

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Run To Finish!

Hebrews 12:1-3

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SermonAudio Blurb: Written to a weary people who are questioning their faith and the truth regarding Jesus Christ, the writer urges them to press on in the race set before them. He does so by pointing backward to the many witnesses who ran the race of faith before them. He counsels them to run without impediments. And he orders them to keep foremost in their minds their author and perfecter of faith, Jesus Christ.

Dismiss

I. Introduction.

- A. Take a brief break from 1 Timothy today to consider a passage out of the book of Hebrews.
- B. The book of Hebrews is written to a people who are finding the church to be something that is old and unimportant and even something of which to be ashamed.
 - 1. They were a people beginning to lose their way, lose their faith and ready to fall away from the faith.
 - 2. They were a people who had lost their missional mind set, no longer seeing themselves as the presence of Jesus in this world; no longer remembering that there was something better that they were waiting on.
 - 3. They were not a people who spoke of Jesus and lived for Jesus without shame; rather they were a people who hid their faith and were shrinking away from Jesus.
 - 4. In other words, they were a people like the people in the church today here in America.
- C. Give quick survey of warnings to persevere in Hebrews.
 - 1. Hebrews 3:12-13.
 - 2. Hebrews 5:12.
 - 3. Hebrews 12:12-13.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

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- D. There are some of you who know you don't know Jesus. There are some of you who think you know but you really don't.
- E. And there are some of you who love Jesus but need to be reminded and encouraged to continue on in your race, in your pursuit of seeing, knowing and loving Jesus Christ.
- F. Read Hebrews 12.1-3.
 - 1. The writer of this book is considering the people he is writing to and he knows that they are weary and wandering in their hearts. As a fellow Christian he has a great burden for them and their salvation.
 - 2. So he again picks up a key theme of the book of Hebrews, which is to endure, persevere, not grow weary, press on.
 - 3. It is worthy to note the pastoral feel in this verse. "Let **us**..."
 - a. He readily identifies himself with them. He is a fellow runner, not one sitting on the sideline in judgment of them.
 - b. He includes himself, a fellow follower of Jesus, and a fellow sinner.
 - 4. At the core of this passage is the exhortation to run. You are in a race and it is for the long haul, so accept it, get going in it, don't stop, don't relax, don't let your guard down, just keep running.
 - a. The word 'race' is from the Greek word *agon*, where we get the word 'agonize or agony.'
 - b. This is no short sprint, but a marathon that lasts our entire life. It is the greatest ultra-marathon that ever was.
 - 5. The race is the life of faith that is following Jesus Christ. It is the life of a Christian.
 - 6. Keep the goal to be to finish the race, not merely start it.
 - a. That is what is meant by the word 'endurance.'
 - b. That term is not a passive term—like a person who can take anything that comes his way. Waves of life wash over him and he is still there. Not what this term is meaning.
 - c. This is the enduring that overcomes, it wins. One man called it a term that means you come out on top. It is that kind of endurance

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that makes you climb to the top of the mountain, run through the finish line in a race, finish the course of studies in school, etc.

- G. But he does not merely call us to run this race of faith. He gives us clear reasons why and how to do so.

II. How to run so you will finish the race.

- A. Why? Because of the witnesses that went before us.

1. 1a ‘a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us...’

- a. This speaks to the prior chapter where we read of men and women who believed God and continued to believe Him to the end of their lives.
- b. This cloud of witnesses does not speak of them as spectators who are watching us run; rather they function as testimonies of what it looks like to run faithfully to the end.
- c. They become our champions and examples to remember.

2. 12:39-40.

- a. A catalog of faithful men and women who believed God.
- b. The goal toward which all of them moved in their race was something that they could see, if only in a glimmer, but they never had it fulfilled.
- c. Yet they did not stop their race and they were all accepted by God in the end.
- d. It is important to remember that we are not alone, for there are many times that we feel that way. But the author of Hebrews wants us to be aware that we are simply part of a great cloud of witnesses who have been faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- e. Every Christian is called by God to be a stranger and alien in this world. But though this is true, we are not alone, there is a great multitude, a multitude that no man can number that has gone this same way and has been faithful.
- f. You may be the only Christian in your family, or your workplace. But you are not alone beloved. There is a great cloud of witnesses who have been faithful. And so the author says I want you to remember that.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
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- g. 1 Kings 19, Elijah, the great prophet feels very alone. God speaks to him and asks him what is wrong.
 - (1) He said this, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."
 - (2) God tells him to go about his business and tells him that there are 7,000 men who have to bent their knees to Baal. He felt alone, but he was not alone.
- h. Are you finding yourself to be weary of the race? Let me give you two simple suggestions that will greatly aid you.
 - (1) First, become a student of the Old Testament and the book of Acts.
 - (2) Second, become a student of biographies of various Christians. The biographies in the Swan is not silent series by John Piper.

