

## Hebrews 12:1-3 (1)

In Hebrews 11, the author of Hebrews characterizes some key aspects of the faith of the OT witnesses (**Heb 11:1**) in connection with which God testified of the invisible objects of hope to the saints of old (**Heb 11:2**). Those saints in turn, responded with persevering faith and became “a cloud of witnesses” to us (**Heb 12:1**).

The goal of Hebrews 11 is not only testimony, however, though it is this primarily; it is also exhortation. This is why **Hebrews 12** begins with the key word “therefore,” requiring that we deal with the implications of the witness of the OT saints and apply the lessons of their testimony.

### Summary

**Hebrews 12:1-3, shows that Christians should think of themselves as “surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses” and apply the lessons of those saints of old who bore testimony to the invisible objects of hope.**

#### 1. Interpretive Context vs. 1a

What is the context in which you as a Christian should interpret your life?

How you conceive of the context or arena of your life will dramatically shape your how you live. Christians should think of themselves as “surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses” who bear testimony to faith in the Lord (**see Heb 11**).

Believers belong to the company of God’s people, living in this world but glorifying God through faith and testifying to the invisible objects of hope.

#### 2. Defined Calling vs. 1b-c

Verse 1 concludes by telling us that God has marked out a race for believers. The Christian’s calling is to “run with endurance the race that is set before us” (**12:1c**).

Many Christians spend too much effort trying to figure out what lies ahead, when our calling is to persevere in faith wherever God should lead us.

This metaphor of life as a race was common in ancient literature as well as in the Bible (**1 Cor 9:24–25; 2 Tim. 4:7–8**).

The author of Hebrews now applies the same picture to believers then and now.

First, he told us to pay attention to the witness of the saints of old, to heed their testimony and how they persevered in running the race set before them.

Abel witnesses to us of the true sacrifice of Christ in which we are to trust. Noah testifies that whilst the world is condemned there is an ark of salvation. Abraham witnesses to the hope in the promises yet unfulfilled for many years in Canaan. Moses

testifies to those who, like him, must forfeit status and favor in the world, riches and rank, in order to follow the Lord.

The context in which we see ourselves as Christians has a great influence in our thinking and acting, but how we conceive of our calling in life is equally vital.

How liberating it is for the Christian to realize that his or her true calling is the race of faith in the living God: to persevere in the various settings where God will place you, to hold fast your convictions and your obedience to God in different settings and seasons of life, to grow in grace and to glorify God through faith all the way to the end of your life.

This is not an easy calling, and just as if we were athletes in training, the author of Hebrews gives us training instructions” (**Heb 12:1b**).

He speaks here of two things:

First; laying aside weight (hindrances).

The author tells us that anything that slows us down must be discarded if we are to run well.

Each of us, as believers, should look at the things in our lives and ask, “Is it a help or is it a hindrance?”

Secondly, the author turns to sin.

Hindrances weigh us down, but sin entangles our feet, causing us to stumble and fall. We take sin lightly at our great peril.

Therefore, we must be wise regarding sin, seeking grace from God to be free from actual sins that we know about, whilst shunning the temptations to sin that abound.

E.g. King David.

True believers cannot afford to trifle with sin.

We have a race to run, a course marked out by God for these few short years of our lives, and unless we actively shun sin we will quickly find ourselves distracted and entangled.

This is our calling, the challenging race of a life of faith.

Notice what kind of race Christians run.

It is not a short sprint.

It is a long-distance race, which does not need speed so much as perseverance.

Many experience the flush of excitement at conversion, only to find that enthusiasm must be converted into endurance. (See the risen Christ’s words to the church at Thyatira, **Rev. 2:19**).