



INTRODUCTION

Hebrews 12:1-2

What can a person accomplish who discovers the secret of aligning their lives under Jesus' truth? This person can finish the race and fulfill the calling God has created them to live out. Hebrews 12:1-3 explains this:

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Friend, I understand that you are probably tired right now. In Scripture, this type of tired is known as being “weary” or “losing heart.” Life may not be working in your favor, as you see it. Sure, it could be your fault why it hasn't. But it could also be someone else's fault. Or it could be a combination of both. Regardless of the reason, the result is the same: You are tired. You are worn out. Your hope has waned, and your fervency has fizzled. But what the author of Hebrews is trying to tell you in this passage is that if you are tired, you still need to keep going.

Even though things are rough right now, don't quit.

You have a race to finish—a figurative race of living the kingdom life for the glory of God and the good of yourself and others. And even though you may have gotten sidelined along the way or detoured by heeding human wisdom, Jesus can set you back on that racetrack and help you finish strong.

The author of Hebrews knew he wasn't writing to perfect people. He was writing to people marred by sin and failure and filled with regret. Flawed people who were just plain tired and wanted to quit. He knew all that, which is why He prodded them and goaded them to keep on going. And how were they (and you) to do that? By fixing their eyes on the one who knows how to both start and finish things—the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

You have the power to keep going because Jesus has the power to both start and finish whatever it is you might face. He is the origin and completion of your faith walk. What you need to do is change your focus. You need to get back on track. Run the race set before you. And the way you do that is by focusing your eyes on Jesus. Become fixated on Him.

When you are fixated on something or someone, that means you stop being fixated on anything else. It's not possible to be fixated on multiple things at the same time. To be fixated on Jesus means you are zeroing in on Him. You are canceling out all other views. You are no longer looking to other people and their opinions or even your own personal viewpoints. Rather, you are looking at Jesus and Him alone.

Where you look will determine where you go. If you are looking at the mess you are in right now and fixating on everything that is wrong, then you will only continue to walk into more mess. You have to see the way out. You have to look to the power that can overcome. Focus your eyes on Jesus—the Alpha and Omega. He will see you through.¹

¹ Devotional by Tony Evans found @ <https://tonyevans.org/focus-on-jesus-the-alpha-and-omega/>

Apply it

“You Are Not Alone”

The writer uses the Jewish heroes of the faith, the cloud host of witnesses (12:1a), as models of perseverance in faith despite difficulties. He encourages the Jewish believers to follow their example. Not only that, but he presents these heroes as witnesses, watching the way the Jewish believers are living. It is as if the ancient believers and the people to whom he is writing are all assembled in a stadium for some great marathon. The huge crowd of men and women of faith mentioned in chapter 11 are packed into the tiers of seats. They have come to watch the race and also to inspire those participating in it to run well by attesting to the validity of the contest and by reminding them of the example set by their predecessors.²

6. Look back at Hebrews 11. Which of the characters do you resonate with most? Why?

As we turn the page to Hebrews 12, the author employs the brilliant metaphor of a sporting event—in this case, a foot race—to encourage his readers to press on and finish their journey of faith. The spiritual athletes showcased in chapter 11 are ushered off the track and into the grandstands in chapter 12, where the author of Hebrews pictures them cheering us on as we take our places in the marathon.³

7. In what tangible ways can the heroes of Hebrews 11 encourage us to live lives of faith?

8. Read Hebrews 11:13-16 and 39-40. What enabled these people to remain faithful till the end? How can we apply these characteristics to our own race?

² Africa Bible Commentary (p. 3947). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

³ Swindoll, Charles R.. Insights on Hebrews (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 12) (p. 194). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

9. Who are some around you serving as a present “cloud of witnesses”? How are they encouraging you to run with endurance?

“Life in The Fast Lane”

The word means weight. It can refer to physical weight (obesity), or to unnecessary baggage. Ancient Greek runners would actually run naked so as not to be encumbered. Olympic athletes in our day wear some pretty skimpy outfits. They don't want anything to slow them down or drain their energy. Picture the start of the Boston Marathon. The lean, muscular Kenyan runners are at the front of the pack, waiting for the starting gun. A couple of skinny American runners are there, too. But next to them is a fat, flabby guy wearing a parka, all-weather pants, hiking boots, with a 50-pound pack. You ask curiously, “What's in your pack?” He says, “I've got all the sodas and Twinkies that I'll need to finish this race.” You're thinking, “Right!” That guy wouldn't stand a chance of finishing, let alone winning, because he has not laid aside every encumbrance.

