



Hebrews 11:30-12:11 When Faith Hurts

Summary: There is a constant pull toward weariness and discouragement for those who call on God as Father, we fight it with steadfast faith.

Some of you have heard me say we go through the Scripture verse by verse for better or worse. Well, this has been one of those 'for worse' weeks for me, personally. Here's what I mean, we are committed to reading and receiving everything God said to us, even when it's hard to hear. So, we go through Scripture verse by verse and we don't just focus on all the happy stuff, all the positive and encouraging stuff, all the stuff they put on coffee mugs and T-shirts. We deal with the hard stuff too. The stuff you wish wasn't actually in the Bible. The stuff you want to skip over or explain away.

Well again, for me, personally, this was one of those weeks. I've told several people I don't like the passage we're looking at this morning, I don't like what it has to say, because it might mean something really hard for my life and I don't want that. I'm being real and honest here.

There are things in this passage of Scripture that I don't want to accept. But what do you do, because it's verse by verse for better or worse? We can't just pick and choose the parts of Scripture we like and politely pass on the rest. We have to take it all. You'll see what I mean as we work our way through the text.

Things actually start on a good note. If you remember, we're walking down the so-called Hall of Faith in Hebrews Chapter 11. We're seeing, in chronological order, the stories of saints through the ages who have trusted and followed God, [by faith](#). We've seen Abraham and Sarah and noticed how their family grew, [by faith](#), into the nation of Israel which Moses led, [by faith](#), out of captivity in Egypt, and now we come to this:

Hebrews 11:30 [By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. 31 By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.](#)

Jericho was the first city confronted and conquered by the people of Israel on their way into the Promised Land after Moses led them out of Egypt.

Before the Israelites approached the city, they sent in some spies to check the place out. They met Rahab who agreed to help them because she had heard stories about these people and what their God had done for them. As a result, she and her family were saved when everyone else in the city was destroyed. She later married an Israelite and is actually included in the family line of Jesus.

There are two major things to learn from her. First, she didn't have all the answers, but she took a step of faith anyway. All she knew was what she had heard about God and what He had been doing for the people of Israel. She hadn't seen any miracles. She didn't have a copy of Scripture to read. She'd never been to church. She only had a *little bit* of knowledge, but she acted on it, by faith.

Friends, don't feel like you have to know and understand everything in order to trust God. Don't give yourself excuses like you don't really know your Bible that well, or you don't know God as well as other people do. Take the little bit that you *do* know and understand and work with that. Because here's what happens: the more you lean into God, the more He reveals Himself to you.

And notice this, because it's super cool. We've been talking about people like Enoch who walked with God, Noah who built the ark, Abraham the father of the nation, and Moses the leader of the nation, and now, the last person whose story we get, is Rahab, a woman, a Gentile – that is, an outsider, a person who is not part of Israel - and she was actually a harlot, a prostitute, when she took that first big step of faith. This is what is written down about her in history, forever. God used a woman whose life was not clean and pretty or holy and righteous to do something *amazing* that we're told to remember.

So, if God can use someone like that, and tell you, 'Yeah, I know who she is and what she's been doing' - if God can use someone like that, tell me why you think He can't use or won't use you? The most significant thing you ever do in your life, the most important decision you ever make, might be one you look back on years later and wonder, *how in the world did God use me then?* Or, why in the world did God bless that?

I'll tell you why, because it's simple faith. It's honest trust. It's believing that if God is God, He can do whatever He wants.

And of course, that's no excuse for you to stay in sin, we should all be maturing over time, coming out of the things that once defined us and destroyed us, but don't ever assume that you have to be this great spiritual superstar before God can ever use you. God uses people whose lives are a mess – it's not an endorsement of what they're doing or the sin in their lives, it's a recognition that if He only used perfect people He would never use any of us.

If God can use the harlot Rahab, He can use you – if you will trust Him, act on the little things you know, and submit to Him, **by faith**.

Well, now the author picks up the pace, he doesn't want this dragging on, there's a point to make, but there's also a lot of evidence to his argument so he begins to skim over other names and events to build his case:

Hebrews 11:32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets:

These are the names of just some of the political and military leaders and prophets God sent over the course of Israel's history to lead the nation and deliver it from enemies

33 who [through faith](#) subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35 Women received their dead raised to life again.

