



#TheStruggle IsReal

Small Group Discussion Guide
#THE STRUGGLE IS REAL



PREPARATION

■ **STUDY**

Spend the week studying Hebrews 12:1–17. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

■ **DETERMINE**

Which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group.

■ **PRAY**

Pray for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members, and their openness to God's Word.

■ **LANDING POINT**

God lovingly disciplines me so I can run life's race with endurance.



GROUP DISCUSSION

■ **CONFIDENTIALITY** | What's said in the group stays in the group.

■ **NO CROSS-TALK** | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

■ **NO FIXING** | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

■ **SHARING** | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.



INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

WHEN LIFE GETS HARD

Marathon runners spend weeks to months training their bodies to be able to endure the grueling 26-mile race. Their training must be rigorous if they hope to finish well. That means running consistently and sticking to a healthy diet. It also requires building mental toughness to be able to press on when their body tells them, “Stop! I’m spent!”

The Christian life is no sprint. It’s a marathon. Like a trained runner, we also need discipline. We need motivation. God wants you to run life’s race well. This week you will discuss how God lovingly disciplines you so that you can run life’s race with endurance.

🗣️: *Why are training and discipline essential in athletic training?*

🗣️: *How would you explain that the Christian life is a marathon in your own words?*



LEARN

Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

LOOK TO JESUS [VV.1-3]

Hebrews 12 opens with the picture of a sports arena. There’s a great crowd of spectators cheering the athletes on as they run their race. Sweat pours from the athletes as they run through the exhaustion and pain. The author of Hebrews tells his readers they’re the runners, and the race they’re running is the race of faith.

These believers were being persecuted for their faith. Some felt inadequate. Some were ready to quit. They needed motivation. That’s why the author points them to Jesus, the object and model of their faith. He endured the greatest suffering “for the joy that was set before Him.” He embodied the author’s definition of faith (see Hebrews 11:1) as someone who believed God would be true to His promises, despite the circumstances.

Read Hebrews 12:1-17. Put yourself in the position of the author's readers.

Q: *What would have been most encouraging to you?*

Q: *Recall a time when someone encouraged you in the midst of struggle. What difference did it make?*

UNDERSTAND THE FATHER'S DISCIPLINE [VV.4-11]

Like any good athlete, these believers needed consistent discipline to run well and finish the race. God trains His children and shapes their character through the struggle. The trials they were experiencing proved God's presence, not His absence. God disciplines those He loves. The author wanted his readers to see their present circumstances differently. To see that when believers submit to the Father's discipline, He trains them to run with great endurance.

Q: *Where in your life are you experiencing the Father's loving discipline?*

HOW TO RUN WITH ENDURANCE [VV.12-17]

So what does it look like to run with endurance? The author of Hebrews shows us. A runner needs focus. Without it, she will get thrown off course by something that distracts or entangles her. Through Jesus, God produces in believers the qualities needed to run well. Believers should also be aware of any sin that can throw them off course. Sin can spread like a disease in believers' hearts and prevent them from experiencing the life-changing power of God's grace.

Q: *What positive things does the author urge his readers to seek and live out?
What negative things does he caution us to avoid?*



Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

LOOK BACK - LOOK UP

The baton has been passed to us, and we run the race of faith today. Let's look at three ways you can run life's race well and with endurance.

First, you need to *look back*. Go back and read Hebrews 11. Every one of those heroes faced difficulty. Some even died for their faith. They had strength in the struggle, but their strength didn't originate in them. It came from God. He produced endurance in them. God gives His people strength to endure any difficulty. You need a community around you to remind you to find your strength in Him.

Second, you need to *look up*. Jesus is more than an example of faithfulness under trial. His power is at work in you to strengthen you to run like He did—with endurance. He gives you everything you need to run the race well (2 Peter 1:3). Following Jesus means that we will suffer for Him. There are no exceptions. But you can suffer well. You can let God use your suffering to change you and those around you.

Q: *Make a short list of people whose faith has inspired you. How did they live? How did they face adversity?*

Q: *What does someone need in order to suffer well?*

RUN FREE

Next, you need to *run free*. There are things that hold you back. Some are good things that you've made ultimate things. Some are clearly sin, and they need to be rooted out. God is disciplining you so you can see Him as your ultimate treasure and joy. God wants you to run free. To do that, you need to let go of anything that gets between you and Him.

Q: *How does sin entangle you and keep you from running free?*

Q: *What are some things that are holding you back (or could) from running free?*



LEAD

Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

LOOK FORWARD

It's also necessary to *look forward*. In the moment, the desire to quit can be strong. When life is hard and painful, it's easy to resort to self-pity, cynicism, fear, or doubt. Having endurance is having the ability to see past your circumstances. To look further down the path to see what God is doing and trust that it's for your good. To move forward in faith, despite your emotions and circumstances in the moment. Endurance isn't easy, and it's learned over time through practice.

When life gets hard, remember that you're not alone in your suffering. The Father is with you, and He uses every experience along the way to prepare you for the hopeful future He wants to give you.

Q: *What's something you could do or say in the moment to see past your circumstances?*

Q: *What would it look like for you to see your life as God's way of preparing a hopeful future for you? How would you live differently?*



PRAY

Acknowledge where life's race is hard for you right now. Ask God to reveal any areas in your life that keep you from running free. Pray for a heart that submits to the Father's discipline and looks to Jesus in the face of suffering.



FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Read 1 Corinthians 9:24–27 and consider the similarities between Paul’s words and what the author of Hebrews says.
- Ask the group to share any stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their lives.



COMMENTARY

A CLOUD OF WITNESSES The “witnesses” referred to in Hebrews 12:1 are the catalog of believers the author previously mentioned in chapter 11. They were commended for their faith in God and for trusting in God’s promises. Jesus is the final and ultimate example of these faithful witnesses.

THE RACE SET BEFORE US The imagery of an athlete running a race is used elsewhere in the New Testament by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:24–27 and 2 Timothy 4:7–8.

FAITHFUL SUFFERING God’s people “are not exempt from opposition in this world (John 15:18–20; Acts 14:22; 1 Peter 2:21), but faithful suffering is the pathway to glory and blessing. Weakness and discouragement in our adversities is what we must guard against (Hebrews 6:11–12; Galatians 6:9; Revelation 2:3).”¹

TWO METAPHORS The author of Hebrews uses two metaphors in verses 5–14: 1) an athlete running a race and 2) a father disciplining his child. Just as an athlete must submit to training in order to perform well in competition, a child needs to submit to training by his or her father in order to mature and grow.

ESAU’S EXAMPLE Esau is used as an example of unholiness or godlessness because he disregarded his position as heir to Isaac and to God’s promises (see Gen. 25:29–34). He gave up his inheritance for just a bowl of stew. Esau was shortsighted, and his story is a cautionary tale of giving in to the temptation to give up greater blessings in exchange for temporary relief or pleasure.

ENDNOTES:

1. Douglas J. Moo, “The Letters and Revelation,” in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 2518.