

LESSON 13

Jesus: The Perfect Example

Hebrews 12:1–3

Keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2

Class Overview: All the examples of faith in Scripture ultimately point to one: the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not only the model of faith but its source and completion. The writer of Hebrews calls believers to fix their eyes on Him, especially when life feels heavy or discouraging. Jesus' endurance through suffering and shame shows us how to remain faithful when we face our own trials.

This lesson reminds us that the Christian life is not about running perfectly but about running persistently, with eyes on the One who finished the race before us. Jesus' victory gives us strength to endure, courage to obey, and hope that our suffering is never wasted.

Class Objectives: By the end of this class, you should be able to—

1. Understand how Jesus' endurance provides the ultimate example for believers.
2. Recognize that perseverance is possible only when our focus stays on Christ.
3. See how Jesus' joy and obedience reveal the purpose behind suffering.
4. Identify practical ways to “run with endurance” by following His example.
5. Commit to finishing the race of faith with steadfastness and hope.

Introduction

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS OFTEN LIKENED TO A RACE. It requires endurance, focus, and perseverance. In Hebrews 12, the author encourages believers who are growing tired from persecution and hardship. He reminds them that others have run the race before them, the heroes of faith in chapter 11, but then points them to the ultimate example: Jesus.

The command is simple but powerful, *“Keeping our eyes on Jesus.”* When we lose focus, we stumble. But when we fix our eyes on Him, we find strength to keep going. Jesus not only started the race of faith; He completed it. He trusted His Father completely, obeyed perfectly, and endured faithfully all the way to the cross.

What sustained Him was “the joy set before Him,” the joy of pleasing the Father and bringing salvation to His people. He endured shame, pain, and rejection because He saw the purpose behind it. His obedience was not easy, but it was perfect. Now, seated at the right hand of God, He reigns as both our example and our encouragement.

When life gets tough, it’s easy to lose hope. But Hebrews 12 reminds us that Jesus has already gone ahead of us. He understands what it’s like to feel tired, misunderstood, and tested. Still, He never gave up. His victory assures us that we can finish the race too, because the same power that carried Him carries us.

Historical Background

The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were struggling with discouragement and pressure to abandon their faith. Many had faced rejection, persecution, and loss for following Jesus. The writer encourages them not to turn back but to keep going, fixing their eyes on Christ.

In Hebrews 12:1–3, he uses the imagery of a race surrounded by a “great cloud of witnesses.” These witnesses are the men and women of faith from chapter 11, people who trusted God despite great trials. But above them all stands Jesus, the ultimate example of endurance.

The phrase “pioneer and perfecter of faith” means that Jesus is both the source and the finish of our faith. He paved the way, showing us how to trust and obey, and He completed the race, making it possible for us to follow. His endurance on the cross wasn’t just physical; it was spiritual. He faced separation, shame, and scorn, yet He never wavered.

The author emphasizes Jesus’ joy as the reason behind His suffering. “For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross.” That joy was not in the suffering itself but in what it would accomplish—our redemption and His victory over sin and death. His suffering wasn’t pointless; it served the greatest purpose of all. By fixing our eyes on Jesus, we can find the strength to endure any trial. He not only provides an example to follow but also the grace to do so. The One who began our faith will also complete it.

Keep Your Eyes on Jesus

The first instruction in Hebrews 12:2 is clear: *“Keeping our eyes on Jesus.”* It’s a call to focus. The Christian race is filled with distractions: fear, fatigue, failure, and the temptation to quit. But endurance begins with focus. When our eyes are on Jesus, we run with clarity and purpose. When we look at our circumstances, we lose strength.

The early Christians who first read Hebrews grew weary. They had endured suffering for their faith, and some were starting to doubt. The writer reminds them, and us, that the key to finishing the race is not found in looking inward but upward. Jesus is both the starting point and the finish line of our faith. He is the “pioneer,” the One who blazed the trail ahead of us, and the “perfecter,” the One who completed it perfectly.

To “keep our eyes on Jesus” means to focus our attention and love on Him. It’s more than a glance; it’s a steady stare. It involves consistently viewing everything through the lens of who He is and what He has done. When Peter walked on water, he remained steady as he looked at Jesus, but he began to sink when he looked at the waves (Matthew 14:29–30). The same is true for us. Where we focus determines our endurance.

