

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Turn your bibles with me to Hebrews 12

We are continuing our verse-by-verse study through the book of Hebrews

And this evening, we are going to begin a new chapter.

We just spent the last three months studying Hebrews 11 – known as the Hall of Faith

The writer of Hebrews provided us with example after example of men and women who were able to endure by faith.

Men and women who demonstrated their steadfast faith in God in the face of tremendous opposition and difficulty.

Again – it is important to read everything in context –

The book of Hebrews was written to a group of Jewish believers who were tempted to return back to Judaism.

These Jewish believers – were being persecuted, they were oppressed for their faith, they were being pressured to abandon the Lord Jesus.

So, the writer encourages this group of Jewish believers and every believer in Jesus to endure.

He is encouraging them to persevere in suffering – he is not saying that their suffering is not real – he knows that they are hurting but they need to persevere.

They needed to stand against the temptation to go back.

So after providing them the examples of saints that endured –

Saints that had ran their own race

The writer of Hebrews tells this group of Jewish believers – and us, that now, it is our turn.

That we, now, follow in their footsteps.

God was giving them and us the very same opportunity!

They had received the promise the earlier heroes had only been able to look forward to – the Messiah.

And now – they needed to not only run the race – they needed to finish the race – in the same way that those in ch11 were able to do so – by faith.

Let's pray...

Read the text -

[Heb 12:1-2 NKJV] 1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares [us], and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2

looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of [our] faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

So the writer of Hebrews in our text, provides this beautiful analogy – about how the life of the believer is like being in a foot race.

Not a physical race - It is a spiritual race

It is a race that began with Jesus – when by grace through faith, we put our faith and trust in Him.

Jesus is the starting line – and heaven is the finish line.

And this analogy – is something we find over and over again in scripture.

Turn to 1 Cor 9

[1Co 9:24-27 NKJV] 24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain [it]. 25 And everyone who competes [for the prize] is temperate in all things. Now they [do it] to obtain a perishable crown, but we [for] an imperishable [crown]. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as [one who] beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring [it] into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

In his last letter – Paul writes to his protégé, Timothy and listen to what says -

[2Ti 4:7 NKJV] 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Now – it might come as a surprise to some – but, I am not a runner.

I think the last foot race I was in was probably in the 6th grade.

I have done a handful of 5k's but those were just for fun –

I have no intentions or aspirations of ever running a long distant race.

I wouldn't even know how to train for one.

Because not only does one have to condition their bodies to be able to run long distances, but they also must condition their minds as well.

What the writer of Hebrews is going to do in our text is give us a strategy for running our spiritual race – so we too – like Paul, can finish the race and finish well.

[Heb 12:1 NKJV] 1 Therefore we also,

Again – in context – he is talking about the men and women from ch 11

He is referring to how all of them made it –

how they were all able to endure

How they were able to run their race – and now, we run our race.

since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,

Now, the author paints the picture of a stadium whose stands are filled with spectators.

These spectators – this great cloud of witnesses – are those who have already finished the race.

Now something important to understand is that the writer of Hebrews is speaking figuratively here –

Those that have passed on –

those that have ran their race - our loved ones in heaven who had placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ – they are not looking down on us and cheering when we overcome and rolling their eyes when we fail.

Nowhere in scriptures do we find that –

The point that the writer of Hebrews is making is that each of us has a race to run and this race is shared by all who look to Jesus in faith.

So as we are running the race – we are looking up at all those who endured as examples of those who finished.

We are to run the race like they did – always trusting and never giving up.

So – what strategy do we use to run the race?

How do we run wisely so that we too can be a testimony to others –

The writer gives us the first one -

let us lay aside every weight,

The word that is used here for weight is an interesting word.

It describes something that is a burden –

It describes anything that hinders or impedes.

The writer of Hebrews is going to make a distinction between weight and sin

A weight is anything that gets in the way of pursuing God whole-heartedly.

It is anything that is slowing us down in our race –

It is anything that is keeping us from moving forward

It is anything that is making it difficult for us to continue to run.

When we watch an Olympic athlete getting ready to run their race –

They are wearing the lightest possible shoes.

