

Focus



Bible reference: Hebrews 12:1-2



Placing Hebrews 12:1-2 in context, we first meet the amazing cloud of faithful witnesses scattered throughout the Old Testament by diving into Hebrews 11. Learning from their acts of faith, the young people will amplify the words of Hebrews 12:1-2 and discover what it means to fix our focus on Jesus in every aspect of our lives.

You will need:

- Hall of Faith handout - cut up
- Bibles (if needed)
- Art materials for the Sound Check activity



Beat

Say:

Our focus Scripture for today is Hebrews 12:1-2. To set the Beat for the session we need to step back to the previous chapter to look at the people of faith mentioned in this letter to the Hebrews. The first word of this passage is 'therefore', so it is important to see what came before this opening statement.

Leader's notes:

On the Hall of Faith handout, cut up the names and the summaries of each character. Split the group into pairs and give them the cut-up 'Hall of Faith' handout. Spend five minutes matching the names with the characters. It may help to have Bibles to look at Hebrews 11. [Names mentioned here for leader's reference.]

Abel	Sarah	Moses	Samson
Enoch	Isaac	Rahab	Jepthah
Noah	Jacob	Gideon	David
Abraham	Joseph	Barak	Samuel

Ask:

Which characters have you heard of before?

What acts of faith is your character known for?

 **Bridge****Ask:**

- Which of the Bible characters from Hebrews 11 would you like to discover more about?
- What resources could you use to learn more about this Bible character?

 **Amplify****Say:**

Hebrews 11 provides us with numerous examples of people who lived a life of faith in God. The first verse of Hebrews 11 gives us a clear definition of faith.

Read:

¹ Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.
(Hebrews 11:1)

Say:

It then goes on to say that all the people we learn about throughout Hebrews 11 lived a life of faith. They had confidence in God's power, even when they didn't know what the outcome would be.

Ask:

- Before we read the Scripture we're going to amplify today, how do we usually use the word 'therefore' when we are writing or speaking?
- Share a sentence that uses the word 'therefore', eg 'She was injured and therefore unable to play for her team.'

Say:

The word 'therefore' is an adverb which means 'for that reason' or 'consequently'. In Hebrews 11 the author of this letter carefully lists many of the people of faith that have gone before. It gives numerous examples of the moments where they demonstrated their commitment to God. In this context we can amplify the words of Hebrews 12:1-2.

Read:

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance

the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

(Hebrews 12:1-2)

Leader's notes:

The group may want to amplify different aspects of this Scripture, but the following questions and notes are provided to support the discussion.

'Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses ...'

- Who are the 'great cloud of witnesses'? (Remember the opening Beat activity.)
- What example of faith do they provide for us?

'...let us throw off everything that hinders'

The word hinder means 'to make it difficult (for someone) to do something or for something to happen'.

- What kinds of things, positive or negative, make it difficult for us to focus on Jesus?
- What do you think the author of this letter means when they suggest that we should 'throw off' these things? What would that look like in real life?

'...and the sin that so easily entangles'

We are also advised to 'throw off' the 'sin that so easily entangles'.

Sin is a word that is often avoided as it seems outdated in the context of our modern way of thinking.

Leader's notes:

Watch the clip together and discuss how it deepens the young people's understanding of sin.

Watch:

What does it mean to sin? Bible Project (stop at 4:30)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNOZ7ocLD74>

- What does it mean to throw off the sin that easily entangles our lives? How can we do that?

'...and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us'

- How does the image of running a race help us to understand what it means to follow Jesus throughout our lives?
- What kinds of events or situations impact our ability to persevere in the race? What can we do in those circumstances?

'...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith'

- Has anyone heard of the term 'navel gazing'? It is the activity of spending too much time considering your own thoughts, feelings or problems - basically being too self-absorbed and pre-occupied with yourself to the exclusion of everything else.

- How does fixing our eyes on Jesus help us to be less focused on ourselves and our faults and failings?
- What helps us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus?
- What is meant by the phrase 'the pioneer and perfecter of faith'? According to the *Biblical Theology Study Bible*, 'Jesus is the object, as well as model, of faith for Christians.' Jesus is at the centre of it all, and remains our focus point no matter our circumstances.

'For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God'

Say:

To help us understand the final part of Hebrews 12:1-2, we're going to watch the remainder of the clip 'What does it mean to sin?'