Jesus’ life demonstrates what it means to trust God fully. He lived with consistent obedience, even when it meant going to the cross. He didn’t

let the opinions of others, enemy opposition, or the weaknesses of friends pull Him away from His mission. His focus remained on doing the Father's will.

For us, this focus is both a command and a comfort. It means that when we grow tired, we have a place to turn. We are not asked to rely on our own strength but to draw from His. Looking to Jesus reminds us that He has already endured everything we face, and overcome it. Keeping our eyes on Christ doesn't mean ignoring pain; it means seeing purpose beyond it. It means trusting that the same power that carried Him through suffering now lives in us. The race is long, and the hills are steep, but our Savior has already finished it. He runs beside us, strengthening us to endure.

If you want to stay faithful in a world full of distractions, fix your eyes on the finish line that already stands: Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith.

Endure with Joy in the Midst of Suffering

Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus, *"for the joy that lay before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame."* Those words reveal something astonishing about our Savior. He faced the worst suffering imaginable, the weight of sin, rejection, pain, and humiliation, yet He did so with joy. The joy wasn't in the agony of the cross itself, but in what the cross would accomplish. Jesus saw beyond the suffering to the salvation it would bring.

The cross symbolized both physical suffering and public shame. Crucifixion was meant to humiliate as much as to kill. Yet Jesus *"despised the shame."* That means He overlooked it. He refused to let temporary humiliation define His eternal victory. He endured because He knew what was beyond it: the redemption of the lost, the defeat of sin, and the glory of His Father.

This view changes how we handle our own trials. Suffering loses its power to harm us when we see it from the perspective of purpose. Jesus didn't avoid suffering; He defeated it through obedience. The same Spirit that strengthened Him now lives in us, allowing us to endure with hope.

The “joy that was set before Him” included both His return to the Father and the redemption of His people. It was the joy of obedience fulfilled, love completed, and victory secured. That joy was greater than the pain. His focus on the eternal gave Him endurance in the temporary.

We often seek joy after facing trials, but Jesus found joy through them. True joy doesn’t rely on comfort; it depends on confidence in God’s plan. When we suffer for righteousness, serve despite hardship, or endure pain, we follow Christ’s example. The joy ahead: the hope of resurrection, reunion, and reward, gives us strength to keep going.

The Christian life will have its challenges. But because Jesus endured, we can also endure. Because He finished, we can finish. The joy of pleasing God and fulfilling His purpose is much greater than the shame or struggle we might face along the way.

To endure with joy means trusting that God’s story is still unfolding. What seems painful now may be shaping something wonderful later. Jesus’ joy was not in what He endured, but in what His suffering achieved. That same joy can empower us when faith feels difficult. When we fix our eyes on Jesus, we remember that endurance isn’t just surviving, it’s trusting. Like our Savior, we can face trials with steady hearts, knowing that the end of the race holds joy worth every step.

Follow His Example to the Finish

Hebrews 12:3 urges us to “consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, so that you won’t grow weary and give up.” Those words remind us that Jesus is not only our Savior, but He is our example. He shows us how to finish well when the race is long and the struggle is real.

The word “*consider*” means to think carefully, to weigh, to focus the mind. The writer encourages us to examine closely Jesus’ endurance, His patience under pressure, His faithfulness under fire, and His obedience during suffering. He faced hatred, betrayal, mockery, and violence, yet He never lost heart. When He was insulted, He didn’t retaliate. When He suffered, He entrusted Himself to the Father’s will (1 Peter 2:23).

Following Jesus' example means running the same kind of race, with endurance, humility, and trust. We're not promised an easy path, but we are promised His presence. He has gone before us, and He runs beside us. Every time we feel like quitting, we are invited to "consider Him," to remember His strength, His patience, and His faithfulness.

Those who first read Hebrews were tempted to give up because of persecution. Their faith was costly. But the writer wanted them to know that Jesus endured far greater hostility and conquered it. If He could endure the cross, then they could endure their trials. And if they followed Him faithfully, they would share in His victory.

Jesus didn't just begin the race; He finished it. He endured the cross, rose from the grave, and "sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Sitting down means the work is done. Redemption is complete. The race is finished. And now He intercedes for us, giving strength to all who run after Him.

