

## Running the Race of Your Life:

why does the race have to be so hard? Hebrews 12:3-13 (lesson A)

Purpose of Discussion: To better understand why God has hard stretches in the race He has marked out for us.

Sermon Refresher: We often come up with various metaphors for life: life is a box of chocolates, life is a journey, life is a ride. The Bible gives us the metaphor of running a race. As we have seen over previous weeks, our race has been marked out for us by God and has a finish line of joy. But, what about the hard stretches? Are these mistakes? The author of Hebrews wants us to see that God has certainly included places of real hardship in the race He has marked out for us. God has done so because as our heavenly father, he is using hardships to train us for our good.

Icebreaker: What is the most memorable race/competition you have competed in? Why?

Transition: Often the greater the race, the more training is required of us. Training isn't the fun part. That's one reason we need coaches: to push us beyond the training we would do naturally on our own. What if God needs to put hard things in our life to do the same thing?

### Discussion

1. How do you tend to respond to hardships? [*gut it out, get overwhelmed, avoid or runaway from hard things, deny that something's hard, complain, compare your hardships to others, self-pity*]
2. If you took out all of the hard stretches in your life and made your life only success and ease, what effect would that have on your soul? How might you be different?

3. Read [Hebrews 12:3-10](#). How are we prone to view God when hardships come into our life? *[punishing us, abandoning us, indifferent towards us]* How does seeing God as our father change how we feel about our hardships?

Digging Deeper (Optional): Does fatherly love and discipline fit together in your mind? Did you experience loving fatherly discipline in your life in a way that helped you? If not, what might help to fit those together?

Discuss this quote from Becky Pipper, *Hope Has Its Reasons*:

*“Nearly a century ago the theologian E.H. Gifford wrote: ‘Human love here offers a true analogy: the more a father loves his son, the more he hates in him the drunkard, the liar, the traitor.’ The fact is...anger isn’t the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference.”*

4. Read [Hebrews 12:10-13](#). God disciplines us for our good. What are some examples in your life when you grew spiritually or personally because of hardship? *[leaders: have your own personal example in mind to perhaps begin the discussion]*

**Digging deeper (optional):** Read [2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#). What role did the thorn in the flesh (some physical or spiritual hardship) play in Paul’s life? Do you ever find God using hardship to wake you up to your need for him?

5. What is hard about this stretch that God has marked out for you?
6. If God is putting hardship into our life for our good as our loving Father, then what does it look like for us to respond rightly to it? *[accepting instead of resisting or complaining, turning to God to depend upon him, inviting in a friend to bear the burden with you]*

Prayer Time ideas:

- Pray for each other in light of what was shared: either have everyone pray for the person on their right or break up into groups of three or four.

Handout attached Lesson B for discussion next week.

## **Running the Race of Your Life:**

running well the race God has marked out for you Hebrews 12:3-13 (lesson B)

*Take some time this week to pray and reflect on the following questions. Your group can share your reflections with each other at your meeting the next week.*

Read Hebrews 12:1-3.

How would you describe the stretch of the race that you have just come out of?

How would you describe the stretch that you are in now or about to enter? What hardships has God marked out for you?

What obstacles stand in the way of you running your race well?

What sins or temptations have the potential to trip you up?

What are some ways that you can fix your eyes on Jesus practically this semester?

What will it look like for you to run the race with endurance through this stretch?