Watch:

What does it mean to sin? Bible Project (4:30-5:15)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNOZ7ocLD74>

Say:

Sometimes we think sin is just a word for doing bad things. But when we think about it as failing to love God and love others, it can help encourage us to focus our minds and actions on what God wants us to do. By getting rid of distractions, we can run the race with an unwavering focus on Christ.

 **Bridge**

Ask:

- Who are the people of faith who have influenced you?
- How have they demonstrated their confidence in God, even when the outcome was uncertain?

 **Sound Check**

Leader's notes:

The aim of the Sound Check activity today is for the young people to create a visual representation of Hebrews 12:1-2. They can draw on the discussion from the Amplify section and decide whether they want to work individually or in a group. Provide your group with the artistic resources you feel are appropriate to create their piece of artwork. They may want to use digital software on their tablet or phone, but remind them to stay focused on the task rather than just playing with tech or opening other apps. Give the group time to complete their creations and share them together.

 **Bridge****Ask:**

- How could you share your visual representation of Hebrews 12:1-2 with the rest of your church?

 **Selah****Leader's notes:**

The Selah section today is an opportunity for the group to peacefully sit and focus their attention on Jesus. As they listen to 'Turn your eyes upon Jesus', encourage them to read the words carefully as they come up on the screen and consider how they need to shift their focus upon Jesus.

Watch:

'Turn your eyes upon Jesus (Find light)' – Lyric Video – Hillsong Chapel (3:44)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FtRKKQ7IjM>

(It may be of interest that this song was written as long ago as 1922.)

When the song has finished, share in prayer together. Ask the group to consider what they need to throw off to continue the race Jesus has set before them. In what places do they need God's strength to run the race set before them?

When the young people have shared their thoughts and prayers, speak to God on behalf of the whole group.

 **Coda****Say:**

In a piece of music, the coda brings the different aspects of the melody, harmonies and bassline to a conclusion. It pulls together the different themes and often, but not always, brings resolution to a piece of music.

Ask:

- As you reflect on everything you have learned today, what is your coda?
- What is the one thing you will take away from this session that will help you to fix your focus on Jesus?

Leader's notes:

Give the young people a moment to think about your question and briefly share their coda with the group before the session comes to an end.



Abel	Adam and Eve's second son and younger brother of Cain. His brother killed him when he offered a better sacrifice to the Lord.
Enoch	It is said that he 'truly loved God'. Instead of saying he died, the Bible says that God 'took him away'.
Noah	Great-grandson of Enoch. He believed God's warning that God was going to destroy the evil people of the world in a flood. He built a large boat as God commanded to save his family and animals.
Abraham	He was named Abram at birth, but God changed his name to mean 'father of many nations'. God called him to go to a new land where God would give him many descendants.
Sarah	Wife to Abraham. Was too old to have children, but she had faith that God would give her a child anyway.
Isaac	He is called Abraham's 'only son' because he was born as the result of God's promise to Abraham. When he was older, he gave a blessing to his sons Jacob and Esau.
Jacob	The twelve tribes of Israel were named after his sons.
Joseph	He was sold by his brothers and taken to Egypt where he became an important official in the king's court. He used his position in the Egyptian government to save his family during a time of famine.



Moses	A Hebrew who was adopted into the royal Egyptian household. The Lord appeared to him and commanded him to lead the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt. Later the Lord gave him the Law on Mount Sinai.
Rahab	A Canaanite prostitute who helped two Israelite spies escape from Jericho so they could make a report to their commanders.
Gideon	He was an Israelite judge chosen by God to lead a small army to victory despite his doubts.
Barak	He was an Israelite leader who, with the prophetess Deborah, led the Israelites to victory over the Canaanite army. He followed Deborah's guidance, but only agreed to fight if she accompanied him.
Samson	A strong man chosen by God to help deliver Israel from the Philistines. His strength was signified by his long hair, a symbol of his dedication to God, but he was betrayed by Delilah and died after bringing down a Philistine temple.
Jephthah	He made a vow to God, promising to sacrifice whatever first came out of his house if he won, and ended up sacrificing his daughter after the victory.
David	A young shepherd who became the second king of Israel after defeating the giant Goliath. He is known for his faith, leadership and song writing.
Samuel	As a young boy, he heard God calling him during the night. After initially thinking it was Eli, he responded to God's call, and God revealed him as a prophet.