No one is wearing boots to a race.

Their running outfits are made of the lightest nylon made. Their outfits are tightfitting.

Why? To reduce drag as they run – to make them more aerodynamic.

Imagine running the race with a backpack full of rocks – doesn't make sense, right?

That is the point that the writer of Hebrews is making –

In order to run the race that God have given to us – we need to remove those things that are going to hinder us.

You see, there are lots of things in the world that aren't sinful or immoral in and of themselves, but they can get in the way of our attention to the Lord.

Our careers, possessions, wealth, even the pursuit of health or happiness can get in the way.

These things in and of themselves are neutral and can be either good or bad, depending on how they factor into our lives.

It's God's intent that all these things would be vehicles and avenues through which our pursuit of Him might be lived out.

The problem occurs - when we lose focus and misplace our priorities, then, these things can easily become weights that get in the way of running the race.

We can become so consumed with our homes and careers and other things that we lose sight of why God allowed us to have it to us in the first place.

We need to have that same mindset as the runner when it comes to our spiritual growth and lay aside all the excess weight.

Anything that weighs us down

That diverts our attention.

Saps our energy.

Waters down our passion –

These things have to go.

We have to lay it aside.

And the Holy Spirit will convict us and point the things out that we must lay aside.

The problem is that we want to run the race our way.

The next piece of strategy that the writer gives us.

and the sin which so easily ensnares us

So we have the things in our lives that weigh us down –

And then we have to lay aside the sin which so easily ensnares us.

Remember I said earlier that the writer distinguishes between weight and sin

Here is the difference.

The weights in life, merely slows us down – they are bothersome and bulky – they get in the way.

They trip us up.

They make things harder.

However -

Sin stops the race completely.

Sin wants to actually disqualify us and drag us off the track altogether.

We will not make progress holding on to known sin in our life.

Now, all sin is a hindrance to Christian living –

It's one of the things we have been looking at on Sunday morning in our study through 1 John.

But I think – in context the writer of Hebrews here is addressing a specific sin.

Notice - and the sin which so easily ensnares us.

There is a specific sin that we need to watch out for

And looking at the context – I believe that this particular sin that the writer of Hebrews is referring to is the sin of unbelief.

Think about all of our studies over the last three months –

By faith, by faith, by faith..... and so on

By faith – they endured. They were able to finish their race.

What stops the race completely – unbelief.

The next point that the writer give us at the end of verse 1 -

and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

The Greek word that the writer of Hebrews uses here – is the word *hupomone* – *who –
poe – monet*

This same word – the writer of Hebrews has used over and over again -

**[Heb 10:36 NKJV] 36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have
done the will of God, you may receive the promise:**

The word speaks of persistence and determination.

It speaks of a continual progress even as suffering and persecution may continue to
grow.

It speaks of

learning to have patience,

learning to endure,

to bare under pressure

learning to stay clinging to Jesus.

It speaks of the believer who continues to endure even though it appears to him that no progress is being made.

And this is the same word we are going to find over and over again in ch 12

The idea is that this spiritual race we will run is not going to be a sprint, but it is going to be a very far distance.

This is one of the things that Jesus points out in the parable of the sower.

Some of the seed fell on stony places – they did not have root roots - and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth.

And what happened to that seed – it withered away once the sun came up.

Not a sprint.

So we are called to run with endurance – hupomone

Remember church, Jesus promises that if we abide in Him – He abides in us.

And it is in that relationship that His spiritual power is infused into your life and my life and it is through His power that we will be able to endure.

Don't misunderstand and think that this endurance comes from within ourselves. It doesn't.

Those who endure is not because they just bit their lips and waited until everything passed them by – no, no, no.

You see because the believer understands that it may never pass –

Our hope is not simply waiting for our circumstances to pass.

Our hope is not on our circumstances – our hope is a person – Jesus Christ

I had you also make a note of the last portion of verse one.

The race that is set before us –

Every single believer has their own race to run.

Now, there is a sense in which we are all running the same race: we're all following Christ; we all need to be faithful to that.

But in another sense we each have a particular race which God has set before US personally.

We can't run anyone else's race; we can't run the race we WISH we were running.