On August 26, 410, the unthinkable happened. After 900 years of impenetrable security, Rome was sacked by the Gothic army led by Alaric. St. Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate, was in Palestine at the time, and wrote, "If Rome can perish, what can be safe?" Rome did not perish immediately. It would be another 66 years before the Germans deposed the last Emperor. But the shock waves of the invasion reached the city of Hippo about 450 miles southwest of Rome on the coast of North Africa where Augustine was the bishop. He was 55 years old and in the prime of his ministry. He would live another 20 years and die on August 28, 430, just as 80,000 invading Vandals were about to storm the city. In other words, Augustine lived in one of those tumultuous times between the shifting of whole civilizations.

. . . He had been the bishop of Hippo since 396 and, before that, was a preaching elder for five years. So he had served the church for almost 40 years, and was known throughout the Christian world as a God-besotted, Biblical, articulate, persuasive shepherd of his flock and defender of the faith against the great threats of his day, mainly Manichaeism, Donatism, and Pelagianism.

Four years before he died, he had handed over the administrative duties of the church in Hippo to his assistant Eraclius. At the ceremony Eraclius stood to preach, as the old man sat on his

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
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bishop's throne behind him. Overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy in Augustine's presence, Eraclius said, "The cricket chirps, the swan is silent."

If only Eraclius could have looked down over sixteen centuries at the enormous influence of Augustine, he would understand why I have entitled this message, "The Swan is Not Silent." He was not silent then and he is not today. He has not been silent for 1600 years.

(<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/biographies/the-swan-is-not-silent>)

