what children are not disciplined by their father?” he asks (v. 7). Rather than view hardship as an indication of God’s indifference, the writer directs them to view hardship as an indication of his discipline. God is using, that is, permitting, hardship to *discipline* or *train* them—we might say to *disciple* them. It indicates that they are his legitimate children, whom he is preparing to receive their inheritance in his kingdom. And while enduring hardship is unpleasant for a time, “Later on”—in preparation for their entrance into the kingdom—“it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (v. 11). The Hebrews respected their human fathers who disciplined them—albeit imperfectly—so should they not respect even more their Heavenly Father who disciplines them perfectly?

In conclusion, the writer returns to his opening *metaphor*. Others are running the same marathon. When you begin to feel exhausted, persevere (v. 1). And when you recognize other runners are feeling the same, come alongside them, run with them, and clear the way for them, so they will not stumble and be unable to finish. One commentator writes: “In the race are those contestants who have become so weary their hands are hanging at their side. They have become so weak they can scarcely stand. It is therefore the privilege and obligation of those who are running with patience to so identify with the weak that their strength will be imparted to them. In making ‘straight paths,’ the one who is patiently enduring will keep the exhausted one from veering off course. It also has in it the idea of removing any obstacle that would cause the runner to dislocate a joint. Either the weakness or the dislocation of a joint would eliminate the contestant from the race” (Pentecost, 218).

Word Studies/Notes

v. 1 *witnesses* Witnesses *to* rather than witnesses *of*, i.e., the men and women of faith mentioned in chapter 11. “They are witness in the sense that they bear witness to the Christian community of God’s faithfulness and of the effectiveness of faith . . . In this way, the great cloud of faithful Christ-followers through history offer the community motivation in its current struggle to stay the course of commitment” (George H. Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews*, 397).

v. 1 *everything* Lit., “every weight” (NKJV); however, the term was used figuratively to refer to encumbrances (cf. NASB) both moral and physical. “Strip down, start running—and never quit. No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins” (*The Message*).

v. 1 *easily entangles* Or “that clings so closely” (NET). “While it is true that any sin will impede the contestant’s progress, the fact that he refers specifically to ‘the sin’ suggests that the writer has in mind the sin of unbelief (10:38-39) . . . Just as the runner is surrounded by a multitude who bear witness to the validity of faith, so unbelief also surrounds us and entices us to abandon faith” (J. Dwight Pentecost, *A Faith That Endures*, 211).

v. 1 *perseverance* “There must be a firm resolve not to drop out of the contest but to exert every effort to cross the finish line despite hardship, exhaustion, and pain. The audience is summoned to an intense perseverance in faith in view of the example of those who have preceded them” (William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 47B, *Hebrews* 9-13, 410).

v. 1 *race* “The comparison of life to engagement in an athletic contest was the common property of preachers of moral philosophy, whose sermons could be heard in the streets of every Hellenistic town in the first century. The metaphor of running a race is taken from the stadium and reflects the recognized preeminence of the footrace in the Greek games. The allusion is to a distance race requiring disciplined commitment and endurance” (Lane, 408-09).

v. 2 *pioneer* The range of meaning of this Greek word includes: “champion,” “leader,” “forerunner,” or “initiator.” Used in connection with the word translated “perfecter” it likely connotes “initiator.” As the initiator of the faith life, he “wrote the book on living by faith” and as its author exemplified obedient faith. Put differently, he pioneered the path of faith (cf. NRSV).

v. 2 *perfecter* “To perfect” in this context means “to express perfectly fully and completely.” In contrast to the men and women in chapter 11, who exemplified faith albeit imperfectly, “as the ‘perfecter of faith’ Jesus is the one in whom faith has reached its perfection”

(Lane, 411).

v. 2 *endured* “There is no greater example of patient endurance in suffering than Jesus, both in His trial and in his crucifixion. The prophet Isaiah said of Him, ‘He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth’ (Isa. 53:7)” (Pentecost, 213).