We can only run the race which God has set before US. We each have a different race. My race may be very different from yours; your race may be entirely different than someone else's. We each have our own particular race, that God has personally called us to run.

So we need to stop trying to run other's people races.

Remember when Jesus rebuked Peter – after Jesus had told Peter what race he was going to run and Peter said, “What about this guy?” What about his race?

And Jesus tells him – “Don't worry about it.”

The next strategy that the writer of Hebrews gives us – is at the beginning of verse 2

looking unto Jesus

The word “looking” here – it means to turn the eyes away from other things and fix them on something or in this case – Someone.

Jesus

Turn your bibles with me to Matt 14

[Mat 14:22-33 NKJV] 22 Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. 23 And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. 24 But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. 25 Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. 26 And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them,

saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." 28 And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. 30 But when he saw that the wind [was] boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" 31 And immediately Jesus stretched out [His] hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

Pop Quiz –

Don't look at your bibles.

When did Peter begin to sink?

When he took his eyes off Jesus.

When Peter saw the wind.

Now – what most people miss is the following question.

When did Jesus calm the sea?

Was it when Peter began to sink?

No.

Jesus didn't calm the sea until they got back in the boat.

That means that Peter still had to trust Jesus during the storm.

How do we run with endurance?

By keeping our eyes on Jesus – not the storms of life – even when the storms continue.

We lock our eyes on Jesus Christ.

That means that we don't lock our eyes on other people that are running the race.

(good or bad)

And the reason is that we will be disappointed.

Pastors will disappoint us;

Other church members will disappoint us;

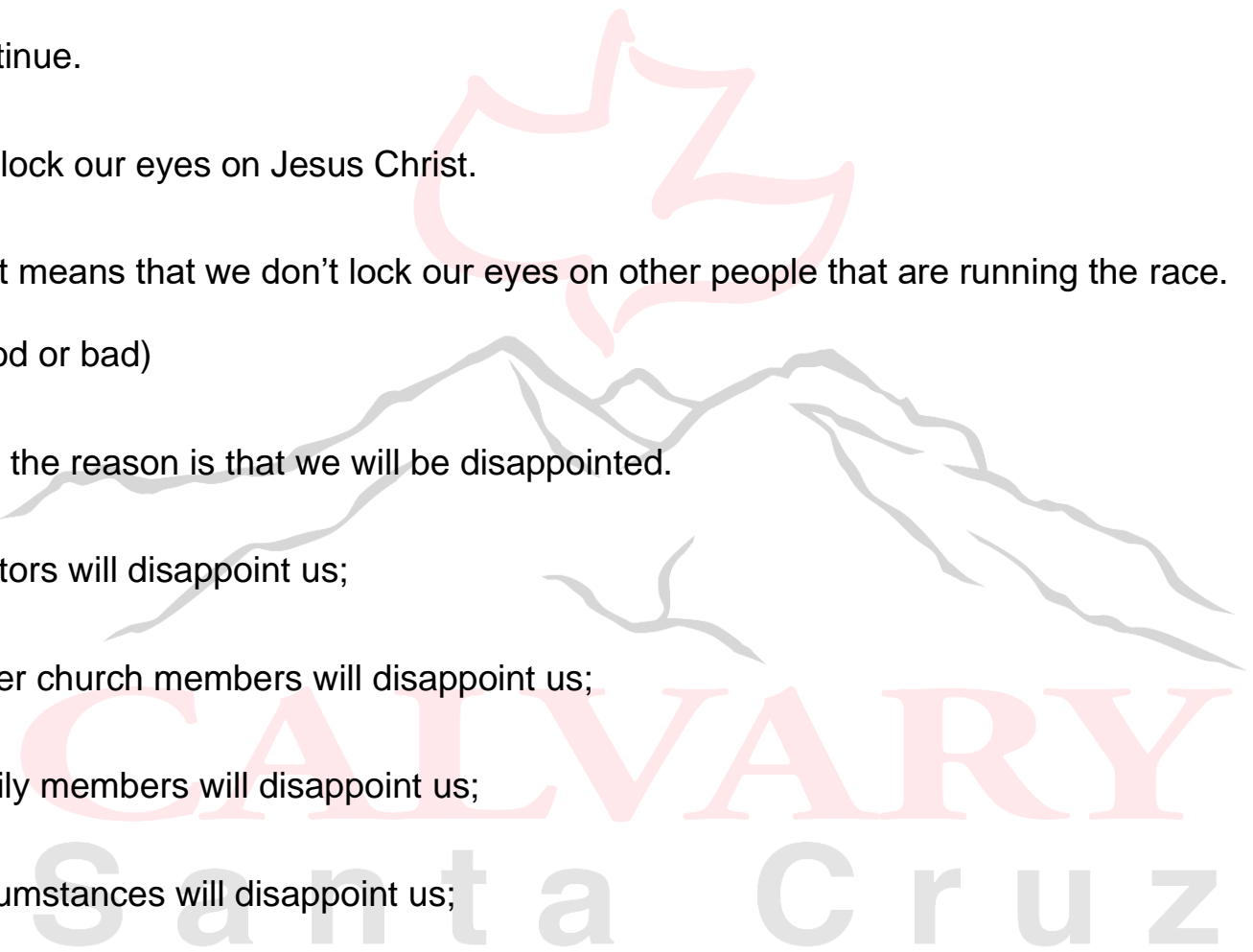
family members will disappoint us;

