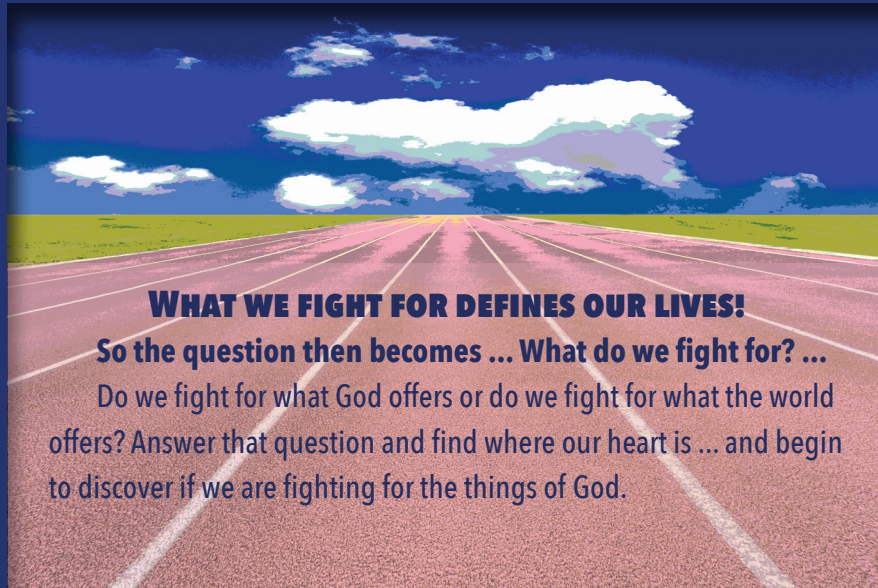


Not Forgetting God 3

LIVING THE LIFE THAT GOD SETS BEFORE US



- (Philippians 2:16–17 NLT) Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of Christ's return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless. But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God, just like your faithful service is an offering to God. And I want all of you to share that joy.

OUTLINE ... (Hebrews 12:1–29)

NOT FORGETTING ...

THAT “OUR GOD IS GOD” AND WORTHY OF OUR REVERENCE AND AWE AND THAT FOLLOWING THIS MAJESTIC, AWESOME, HOLY, TERRORIZING, DREADFUL, DANGEROUS “GOD WHO IS GOD” IS EVERY BIT AND MORE WORTH OUR STRUGGLE

1. When we commit ourselves to live the lives God sets before us to the end of our lives on earth, then our lives will be defined by the holiness of God, 12:1-11.

A. We accept the life God sets before us and lay aside everything that would hinder us from living that life, 12:1.

- (Hebrews 12:1 ESV) Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, **and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.**

B. We look to and consider Jesus, 12:2-4.

- (Hebrews 12:2–4 ESV) **Looking to Jesus**, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 **Consider him** who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.
- (Hebrews 2:9–10 ESV) But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist,

in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

- (Hebrews 5:7–8 ESV) In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. 8 **Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.**
- (Deuteronomy 9:3 ESV) Know therefore today that **he who goes over before you as a consuming fire is the LORD your God.** He will destroy them and subdue them before you. So you shall drive them out and make them perish quickly, as the LORD has promised you.
- (Hebrews 13:8 ESV) **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.**
- (Revelation 1:14 ESV) The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. **His eyes were like a flame of fire.**
- (Revelation 2:18 ESV) And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: “The words of **the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire,** and whose feet are like burnished bronze.”
- (Revelation 19:11–16 ESV) Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12 **His eyes are like a flame of fire,** and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and **the name by which he is called is The Word of God.** 14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh **he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.**

C. We embrace our Father's discipline and share his holiness, 12:5-11.

WHAT BETTER PLACE TO LEARN HOLINESS?

We receive our "education" in holiness via "the Consuming Fire"—aka our Father in heaven.

- (Hebrews 12:5–11 ESV) And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as **sons**? "My son, do not regard lightly the **discipline** of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. 6 For the Lord **disciplines** the one he loves, and chastises **every son** whom he receives." 7 It is for **discipline** that you have to endure. God is treating you as **sons**. For what **son** is there whom his father does not **discipline**? 8 If you are left without **discipline**, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he **disciplines** us for our good, that we may share his **holiness**. 11 **For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.**

2. When we commit ourselves to living in holiness and peace in our local fellowship, then we will live in the presence of God and his unshakable kingdom, 12:12-27, cf. Proverbs 4:26-27, Deuteronomy 29:18-19.