v. 2 *scorning* I.e., Jesus treated the shame of crucifixion as insignificant or of little consequence.

v. 2 *throne* “Exalted to the right hand of God . . . let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Ac 2:33, 36; cf. Php 2:9-11).

v. 3 *consider* The Greek verb connotes *comparison* and *reflection*, which implies the value of *meditation* on and *contemplation* of Jesus’ suffering.

vv. 5-11 *discipline* Discipline is not punishment. “Punishment is retribution for evil that has been done. God never punishes His children for their iniquities, because all punishment of sin was borne by Jesus Christ on the cross (Rom. 8:1) . . . Chastening or discipline, on the other hand, has moral training in view” (Pentecost, 215).

v. 7 *hardship as* Cf. Heb 5:8. God uses the circumstances of life, particularly the hard ones, to train his children. “It is not as misery, accident, or the like that Christians should understand suffering but as discipline. God uses it to teach important lessons” (Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12:137). “In this context [*paideia*], ‘corrective discipline,’ signifies the suffering that may have to be endured because of fidelity to God (cf. 10:32-34; 11:35b-12:4)” (Lane, 421).

v. 8 *legitimate* An illegitimate child is still a child of the father, but legitimate children, true sons, are heirs. Illegitimate children is a reference to Christians whose disloyalty to the faith results in their loss of inheritance (i.e., reward). “In the Roman world, an ‘illegitimate child’ had no inheritance rights” (Zane C. Hodges, “Hebrews,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 810).

v. 12 *feeble arms* . . . “Reverting to his athletic figure of speech, our author bids his readers brace their flagging limbs and press on to the goal. Some of their number were feeling specially discouraged and disinclined to make the necessary effort; the others should do everything possible to help them” (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT, 363), which would include clearing the path ahead for them (v. 13).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

“Strip down, start running, and never quit” the marathon that is the Christian life, knowing that God is using the hardships you suffer along the way to prepare you to receive your inheritance in his future kingdom.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?
2. What does this passage teach me about myself?
3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

They say parenting is a marathon, not a sprint. With Mother's Day just around the corner, I'd like to offer several "race" tips as you prepare for the miles ahead. 1) *Go easy on yourself.* Reevaluate your expectations and give yourself some grace because you're going to make mistakes. Your kids are a delight, and you should enjoy parenting! 2) *Don't train too hard.* Your child isn't perfect, so quit treating them like a potential prodigy. Developing their character is your main focus; the rest will come. Decide the three most important character traits you want your child to have and work on those. Revisit and revise your goals every year. 3) *Stick with the plan.* God has parented through every generation, and this generation of kids isn't a surprise to our Creator. He has given us everything we need for life and godliness (1 Peter 1:3). You can find His parenting strategy in the Word, so start reading and praying Scripture daily. 4) *Get a mentor, coach or training partner.* Mentors are the best and offer an incredible amount of wisdom. Notice some outstanding youth at church and ask their parents to mentor you. They'll be honored! 5) *Celebrate what you're accomplishing.* You might not finish first in your age division but when you walk with God, I guarantee you'll see some fruit in your child. Affirm what God is doing in their life and celebrate (ice cream's my favorite). 6) *Stay motivated.* Your kids are ever changing and developing, and this stage will quickly disappear before the next one lands in your lap. Pray for grace and encouragement daily! We're praying for you!

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Hebrews 12:1-13.

1. What should we throw off?
2. Who does the Lord discipline?
3. What does discipline produce?

What Do You Think?

What is good about discipline?
How does discipline make us holy?

What Do You Do?

Create a "Training Plan" for growing with God. Spend 5 minutes on each task every day
– Bible reading, prayer, worshiping God, and Scripture memory.

CORE COMPETENCY: Faithfulness

I am loyal to God and others, so they know they can count on me.

MEMORY VERSE: 1 Thessalonians 5:11

"Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- ☐ I completed my Bible Study
- ☐ I memorized this week's verse
- ☐ I brought my Bible to church
- ☐ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

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