This is encouraging stuff, this is what we want right? Give me some faith like that! Two things to point out here:

First, do you remember what we saw regarding Sarah back in vs 11 – look there with me now, she, notice this: [received strength to conceive seed](#). When the time was right, God gave her what she did not have previously – she [received strength](#). Well, now look with me back at vs 34 – we read about those who [were made strong](#), and who [became valiant in battle](#).

This is important because how often do we say things like, I could never... and you fill in the blank. Well, no, maybe right now, on your own, you couldn't. But God's calling always comes with God's equipping. So maybe He's calling you to do something you never thought you could do, but when you step into it, He'll meet you and give you what you need for the task. *He'll make you strong enough for what you face.*

Second, notice women [received their dead raised to life again](#). Interestingly, most of the time when someone rises from the dead in Scripture it's in response to the request, sorrow, or prayer of a woman, and it's often her child she receives back. Madeleine and I had a friend whose son stopped breathing as an infant and died. She brought him outside and she was praying and crying over him in the lawn while her husband ran down the street to the home of a doctor friend and the boy came back. He's a teenager today and she always called him her miracle boy.

That's in physical terms, but Madeleine pointed out to me the spiritual analogy here too. How many women are praying for God to grant eternal life to their spiritually dead children through the gospel? How many have already seen it happen? And truly, what's the greater miracle, seeing someone's heart start beating again, seeing their lungs fill with air, or seeing someone's soul spring to eternal life through the work of the Holy Spirit pressing the gospel upon them?

Mommas, keep praying! Pray that you would see your spiritually dead children, your spiritually dead husband, your friend, your family member, your boss, whoever, keep praying that you would see the spiritually dead raised to life!

Well, it's all been good up to this point, right? But then suddenly, and without warning, things take a turn:

[\(35 continued\) Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings,](#)

yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

So, this is the part I don't like.

When I read Hebrews 11, I see people doing hard things for God. I see people trusting Him and things going well when they do. I see people overcome difficulty and challenge, they experience breakthrough and victory, they struggle and strain, they sweat and they pray and it all comes together for them in the end. And I like that. I want to spend my life that way. I'll endure the hardship if it leads to victory. I'm willing to do that.

But then I come to this.

I see people who did *the exact same* things, who struggled and strained and prayed, who faced difficult situations and difficult people, and suffered. They did all the right things and their life ended in pain. They sacrificed and fought and they never broke through. They resisted and never found relief. There was no happily ever after. No walking into the sunset. No celebration after the battle. And church, if I'm honest, *I don't want that*.

Now, I'm talking to you as Jeff, the man who happens to be a pastor. In my flesh, my natural inclination is to resist that. To say, "No thank you. That's not for me." Why would I do so much, go through so much, and never see a reward, never see any gain, never cash out any payoff?

I don't want this life. I don't want this option. But it's real. It happens. It was and is the outcome and ending for many who love and follow Jesus. They do everything right, and get kicked in the teeth anyway.

So I've had some real conversations with God this week. I've told Him I don't like this. I don't want this. I don't want to stand up here and teach this *because it could be true* and I don't want to experience that. I want the victory. I want the payoff. I want the struggle that produces rewards. I'm not asking for an easy life, but I'm asking for the good outcome that makes the trials worth it.

And after all my pouting, here's where I feel like God has brought me – He asks a question: if you knew your season would end in a trip to the Super Bowl, but you also knew you would lose the big game, would train and play anyway?

Think about this – imagine it's the off season and you know that once the season starts, you're actually going to make it all the way, but you'll lose at the end. Do you still suit up? Do you still spend the summer working out, getting stronger, practicing some skills? Do you still go to two-a-day practices and training camps? Do you still show up and give it your all, all season long? Do you still give every game your very best?

Are you here for the process and the struggle, love of the game and your team, or are you just here for the outcome? If you're not guaranteed victory, are you still willing to play?