As our lives are now yielding the peaceful fruit of righteousness, we are to be vigilant and diligent in strengthening our fellowship of believers by bringing peace and holiness to everyone in our fellowship through the harvest of righteousness in our lives.

A. We commit ourselves to straight paths and peace in our local fellowship, 12:12-17.

- (Hebrews 12:12–17 ESV) Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen

your weak knees, 13 **and make straight paths for your feet**, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. 14 Strive for **peace** with everyone, and for the **holiness** without which no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the **grace** of God; **that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;** 16 that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. 17 For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

■ When we ponder the path of our feet, God will lead us to fight/struggle for peace for everyone and bless us with holiness.

OUR FEET IDENTIFY THE PATH WE ARE ON BECAUSE OUR EVERY DAY STEPS ARE THE TRUE INDICATORS OF OUR LIFE DIRECTION.

- (Proverbs 4:26–27 ESV) **Ponder the path of your feet**; then all your ways will be sure. 27 Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.
- (Proverbs 4:26–27 NASB95) **Watch the path of your feet**. And all your ways will be established. 27 Do not turn to the right nor to the left; Turn your foot from evil.

■ When we ponder the path of our feet and fight/struggle for grace for all, God will lead us in grace and to grace and away from the root which bears poisonous and bitter fruit.

- (Deuteronomy 29:18–19 ESV) **Beware** lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. **Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, 19 one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, "I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart."** This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike.

B. We find ourselves living in the presence of God and his unshakable kingdom, 12:18-24.

- (Hebrews 12:18–24 ESV) **For you have not come to** what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest 19 and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. 20 For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” 21 Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” 22 **But you have come to** Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

C. Living in the presence of God and his unshakable kingdom we do not refuse the One who speaks from heaven, 12:25-27.

- (Hebrews 12:25–27 ESV) **See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.** For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. 26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” 27 This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

3. Those who live their lives before the Consuming Fire will worship him in reverence and awe, 12:28-29.

Now we find ourselves as sons of God on the path of Jesus Son of God. Trained and educated in holiness by the Consuming Fire, we

offer acceptable worship. Brimming with praise and adoration ... overflowing with a wonderful, powerful, abiding appreciation for the unshakable kingdom which we have received, we bow before him in reverence and awe.

- (Hebrews 12:28–29 ESV) Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, **for our God is a consuming fire.**

COMMENTARY ...

- *****Here is the essential link between Christology and discipleship. From 2:10 we learned that God intended not only to perfect Jesus as Son through his suffering, but **that Jesus was to be the pioneer of “many sons” whom God would lead to glory**, that is, to God’s own presence. **By now designating his hearers as “sons” whom God is educating**, the author picks up from that earlier statement, and from the characterization of Jesus as “pioneer and perfecter of faith” in 12:2. We remember also how the author spoke of Jesus’ own process of perfecting in 5:7–10: “although he was a son, he learned (emathen) obedience from the things he suffered (epathen).”
- The suffering experienced by Jesus was integral to his obedient and faithful response to God. **In just the same manner, the author here insists, the sufferings experienced by these discouraged and dispirited Christians are the very means by which they are now to be educated into the status of “sons” like the Son of God, Jesus.** When the author declares in 12:7 that “God is treating you as sons,” he means also that “God is treating you as God treated his own beloved Son.”
- Once the link between education and the father-son relationship is established, the author can elaborate four dimensions of that relationship. Each sentence exploits the analogy between the human parental role and the divine. **The first statement begins with a rhetorical question, “What father does not educate his son?” The intended answer must be, “There is none.” It**

is unthinkable. [Johnson, L. T. (2012). *Hebrews: A Commentary*. (C. C. Black, M. E. Boring, & J. T. Carroll, Eds.) (1st ed., p. 321). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.] Hebrews challenges our imagination to enter a universe that is not defined by quantitative measure but by qualitative difference, to ponder a world in which the unseen is more real, more powerful, and more attractive than that which can be seen and touched and counted. **In a word, Hebrews proposes as real a world that most of us consider imaginary.**

[Luke Johnson, L. T. (2012). *Hebrews: A Commentary*. (C. C. Black, M. E. Boring, & J. T. Carroll, Eds.) (1st ed., pp. 1–2). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.]

