

## Great Cloud of Witnesses

1. Warm up: Memorial Day marks the beginning of summer for most of us. What's one of your favorite summertime activities?
2. Memorial Day is officially dedicated to remembering soldiers who gave their life for our country.
  - a. Is there someone in your family or circle of friends who gave their life for our nation? If so, tell us a little about them.
  - b. The war in Ukraine has reminded us of the critical role that the military plays in protecting democracy. How are you feeling about the war in Ukraine?
  - c. While we're on the subject of current events, in recent weeks children have been shot to death in Texas, Black grandmas in Buffalo, and Asian churchgoers in California. What are your thoughts and feelings about all of that?
3. Memorial Day began in the aftermath of the civil war, and over time the course of time, has evolved to include a more general remembrance of departed loved ones. Jeff mentioned how his Grandma always referred to Memorial Day as "Decoration Day" because that's when people in her generation would go to the cemetery to "decorate" the graves of loved ones with flowers. We've all heard how Mexico observes the "the Day of the Dead" as a time to remember and honor departed friends and family members. On Sunday we did that. Read Hebrews 11:1 – 12:2, selected verses, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that "we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses." What do you think that means? Jeff suggested that departed loved ones and great Bible heroes not only inspire us by their example, but also have an awareness of what's happening here. He mentioned places in the book of Revelation (chapters 6 and 8) where people in heaven pray for things happening on earth. Based on that, he suggested that people in our Great Cloud of Witnesses cheer us on and lift prayers to God on our behalf. Do you buy that? How do you see it?
  - b. Hebrews 12:2 invites each of us to think about who's in our own Great Cloud of Witnesses. Our Cloud of Witnesses is important not just because they pray for us, but also because of how they influenced us. On Sunday Jeff told about several people in his Cloud of Witnesses. Tell us about someone in yours and something really valuable you learned from them.
4. Our key verse, Hebrews 12:2, follows an entire chapter (Hebrews 11) that reminds us of great Bible heroes. The idea of the Great Cloud of Witnesses arises out of that. In other words, Bible heroes are also in our Great Cloud of Witnesses. We saw a video segment that mentioned several Bible heroes as examples. Mary Magdalene is an example of someone who didn't let spiritual prejudice hold her back. Gideon is someone who overcame his fear to become a courageous military commander. Hagar

is someone who felt completely beaten down and discouraged until she experienced God's presence. The video segment reminded us that none of us has to run this race alone. You've got people. Your Great Cloud of Witnesses is greater than you ever imagined, including even Bible heroes. If you could pick one person in the Bible to be your "patron saint" and be part of your Great Cloud of Witnesses – someone whose example really speaks to you and inspires you – who would that be?

5. In her teaching segment, Pastor Tandy used dominos to remind us how each person affects those who come after them. The song Jordan White sang near the end of the service ("Talkin' to Jesus" by Brandon Lake) also drove home the same point. One person's faith can inspire faith in others. Conversely, one person's misdeeds can scar others. Each of us will someday be in someone else's Great Cloud of Witnesses. Our influence will linger long after we've departed. That should cause us to consider what kind of Domino Effect our life will have. Who is someone whose Cloud of Witnesses will include you when you depart? What's something you hope your example will teach or inspire in them?

## Hebrews 11:1 - 12:2, selected verses

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. <sup>2</sup>Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval.

<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup>By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

<sup>29</sup> By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land. . . . <sup>30</sup>By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days.

<sup>32</sup> And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— <sup>33</sup>who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup>quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. <sup>35</sup>Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. <sup>36</sup>Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup>They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— <sup>38</sup>of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

**12** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.