circumstances will disappoint us;

and We will even disappoint ourself;

We fix our eyes on Jesus.

Why?



He will never disappoint you.

He is totally faithful; He is totally trustworthy; He will never leave you or forsake you; and He is absolutely glorious.

He loved us so much that He died on the cross to pay for our sins, and rose again to be our living Savior.

He sits at the right hand of God where He is interceding for you and me right now with God;

And if we look to Him, He will take us by the hand and He will help us run our race.

And one day, when we finish our race, we will run right into His arms!

The next thing that writer of Hebrews reminds us of – is that Jesus

is the author and finisher of our faith,

We are to look to Jesus by faith because our faith came from Him.

It originates with Jesus.

Here's a key if we are to run the Christian race with endurance...we not only receive faith initially from Christ, but we receive faith daily from Him.

He is the founder and perfecter of our faith.

The author and finisher of our faith

Faith was originally created by Christ and distributed to His people.

He then is working with us to perfect that faith. We should look to Him for faith and look to Him daily to have our faith perfected.

Turn to Ephesians 3

[Eph 3:14-19 NKJV] 14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what [is] the width and length and depth and height—19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

How is our faith perfected? Jesus works with us through the Holy Spirit. As we run the race of the Christian life, the Spirit of Christ supplies the necessary help to run and help to finish – to endure.

And the final thing that the writer of Hebrews reminds us of -

who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and **has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

We look to Christ as the saints of old did.

We look to Christ because He is the supplier of everything we need to run the race.

Finally, we look to Christ because in Him we find a clear example to imitate.

Think about the race that Jesus ran –

His was a hard race that began in poverty and ended in pain on a cross.

His was a race lined with hatred, bitterness, opposition and the desire to see Him dead.

His was a race that set the perfect example of how a race should be run.

His was a race in which He never faltered.

He never lost sight of the goal and He never quit running until the goal had been achieved.

Jesus endured the cross by looking past it to the joy that would follow.

Where is the joy in going to a cross?

Where is the joy in dying like a common criminal?

Where is the joy in being rejected by people you love?

For Jesus, the joy was in what would happen when He finished His race.

This group of Jewish believers were ready to quit the race.

Their focus was on the now – their suffering, their opposition.

And the writer of Hebrews is telling them and us - look to Jesus; consider Jesus; esteem Jesus; treasure Jesus.

And as we focus on Him -

We run the race set before us because Christ is sitting “at the right hand of the throne of God.” Your race is important but remember that the greatest race has already been won by Jesus Christ.

Jesus “for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.”

Let us not grow weary or fainthearted as we take comfort in the fact that this is the race that God (who loves us) has set before us.

So - let us run the race set before us with endurance as we keep our eyes on Jesus.

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, “I am a sinner.”

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

[Num 6:24-26 NLT] 24 '

May the LORD bless you and protect you.

May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you.

May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.'