To follow Jesus' example means more than admiring Him; it means imitating Him. It means responding to hardship with faith, meeting opposition with love, and trusting that every step brings us closer to the joy set before us. The same endurance that carried Him through the cross can carry us through every trial. Faithfulness to the finish is possible because Jesus has already finished for us. He paved the path, provided the power, and secured the victory. Our task is to keep running, to refuse to grow weary and give up.

When you feel worn down, remember the One who endured for you. When you are tempted to quit, remember the One who never did. The finish line is closer than it feels, and Jesus stands there, waiting with open arms, saying, "Well done."

Lesson Summary and Reflection

The writer of Hebrews calls us to endurance, but not in our own strength. Our example and encouragement come from Jesus Himself. He ran the race of faith perfectly, endured suffering completely, and now reigns in victory eternally. When we grow weary, we look to Him. When we lose focus, we fix our eyes again on His faithfulness.

First, *keep your eyes on Jesus*. The Christian life is full of distractions, but focus gives endurance. Jesus is both the beginning and the end of our faith, the One who started it and the One who will complete it. Looking to Him keeps us steady when the path grows hard.

Second, *endure with joy amid suffering*. Jesus faced the cross not with despair but with joy; the joy of pleasing His Father and saving His people. He looked beyond the pain to the purpose. We, too, can endure hardship when we remember that our suffering is never wasted. God uses it to shape our hearts and advance His glory.

Third, *follow His example to the finish*. Jesus endured hostility, betrayal, and shame but never gave up. He finished His race and sat down at God's right hand. He is now both our example and our helper. His victory guarantees ours. The same strength that sustained Him is available to us through His Spirit.

The message of Hebrews 12 is clear: don't give up. The road of faith is difficult, but we are not alone. We run surrounded by witnesses, strengthened by grace, and guided by the perfect example of Jesus. The finish line is certain because He has already crossed it for us.

Key Truths

- Endurance begins with focus—keep your eyes on Jesus.
- Joy in suffering comes from trusting God's purpose, not avoiding pain.
- Jesus endured hostility and shame to bring us victory and hope.
- Faithfulness to the finish requires daily dependence on His strength.
- Our Savior not only showed the way—He now helps us walk in it.

Conclusion

Jesus is the power that enables us to persevere. He ran the race before us, carried the cross for us, and secured eternal life for us. When we fix our eyes on Him, our faith finds strength, and our steps find purpose.

The call of Hebrews 12 is to stay in the race. Don't look back. Don't give up. Keep your eyes on the One who finished His course in perfect obedience. Because He endured, you can endure. Because He overcame, you will overcome.

Faithful endurance isn't about running fast; it's about running focused. Keep your eyes on Jesus, and you will finish strong.

Memory Verse and Weekly Challenge

Hebrews 12:2 (CSB) — *“Keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

Endurance comes not from looking at our struggles but from fixing our gaze on Jesus—the One who ran the race perfectly, suffered willingly, and finished victoriously.

Weekly Challenge

1. Refocus Your Eyes.

Each day this week, begin your prayer time by reading Hebrews 12:1–3. Ask God to help you keep your eyes on Jesus rather than your circumstances.

2. Find Joy in Obedience.

Choose one act of service or sacrifice to do quietly this week, focusing on pleasing God rather than being noticed.

3. Endure With Purpose.

When something frustrates or discourages you, pause and pray, *“Lord, help me see the purpose behind this.”* Let endurance replace frustration.

4. Encourage a Runner.

Reach out to someone who's growing weary in their faith: perhaps through a note, prayer, or visit. Remind them that Jesus endured for them and still runs beside them.

5. Celebrate the Finish Line.

Spend time in worship reflecting on Christ's completed work. Thank Him that because He finished His race, you can finish yours.

For Discussion

1. What does it mean for you personally to “keep your eyes on Jesus” in daily life?

2. How does remembering the joy that sustained Jesus help you face your own challenges?

3. When are you most tempted to give up or lose focus in your walk with God?

4. How can you learn to see trials not as punishment but as preparation for endurance?

5. What practical step can you take this week to run your race with more focus, faith, and perseverance?