Well, here's the deal – we're all going to face Super Bowl moments in life. And victory in the stadium *is not guaranteed*. But God isn't looking for you to *win*, He's looking for you to *play well*. Whether or not you have a Super Bowl ring on your finger, you're still going to have a crown on your head in heaven. Is that enough? Or is it the ring you really want? Friends, this is what it really boils down to. Do you want a victorious life on earth or eternal life in heaven? Some people get both, but if that's not you, are you still OK with heaven?

Because, look at this:

39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

What it's saying is, all of this happened before Jesus. None of them knew exactly what God was doing, they hadn't seen the sacrifice He was preparing. They believed something was coming, they believed He was working, but they didn't know what it would look like – they were missing something, something we all now have in Christ.

But having said that, there's something else super important for you to notice here. Look with me at vs 39. What does it say? [All these](#) had a good testimony, [all these](#) had faith, [all these](#) would one day receive the promise made possible through Jesus with us. Whether they saw victory and overcame their situation here on earth or whether it ended in suffering and solitude and pain, they [all](#) had faith, they [all](#) obtained a good testimony and they [all](#) received the eternal promise.

Which means: *you can't make a direct link between outcomes on earth and destiny in eternity*. Look at vs 34 with me, what does it say? They [escaped the edge of the sword](#). But then look at vs 37. What does it say? They [were slain with the sword](#). Some escaped, some did not – how do you control who is who, which is which? We want to know. We want a plan. We want an answer. Because, *we want to be the ones who escape*.

That's normal, it's natural. But listen to me, please, please listen to me. If for some reason, you don't escape the sword, if for some reason, you pray, and pray, and pray, you try to do everything right, and it doesn't turn out the way you hoped, *it doesn't mean you've done something wrong*. I don't know why, but sometimes God saves you and sometimes He lets you be slain, and *either one is OK eternally*. I don't want to tell you that, church, but it's true.

So, what are we supposed to do? How do we face the fact that we're called to play the big game, to step into the stadium *with no guarantee of the final score on earth* even if eternity is secure in Christ? Well, look with me at Chapter 12 where we find some answers:

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

We find two things here. First, as we have been saying all along in Hebrews 11 – these examples are put forward to encourage us. We see these things happened to them and we understand they might happen to us, *but if they do*, we also see how things turned out – we see that God has always called people to endure, patiently, **by faith** even when facing incredible obstacles.

And since that is true, we should aggressively cut weight. I remember hearing about a Navy SEAL training to climb one of the world's highest mountains and as part of his preparation he actually cut the tags out of every piece of clothing he was taking. It's not uncommon for people attempting such climbs. If you're going up a massive mountain and you have to carry everything you bring, you're not just concerned about extra pounds, you're actually looking to cut extra ounces and grams.

Christian, is that how you approach life?

Are there things, maybe even good things, hobbies, entertainments, collections, stuff that's clogging up your life, weighing you down? Are you carrying unnecessary weight? Listen, that's a question we need to keep asking, because life changes over time, and your responsibilities and obligations change over time. Things that were OK when you were young and single or before kids came along might not be wrong, they're not sinful, but they're a weight now. They slow you down. You might pick them up again later, who knows? But right now, is there anything you're trying to drag with you through life that's taking up too much time, attention, or money? Where can you cut some tags out of the T-shirts of your life *so that* you can make it up the mountain in front of you?

And certainly, what about the sin that so **easily ensnares us**. Do you ever do any trail running? It's not like running on the track or the road. Depending on the trail you may need to look down and actively assess exactly where you're going to place your next step so you don't land on a root or rock or slide in that mud. Life is like that. There are snares for sin everywhere. You carry a highly effective one in your pocket or purse, you might have it in your hand right now. How often has that little device ensnared you and pulled you into sin? How often has it led you to look at things you didn't need to see, or stirred up emotions in you that you didn't need to have? Are you using it at as a God-given tool to accomplish good things in life, or is it **so easily ensnaring you**?

Church, we need to cut weight and avoid snares of sin, because notice, we are called to: **run with endurance the race that is set before us**.

Here's the problem as I see it: you don't need endurance for a sprint. You need it for a marathon – and that's what we're called to in the Christian life. A long obedience in the same direction, regardless of the obstacles.

