

Living by Faith

Lesson 10: Running with Endurance: Looking to Jesus -- Hebrews 12:1-3

Imagine stepping into a great stadium packed to the rafters. The stands rise around you on every side, tier upon tier, and the noise is like the sea. But this is no ordinary crowd. As your eyes adjust, you begin to recognize the faces. There is Abel, and Noah, and Abraham. There is Sarah, and Moses, and Rahab. There are the ones who shut the mouths of lions and the ones who were sawn in two. Every one of them ran the race you are about to run, and every one of them finished by faith. They are not spectators come for entertainment. They are witnesses, and the very testimony of their lives is cheering you on.

Now look down at yourself. You are dressed for a long-distance race, but you are wearing far too much. There is a heavy coat across your shoulders, weights strapped to your ankles, layer upon layer of things that will not help you run. No serious runner carries extra weight. So the writer of Hebrews calls out to you across the centuries: lay it aside. Strip off every weight. And especially strip off the sin that clings so closely, the besetting sin that wraps around your legs and trips you again and again. You cannot run free while you are carrying what you were never meant to carry.

But here is the secret that holds the whole scene together. The race is not run by staring down at your own feet, and it is not run by gazing up at the great crowd, as glorious as they are. It is run by looking to Jesus. He is the founder of our faith, the one who blazed the trail, and He is the perfecter of our faith, the one who ran it flawlessly to the end. He set His face toward the cross for the joy that lay beyond it, and now He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. The runner who finishes is the runner whose eyes are fixed on Him.

Maybe you are weary right now. Maybe the race has been longer than you expected and the road has been harder than you were told it would be, and some days you wonder whether you have the strength to keep going. This lesson is for you. The writer knows about weariness, and he gives you the remedy: consider Jesus, who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. Lift your eyes. The One who ran ahead of you reigns now, and He is bringing many sons and daughters home.

Group Discussion: What kinds of things tend to slow Christians down or trip them up in the race of faith, and why is it sometimes hard to recognize a weight for what it is until we lay it aside?

Personal Reflection: When you grow weary in following Christ, where do your eyes tend to drift, and what would it look like this week to deliberately fix them back on Jesus?

Read Hebrews 12:1-3

Study Questions

1. Hebrews 12:1 says we are 'surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.' Who are these witnesses, and how does the long chapter of faith that comes just before this verse (Hebrews 11) shape the way we are meant to understand and respond to their example?
2. The writer urges us to 'lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely.' Is there a particular weight, or a sin that clings to you, that you sense is slowing you down in the race right now? What makes it so hard to set down?
3. The Christian life is pictured as a race to be run 'with endurance,' not a sprint to be finished quickly. What does this image teach us about the nature of following Christ over a lifetime, and what does it imply about the danger of growing weary and quitting (compare Hebrews 10:36; Galatians 6:9)?
4. Think honestly about your own pace. Are you running the race with patient endurance, or have you slowed to a walk, or even stopped? What is one thing that has helped you keep going when you wanted to give up?
5. The verse tells us to run 'the race that is set before us.' What does it mean that God has marked out a particular course for each of us, and how does this guard us against comparing our race to someone else's (compare 1 Corinthians 9:24-27)?

6. Where are you tempted to compare your race to another believer's, either in pride or in discouragement? How might fixing your eyes on Jesus instead free you from that comparison?
7. Verse 2 says Jesus endured the cross 'for the joy that was set before him, despising the shame.' What was the joy set before Christ, and how can the joy ahead of us give us strength to endure hardship and shame for His name now (compare Hebrews 11:24-26)?
8. Is there a place in your life where following Christ has cost you something, or might cost you the approval and comfort of others? How does the example of Jesus, who endured the shame for the joy beyond it, speak to that cost?
9. Hebrews 12:2 calls Jesus 'the founder and perfecter of our faith,' and says that 'for the joy that was set before him' He 'endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.' What does it mean that Jesus is both the author and the perfecter of our faith, how is His endurance the supreme example for us, and what is the significance of the truth that He is now seated and reigning at God's right hand?
10. Looking back over Hebrews 12:1-3 as a whole, name one concrete way you sense the Lord forming endurance in you right now. What is one weight you will lay aside, or one habit of looking to Jesus you will take up, so that you do not grow weary or fainthearted?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 10:35–36, do not throw away your confidence, for you have need of endurance to receive what God has promised; Galatians 6:9, let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not give up; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, run the race so as to win the prize, exercising self-control and discipline; Philippians 3:13–14, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward, press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call; Acts 2:33–36, the risen Christ exalted to the right hand of God, made both Lord and Christ, reigning now.