

Run! Hebrews 12:1-3

Endurance racing...friend who does marathons to stay in shape...endurance races stretch the limits of a human body ... A marathon is about 4.5 hours of running...you burn basically two days' worth of calories...Straight south, you hit Pittsburg, you're about halfway...ultramarathoners (deal with hallucinations, blurred vision, cardiac arrest...you have to eat meals and maybe take a nap with a ultra).

Here's the point: endurance running requires radical focus...you simply can't do it without extreme concentration of effort in a particular direction for an extended period of time.

Hebrews 12:1-3...This metaphor for living out the Christian life.

Context...Jews who were struggling with staying focused in their Christian commitments.

- When they lacked focus, they were blending their Christian beliefs producing a strange medley of views.

This should sound familiar...minority...the pressure we face is to just fit in with the views all around us.

- Christianity+?... when you become a Christian, you can't just stay the same without compromise...and you can't consistently add on the views around.
 - Complete worldview with a singular focus on Christ and all the rest of our lives have to take second seat to that.
 - take up your cross (Luke 9)...Jesus analogizes following him is like being on your way to execution.
 - In life, we are called to a radically Christian focus

Hebrews 12:1-3 shows us how to Run in Christian discipleship!

- 1 Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us,**
- 2 keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**
- 3 For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

The only imperative in Hebrews 12:1-3 is to run. The Christian life is pictured as a distance or endurance race.

Big Idea: **Run the race of the Christian life with endurance completely fixed on and depending upon Jesus.**

Comparing the Christian life to a race is common biblical theme...Paul especially liked the running a race metaphor:

2 Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

1 Corinthians 9:24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

Three aspects of how we are to run in Christian discipleship:

First aspect...

What's the "therefore" there for?

- It's a conclusion from what comes before.
- Chapter 11 begins with a characterization of faith and then gives a who's who of "faith exemplars." (Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, David)...hall of faith.
 - In what way are we to run? In one sense, we are to run in the patterns of faith of those who have come before...we are to be propelled or encouraged by these examples.

1. Be encouraged by examples of biblical faith.

"Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us..." (v. 1a)

We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who lived out their faith.

What is biblical faith?

- Last week: not a blind leap in the dark...but is living out the reality of God entrusting ourselves to him and our Christian hope.
- Faith is, in a word, trust...but not trust from a distance
 - You get an amazing array of instances of biblical faith...Every single instance is rational trust in God...no blind leaps.
 - It will always be more rational to trust God.

What are these folks in Hebrews 11 supposed to do for us? Nothing... except they have set an example.

We can also look at other examples of faith NT, church history, mentors

- Not superheroes.
- We have this cloud of witnesses calling us to faithful walk.

So be encouraged by our very imperfect and sinful forebearers but remember it is a life of faith that they lived not perfection.

2. Be free of extra weight

“...let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us.” (v. 1b)

Don't sin...we don't actually teach on sin very often.

- Distinction between hindrances and sin... encumbrances, impediments, or weight.
 - The question is not whether it is wrong for you to do something. The question is whether it will slow you down and trip you up.
 - The question we need to ask is not whether it is sinful but whether it enables faith or hinders faith.

**What is weighing down your run?

Hindrances:

- Habits...lifestyle, sleep schedule
- Screen time: Americans average 7 hours a day of screen time.
- Careers...an over-focus...an under focus.
- Hobbies...our kids' hobbies?
- Certain friendships and acquaintances
- Your appearance...self image

You can't worry about these too much when you are running when you're focused on running.

- This is counter cultural. Fitting in is the norm and people want you to be like them.
- Start throwing off some things that hold you back and expect social pressure.

Now we are to throw off hindrances AND SINS...We have our lists of dos and don'ts. We know that to do something contrary to the list is sin.

“Sin isn’t only doing bad things; it’s more fundamentally making good things into ultimate things. Sin is building your life and meaning on anything, even a very good thing, more than on God.” ~Keller

- Doing even good deeds could be sin if we are finding our identity in those good deeds (career, hobby, kids, marriage, ministry) when we put them in the place of God.

Christianity is a radical call, which requires radical focus, and anything that is a hinderance to growing in the Lord must ultimately be removed.

3. Look to Jesus who accomplishes the work in us.

“...keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (v. 2)

Not walk... you can walk and do many other things. Walking, at least at a certain pace, just is meandering or waffling. When you walk, you take in the scenery and who knows where you will end up.

Distance running forces you to be radically focused. You simply can’t do it and do many other things.

- Why? Because it is just so difficult.
- Contra easy believism...you don’t just tack on Christianity to all the rest of what you already believe and what you do.

It’s a difficult call but it actually gets worse. It is not just difficult, it’s impossible... healthy runner?

- Our hearts are desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9), that we are broken and that there is nothing good in us (Rom. 3)
- Are we being called to run a marathon despite the fact that we can’t even walk much less run?

We can try our hardest to be “good Christians” but this is absolutely hopeless.

- This is the problem with religion. Religion tells us to do things... “walk it off.”

It is not to say we shouldn't strive after the Lord...but Christian striving is more of a positioning ourselves such that God works in our lives.

But here's the good news...**Jesus is source of and the perfecter of your faith.**

- We should be encouraged by those who have come before but Jesus is our all in all. He's the source and perfecter of our faith.
- Without him, we can't do it.

And where is he?

"For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." v. 3

Now the last part of verse 2 says why he is uniquely qualified to be the author and perfecter of our faith...Jesus has endured the cross for a certain joy set before him. What's the joy?

- It's the completed work on the cross and all that this entails, the finalization of the work of redemption.
- What's the joy that made the cross worth enduring? Well, at least in part, you are.

Application

What extra weight are you carrying around today?

It's REALLY tough to run for a long distance carrying other things. Today is the day to surrender those areas of your life that need to be shed.

Let me challenge you to ask God to put his finger on some area that either holds you back or that you have made ultimate in God's place.

Are your eyes fixed on Jesus?

It's also exhausting to work our way to God...here's some very good news...that work is already accomplished on the cross of Christ.

We don't have to do anything other than accept what's been done.

The Christian life is one of surrendering to Christ and allow him to perfect our faith.