

HEBREWS 12

Runners (1–4). The people listed in chapter 11 are the “cloud” that witnesses to us, “God can be trusted! Put your faith in His Word and keep running the race!” When you read the Old Testament, your faith should grow, for the account shows what God did in and through people who dared to trust His promises (Rom. 15:4). When you read the Gospels, you see the greatest example of endurance in Jesus Christ.

Children (5–11). “Chastening” refers to child training, helping the child prepare for adulthood. It does not necessarily mean punishment for disobedience, although that sometimes might be included. The successful runner must exercise discipline and submit to training. Never fear the chastening hand of the Lord; it is controlled by a loving heart. God’s goal is your maturity.

Citizens (12–29). The people of Israel had a frightening experience of law at Sinai (Exod. 19), but our experience at Mount Zion is one of grace and glory. We are citizens of the heavenly city and will one day fellowship with patriarchs and angels—and God! But this does not mean we can ignore His solemn voice to us. If God is shaking things in your life, listen to His Word. You will discover the things that cannot be shaken, and you will run the race to the end.

HEBREWS 13

Lest we get the idea that we can run the race successfully alone, the writer closes his letter by reminding us to follow our spiritual leaders. If we do, we will love the brothers and sisters (v. 1), help strangers (v. 2) and prisoners (v. 3), live above lust (v. 4) and covetousness (vv. 5–6), and not be led astray by false doctrines (v. 9).

Remember them (7–8). This may refer to leaders now dead, but their ministry goes on. Remember what they taught you, how they lived, and what they lived for. Church leaders may come and go, but Jesus is the same; and they must fix our eyes on Him.

Obey them (17). If they are faithful to care for your soul and teach you the Word, you have the responsibility to obey. A spiritual leader is not a dictator who drives you from behind. He is a shepherd who goes before and leads the way.

Pray for them (18–19). When you come to the throne of grace, ask God to make His shepherds faithful and fruitful. Pray that the Great Shepherd will use them to “make you complete in every good work” (vv. 20–21).

Greet them (24). You should know your leaders personally and be on good terms with them. Let nothing come between you that could create problems in the fellowship (12:14–15).

JAMES 1

The wisdom of God (1–11). You need wisdom in trials so you will not waste your suffering and miss the spiritual growth that should result. When you trust God, trials work for you and not against you; but be sure your heart is wholly yielded to Him. If your heart and mind are divided, trials will tear you apart.

The goodness of God (12–20). When you realize how good God is to you, you will have no interest in the temptations the enemy puts before you. When you are tempted, count your blessings; and you will soon have strength to say no.

The Word of God (21–27). The Word gives us spiritual birth (v. 18; 1 Pet. 1:22–23). It is like seed planted in the heart that produces spiritual fruit (v. 21). It is a mirror that helps us examine ourselves (vv. 23–25) and cleanse our lives. We must *do* the Word of God, not just read it or study it; the blessing is in the *doing*.

JAMES 2

If you have true saving faith, you will practice *impartiality* (vv. 1–13) and see people in terms of character and not clothing. You will not cater to the rich or ignore the poor, but you will love each person for the sake of Jesus Christ. Christian love simply means treating others the way the Lord treats you and doing it in the power of the Spirit.

True saving faith is also seen in *activity* (vv. 14–26). Faith is not something you only talk about; it is something that motivates your life so that you think of others and serve them. Abraham was saved by faith (Gen. 15:6), but he proved that faith by obeying God and offering his son (Gen. 22). Rahab was saved by trusting God (Heb. 11:31), but she showed the reality of her faith by protecting the spies (Josh. 2; 6:17–27).

James and Paul do not contradict each other (Rom. 4:1–5; 5:1); they complement each other. We are justified (declared righteous) before God by faith, but we are justified before men by works. God can see our faith, but men can see only our works.

JAMES 3

The believers James wrote to were having problems with their tongues (1:26; 2:12; 4:1, 11–12). Of course, the tongue is not the problem; it is the *heart* (v. 14; Matt. 12:35–37). But before you say anything, ask yourself some questions.

Who is in control (1–4)? If your tongue is under God’s control, you will take what you say seriously (v. 1), and your whole body will be under His discipline (v. 2). Just as a horse needs a rider holding the reins, and a ship needs a pilot at the rudder, so your tongue needs a master; and God is the only one who can do the job. Psalm 141:1–4 is a good prayer if you need help in this area.

What will the consequences be (5–12)? Are you starting a fire that may get out of control and do a lot of damage? Are you turning loose a dangerous beast or poisoning a refreshing spring? Once your words are spoken, you cannot take them back, so look ahead.

What are my motives (13–18)? Is there bitterness in your heart or envy? Are you speaking from God’s wisdom or the wisdom of the world? Are you a peacemaker or a troublemaker? If your heart is right before God (Heb. 4:12), He will use your words to produce the right kind of fruit.

JAMES 4

Of the early church, it was said, “Behold how they love one another!” Today, people might say, “Behold how they compete with one another!” Why is it sometimes so difficult for God’s people to get along?

Selfishness (1–3). The wars among us are caused by the wars within us. We want to please ourselves, even if it hurts somebody else. If we are not careful, even our prayers can become selfish!

Worldliness (4). Because Abraham was separated from sin, he was the friend of God (2:23); but Lot was the friend of the world (Gen. 13:1–13). Ponder 1 John 2:15–17.

Pride (5–10). Satan knows how to use pride to defeat you as he defeated Eve (Gen. 3:1–6). Are you laughing when you should be weeping over your sins? Are you resisting the devil or resisting the Lord?

Criticism (11–12). One of the easiest ways to hide our sins is to expose the sins of others. Gossip and slander grieve the Spirit and divide the family. God called us to be witnesses, not judges!

Boasting (13–17). Life is short and the future unknown, so do the will of God today. When you make plans, always say, “If the Lord wills” (Prov. 27:1).¹

¹Wiersbe, W. W. 1997, c1991. *With the word Bible commentary*. Thomas Nelson: Nashville