Listen to me my brothers and sisters, if you're tired, if you're weary, I get it. But God is calling us to [endure](#). And that is why He's giving us all these examples, and clearing the path for us Himself. Notice what we are told to do next:

[2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.](#)

[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.](#)

If I can paraphrase here – God isn't calling you to do anything that He has not taken on and faced Himself. When you come to trials and hardship in life, look to Jesus and remember Him. This is the God-given prescription for handling your difficult days: [consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.](#)

You know what that says? It says there will be a tendency toward weariness and discouragement in your soul. And considering Jesus is the best antidote for it. Church, I think a lot of us have experienced some [weariness and discouragement](#) in our souls lately. So, we need to [look to Jesus](#) and [consider](#) Him all the more. This is God's answer.

So, if you're keeping up with this – in order to live the Christian life we have the example of other people to follow, we cut weight and avoid sin, we adopt the endurance mentality, we look to Jesus, and one more thing – we remember that God is overseeing 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.”](#)

[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. 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. 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.](#)

Here's what this says: sometimes the hardships in your life are things God allows or even assigns to you in order to make you better and stronger and more mature.

Discipline has two sides – it can refer to both negative and positive training. If you do something wrong you receive discipline. Someone in authority confronts and corrects your behavior.

But there's another kind of discipline too - the ability to determine to do hard things well. We speak of a well-disciplined team that still functions under pressure. They have been trained, stretched, drilled, and they have learned to hold it together when everyone else is falling apart.

God uses both kinds of discipline in our lives. And neither is fun to endure, but what is the ultimate goal? [The peaceable fruit of righteousness](#). This is what God wants to produce in you as you faithfully follow Him, with discipline and diligence. And this is why life is so hard at times: we're surrounded by unrighteousness. We want to follow God in a world that wants to serve itself. There's bound to be conflict – even Jesus suffered on earth.

So, pulling all this together, here's what I see. We live on a fallen planet surrounded by fallen people so there is a constant pull toward weariness and discouragement for those who call on God as Father. Some of you feel that pull right now.

We fight it by [considering one another](#), seeing that life doesn't always go well, sometimes we conquer and sometimes we suffer, but we can always look to Jesus and remember all that He has endured for us. We [consider](#) Him, we go to Him, we talk with Him, we cry to Him and we ask Him for help. Meanwhile, we also look to cut the weight of anything that's holding us down, watch out for the snares of sin, and adopt an endurance attitude remembering that our Father also uses the events of our lives to help us grow.

I wish I had something simple to say. I wish I had something easy to say. But this is what I found in Scripture, so I'm sharing it with you and preaching it to myself, verse by verse, for better or worse. I hope we can encourage one another as we play our Super Bowls, hoping for a ring and victory on earth, but knowing, either way, we'll receive a crown in heaven, and it's much, much, more than just a participation trophy. So let's suit up church, and show up, and look to God, [by faith](#) wherever He leads.

Let's pray.

The
CITYGATES
C H U R C H
Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Hebrews 11:30-12:11
When Faith Hurts

Summary: There is a constant pull toward weariness and discouragement for those who call on God as Father, we fight it with steadfast faith.

- How do you handle difficult sections of Scripture that you don't naturally like the message of?
 - Have you grown to appreciate or accept certain passages that were once more difficult for you?
- Have you experienced miraculous victories in life? If so, what were they?
- Have you experienced suffering and sorrow, rejection and defeat?
 - Go back and read Hebrews 11:4, what was Abel's experience of living by faith? In light of that, why is it significant that he is the first individual introduced in the chapter?
- If you knew, before the season began, that your team would make it to the Super Bowl and lose, would you still play? Why, or why not? What parallels do you see here with victory and suffering in the Christian life? Where does the analogy break down?
- What are some things you've cast off, or need to cast off, as a weight that hinders?
 - Cross reference with John 15:2 – why does the Father prune a branch that is already fruitful? Have you experienced this, has God removed things from your life for this reason yet?
- Why is it accurate to describe sin as a snare?
- How does viewing life as an endurance race affect your approach to it?
- How does thinking about Jesus and all that He endured help you fight off weariness and discouragement?
- Notice, verse 5 says you have forgotten that God disciplines us. Is that true of you? How often do you think of God using something difficult, challenging, or painful to correct, train, discipline, or guide you?