- (a) Amy Carmichael.
 - (b) Foxes Book of Martyrs.
 - (c) J. Hudson Taylor.
 - (d) George Mueller.
- i. So, again, we are called to run and to keep running, but looking back at the wealth of godly examples is not enough. There are practical steps we must take ourselves.
- 3. So the why we run is because we have a wealth of others who have gone before us in that race.
 - a. We can remember those who destroyed their faith, piercing themselves with every pang and hurt.
 - b. But, we can remember those who died as old men and women, still confessing Jesus as their salvation and Lord.
 - c. We can remember those who were tortured and killed, all the while confessing Jesus as Lord.
- B. How? By removing entanglements to this world.
 - 1. Laying aside encumbrances.
 - a. The imagery used is of the races that were held every year throughout the empire. The Olympics were something these readers were well-acquainted with. The contestants were required to strip naked so that nothing was in the way.
 - b. Here we see two different things being put aside—encumbrances and sin.
 - c. It is very helpful to me to read about encumbrances.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
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- (1) These are not sins. They are not what the bible forbids for those who follow Jesus.
 - (2) These are those things that create a hindrance, a resistance, in our ability to run well and with endurance.
 - (3) When I went backpacking I had to strip my supplies down to the absolute necessities to make it through the 50 miles.
 - (a) The question is not if what I would take was good or ok to have.
 - (b) The question was, will this hinder me in any way from finishing the trek?
 - (4) Radical changes will take place in many of your lives when that question is what drives your decisions in the areas of freedom granted you by your Lord.
- d. 2 Timothy 2:4 No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.
 - e. 1Co 9:25 And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.
 - f. 1Ti 6:9-12 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.
2. Laying aside sin.
 - a. This term of laying aside speaks of stripping off of clothing. It is simply discarding these things that are not acceptable in the life and heart of a believer.
 - b. Romans 13:12 The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.
 - c. Ephesians 4:25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
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- d. Colossians 3:8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.
 - e. And it is this sin that is always entangling us, seeking to trip us and cause us to fall away.
 - f. This is not some external force outside of us. It is the sin that remains in us. It is always seeking to gain an upper hand in our lives and we need to constantly strip it off as soon as we recognize its ugly presence.
- C. What is the basis?
- 1. Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.
 - a. We are called to fix our eyes upon Him. Mark that well in your bible and in your mind.
 - (1) We run well when we remember the many who have gone before us and finished their race.
 - (a) But it is Jesus who we fix our gaze upon, not those others. They are all men and women who fixed their gaze upon God, believing that he was faithful, and so they pressed on.
 - (b) So too, we must fix our eyes upon Jesus, knowing that it is only through Him that we will finish.
 - (c) It is amazing how focusing on something can help us (Bekah and the broken arm).
 - (d) Jesus becomes our supreme reason to keep running.
 - (2) He is our author and perfecter of our faith.
 - (a) This simply means that without Jesus there would be no race to run.
 - (b) The bible says that all of God's promises to us are found in Jesus.
 - (c) It is only through Jesus that Heaven is opened, that sin is paid and destroyed, that death cannot contain us, that we are redeemed out of enslavement to sin, that we have a sure, solid anchor of hope.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
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- (3) So we run this race because we believe that not only did our faith begin with Jesus, but it will finish with Jesus; therefore everything in between must be Jesus as well.
 - (a) We run well when we believe that what He promises is infinitely better than all the lies that take our eyes off of Him.
 - (b) We run well when we remember that it is He who bore our sin, it is He who is our life, and it is He who stands in heaven always interceding on our behalf.
 - (c) How can we not run?
2. Who has run the race before us.
 - a. The pathway was laid for us in His life.
 - b. It was a life that was filled with obedience to His Father. It was a life filled with a desire to do God's will. It was marked by a desire to bring glory to God.
 - c. Think of His race, because it was different in some key ways.
 - (1) His course before Him was one that no one else could hope to run. It was a course that was to destroy sin and death, to overcome our arch-enemy, Satan himself.
 - (2) His course led Him to the horror of the Cross; whereas we run a course that leads to eternal life with God.
 - (3) His course led to become the perfect sin-bearer; we run a course of forgiveness of all sin.
 - (4) His course led Him to suffer and endure the fullness of God's wrath; our course is one that saves us from that wrath.
 - (5) His course was one where He was utterly alone, experiencing even the turning away of His own Father; our course is with one another, strengthened by the Holy Spirit and a great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
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- (6) His course was one of utter shame (something that offended the Jew and was utter foolishness to the Gentile). And yet He despised that shame.
 - (7) And if He did not regard the supreme, infinite shame that He faced, the sinless One taking on our sin, then we should not regard any shame we endure because of His name.
3. Who has finished the race.
- a. The great words uttered by Jesus on the Cross was, "It is finished." Then He gave up His spirit and died.
 - b. But it was not the end of the story was it? Dark days passed, where those who used to be with Him filled with all confidence and power were now hiding out like common thieves.
 - c. No longer were there bold words from their mouths, only whispers of despair.
 - d. But then came the third day, when they discovered that He had risen from the grave as He had promised.
 - (1) There He was, alive, more alive than they could ever understand.
 - (2) For days He spent His time with them until finally it was time for Him to return to heaven to be with His Father.
 - e. This is the joy that was set before Him:
 - (1) To be exalted above all things created, to have the name that is above all other names.
 - (2) To be seated at the right hand of His Father
4. "consider" (vs 3) Therefore we do not run blind or without hope. Rather, we fix our eyes upon the prize, eternity with our Lord.

III. Conclusion.

- A. I have spoken these words to this young lady on the day of her baptism.
- B. I have spoken these words to all who hear my voice who are struggling and losing hope.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
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- C. Fix your eyes on Jesus alone. Do not run a course that you have laid down, rather run the one that God has laid down, for it is defined and marked by the faithful, sin covering blood of His Son.
- D. Fix your eyes on Jesus, always asking Him to bring your faith all the way across the line.
- E. Fix your eyes on Jesus as you strip off sin and burdens.
- F. Fix your eyes on Jesus, for He is faithful to save all who call upon His name.

Small Group Questions

- How do encumbrances weigh you down in your pursuit of Jesus?
- What are the encumbrances that you find in your life and what plan have you put into place to remove them?
- How do you “fix your eyes on Jesus?” How can you know when you are not fixed on Him?