

# HEBREWS

## HPUMC BIBLE READING PLAN

### GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 4

#### CONVERSATION STARTER

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If you could add a new sport to the Olympic Games, what would it be and why?

#### RUN YOUR RACE

*Hebrews 12:1-2*

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**“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...”** (Hebrews 12:1-2)

In the ancient world, the word “race” would’ve called to mind a specific image. Especially for those living in the Roman Empire, the Olympics were a fixture. When the author of Hebrews encourages their readers to “run the race,” this is likely what they are referring to.



When an ancient competitor ran in the Olympics, they were running as representatives of their gods. They believed that *how they ran* would tell the world about what their god was like.

This is why Paul writes in [1 Corinthians 9:24](#) that we should run the race to *win*! We should want the prize because the prize is, in large part, about bringing glory and honor to God. We run to show the world what God is really like. We are God’s representatives!

And by the way, the author says, as we run we’re surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. The image above details the excavation of an ancient Olympic stadium in the ancient Greek city of Magnesia. Picture yourself flying around the track, and then

imagine for a moment you look up into the crowded stands. Thousands of people are cheering you on as you race, clapping wildly and shouting your name, encouraging you to keep going, don't give up! And you begin to recognize their faces.

You see Abraham up top! And there's Joseph! Moses, too! Beside him are Joshua and King David. The Prophets are all in a row above them—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. Rahab and Deborah are just there beside Mary, the Mother of Jesus. And that's not it!

In the front row, right in the center, is *Jesus*. And his face shines brightest and most proud of them all. His voice rings out the loudest, shouting *your name*! He's clapping for you, telling you not to give up, that you can do it.

And there, surrounding Jesus on all sides, are all those you love who have passed on. The faithful ones who continued the story of the Old Testament saints in your life. The giants who called out faithfulness in you as you grew up. The mentors who counseled you and shepherded you. The stadium erupts with the sounds of their collective cheers.

All of us are running the race. And how we run matters because it reveals to the world who our God is and what our God is like. And just like in any race, there will be moments when we feel like giving up. Moments where we don't know if we're in first place or dead last. Moments where it seems like the track ahead of us stretches on ahead with no end in sight. When you find yourself feeling defeated or exhausted, imagine looking up into the stands at the faces of these witnesses. Hear their encouragement raining down on you in a deafening roar, calling you forward one step at a time: *Don't give up! You've got this! We're with you!*

Spend a few moments processing this idea with your group. Who do you see up in the stands cheering you on and offering encouragement as you run? How does this change the way you want to run your race?

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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1. What ideas or practical next steps are you taking away from our reading of Hebrews?
2. What have you enjoyed about Hebrews? What has been difficult or challenging for you?
3. Have you faced any situations where having faith in God felt risky? How did you respond? What helps you remain faithful when God's plans seem delayed or unclear?

4. Hebrews 13:16 reads, “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” How can you live this out this week?

## WEEKLY PRACTICE

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The great Christian thinker Dallas Willard argued that Scripture memorization might be the most important spiritual discipline because “(The words of God) become a power, a substance, that sustains and directs us without our even thinking of them, and they emerge into conscious thought and action as needed.” Jesus is the perfect example of this. He quoted Scripture throughout his life, including when the enemy came to tempt him in the desert (Matt. 4:1-11) and when he hung on the cross (Matt. 27:46).

As we wrap up our time in Hebrews this week, reflect on what you have read over the past few weeks. What verses have transformed your mind, moved your heart, or given you strength? **We recommend this passage from Hebrews 12:1-3:**

*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, 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. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

If you are new to Scripture memorization, here are **a few helpful tips:**

- **Index Card:** Write the verse(s) on an index card and carry the card around with you so you can work on memorizing in your free time.
- **Record Yourself:** Try recording yourself on your phone reading the verse(s). Listen back to the recording while you're driving, working out, cleaning your house, grocery shopping, etc.
- **Make It Visible:** Tape the verse(s) to the bathroom mirror or to your car dashboard and work on it as you go about your day. You can also put it as your desktop or phone background. You'll honestly be surprised by how much that helps.
- **Repetitive Writing:** Transcribe the verse(s) by hand. Rewrite the verse(s) over and over or use hand-lettering or other creative illustrations or pictures as a way of putting it in your mind.
- **Repetitive Recitation:** Read the verse(s) out loud in two-minute increments and repeat (while allowing some time for your mind to rest).