- **Conflict in the church brings glory to Satan and disgraces our God.** Few things will grieve God more and impede the great race more than conflict in the Body of Christ. In fact, conflict in the church—and the failure to pursue peace—is the most public reason so many never finish. Satan too often infiltrates committees and elders’ homes and parsonages, paralyzing those who ought to be setting the pace for others. [Hughes, R. K. (1993). *Hebrews: an anchor for the soul* (Vol. 2, p. 180). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.]
- Thus our author pictures himself and his readers as competitors who, as they contend for the faith in the arena of life, are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, namely, those champions of faith and perseverance of earlier generations, crowded as it were row upon row within the encircling amphitheater. **If these are witnesses in the sense of spectators, as the imagery implies, it is even more important to understand that they are witnesses in the sense of those who have proved themselves to be unflinching professors of the faith and have overcome by the word of their testimony** (see Rev. 12:11). [Hughes, P. E. (1977). *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (p. 519). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.]
- **THE CONTEXT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE ... what is the arena, in which you as a Christian should interpret your life?**

... The writer of Hebrews suggests a far different context, namely, that Christians should think of themselves as “surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses” who bear testimony to faith in the Lord. If you are a believer, he says, this is the context in which you should see yourself. This is the body to which you belong, and whose approval you should court. This is the audience, as it were, before whom you live, a great arena filled with the beloved of God, the faithful of all ages, and now is the day when you are running your race to the sounds of their approval and encouragement. ... But there is a great difference here, namely, that the writer of Hebrews does not see these as dead men to be remembered, but living witnesses to be heard. ... **This, then, is how you should conceive of your life. You belong to this noble company of God’s people, living in this world but glorifying God through faith. This is the context of your life. You are surrounded by those with whom you will spend eternity, those who will be your brothers and sisters long after everyone else is consigned to judgment.** You should hear their voices and conform to the pattern of their faith, not to the pattern of this world. [Phillips, R. D. (2006). *Hebrews*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (pp. 529–530). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.]

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- (Exodus 19:18 ESV) Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because **the LORD had descended on it in fire.** The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.
 - (Deuteronomy 4:11–12 ESV) And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while **the mountain burned with fire** to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom. 12 Then **the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire.** You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice.
 - (Deuteronomy 4:23–24 ESV) **Take care, lest you forget** the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the LORD your God has forbidden you. 24 **For**

the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

- (Deuteronomy 9:1–3 ESV) Hear, O Israel: you are to cross over the Jordan today, to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you, cities great and fortified up to heaven, 2 a people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim, whom you know, and of whom you have heard it said, “Who can stand before the sons of Anak?” 3 **Know therefore today that he who goes over before you as a consuming fire is the LORD your God.** He will destroy them and subdue them before you. So you shall drive them out and make them perish quickly, as the LORD has promised you.
- (Deuteronomy 33:1–2 ESV) This is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the people of Israel before his death. 2 He said, “The LORD came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran; **he came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand.**
- (Psalm 29:7 ESV) **The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.**
- (Psalm 97:1–5 ESV) The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. 3 **Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around.** 4 His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. 5 The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth.
- (Isaiah 30:27 ESV) Behold, the name of the LORD comes from afar, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; his lips are full of fury, **and his tongue is like a devouring fire.**
- (Isaiah 30:30 ESV) And the LORD will cause his majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of his arm to be seen, in furious anger **and a flame of devouring fire,** with a cloudburst and storm and hailstones.

- (Daniel 7:9–10 ESV) As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; **his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. 10 A stream of fire issued and came out from before him;** a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.
- (2 Thessalonians 1:7–9 ESV) And to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, **when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire,** inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

THE STANDS ARE PACKED WITH THE SAINTS OF OLD
... The writer of Hebrews now applies the same terminology to us. First, he tells us that the stands are packed with the saints of old. He places them there not merely as spectators, but also as a cheering section. He tells us to pay attention to their testimony, to heed the encouragement they give us. There is Abel reminding us of the true sacrifice we are to trust. Out cries Noah that while the world is condemned there is an ark of salvation. Abraham cheers out for all who hope for promises yet unfulfilled, just the way he did for so many years in Canaan. Moses shouts out to those who, like him, must forfeit status and favor in the world, riches and rank, in order to follow the Lord. Their presence gives us the home-field advantage for our race, if only we will see them there by faith and hear their cries. [Phillips, R. D. (2006). *Hebrews*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (p. 530). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.]