Encumbrances are distinguished here from sins. They include things that are not intrinsically wrong, but they're wrong because they keep you from running as you should. If you got rid of those heavy hiking boots and put on some jogging shoes, you'd run better. If you dropped the pack and dressed in shorts and a tank top, you might finish the race.⁴

10. What are some encumbrances that aren't inherently sinful but negatively impact you from running your race well?

⁴ Cole, Steven, *Faith to Run the Christian Marathon (Hebrews 12:1-3)*, <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-44-faith-run-christian-marathon-hebrews-121-3>

11. How can we hold each other accountable to these encumbrances if one sees something as an encumbrance and the other sees it as liberty?

“Guilty Of The Crime”

The most sobering thing we see here is that the “sin which clings so closely” to us refers to the specific sin(s) each of us, individually, is most likely to commit— a “besetting sin” as it is termed in the older translations. We each have characteristic sins that more easily entangle us than others. Some sins that tempt and degrade others hold little appeal for us— and vice versa.

Sensuality may be the Achilles’ heel for many men, but not all. Another who has gained victory over such sin may regularly down jealousy’s deadly nectar, not realizing it is rotting his soul. Dishonesty may never tempt some souls, for guile simply has no appeal to them, but just cross them and you will feel Satan’s temper!

What sin is it that so “easily” (NIV) entangles you or me? Covetousness? Envy? Criticism? Laziness? Hatred? Lust? Unthankfulness? Pride? Whatever sin it is, it must be stripped off and left behind.⁵

12. In what way can sin so easily entangle us and cause us to trip up? What is the antidote?

13. (Personal Question) What sin or sins seem to trip you up most? What is it about them that causes you so much trouble as you run your race?

⁵ Hughes, R. Kent. Hebrews (2 volumes in 1 / ESV Edition) (Preaching the Word) (Kindle Locations 6678–6683). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Remember that you are never alone in the race. Nothing will dampen your spirits and cut your stride in the spiritual marathon like the feeling that you're alone. You're not! Consider the golden words of the Scottish preacher John Baillie. Make his prayer yours: "I thank Thee that this Christian way whereon I walk is no untried or uncharted road, but a road beaten hard by the footsteps of saints, apostles, prophets, and martyrs." [129] Thousands of faithful men and women have run the same path as you.⁶

14. What sins seem to impact the following: Men/Women; Young/Old? How can we help one another to rise above the temptations around us?

"Take It To The Limit"

We each have a specific course mapped out for us, and the course for each runner is unique. Some are relatively straight, some are all turns, some seem all uphill, some are a flat hiking path. All are long, but some are longer. But the glory is, each of us (no exceptions!) can finish the race "that is set before us." I may not be able to run your course, and you may find mine impossible, but I can finish my race and you yours. Both of us can finish well if we choose and if we rely on him who is our strength and our guide! We can experience the same satisfaction the Apostle Paul did as he neared the finish line: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Timothy 4: 7, 8) Is that not a comforting and inviting thought? There is no doubt that we can finish "the race that is set before us" — and finish it with satisfaction.⁷

15. In what ways are our races similar to all Christians? In what ways is your race different than others around you? How does knowing that God marked out this race grow your endurance?

⁶ Swindoll, Charles R.. Insights on Hebrews (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 12) (p. 200). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.. Kindle Edition

⁷ Hughes, R. Kent. Hebrews (2 volumes in 1 / ESV Edition) (Preaching the Word) (Kindle Locations 6697-6698). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

The writer again reminds his people to consider Jesus in verse 3. The author isn't asking them to merely take Christ under consideration. By consider, he means to hold up Christ as a model and to constantly look to him for inspiration and encouragement. Jesus shows his followers how to be found faithful in the end. This is not a new argument in Hebrews. The writer is echoing his exhortation from chapter 3. The only way to endure and stand firm is to consider Jesus. He endured great hostility in the race. It doesn't take much pain to get our attention or much hostility for us to feel persecuted. There are persons right now enduring vehement physical persecution because of their faith in Jesus Christ. There are people being flogged, beaten, imprisoned, separated from their families, and even martyred in his name.

Thinking of physical hostility, the writer of Hebrews reminds us that our Redeemer was tortured. Jesus was flogged, whipped, and endured this hostility against himself. Considering what Jesus Christ endured will help us endure in a world that continues to grow more and more hostile and opposed to Christianity. We must fix our eyes on him if we are going to persevere.⁸

16. What reports do we hear about persecution in our world? How about around you? Why does God allow his people to endure trials and tribulations? How are we to respond to it?

17. What is the ultimate goal and finish line of our Christian race? How can “considering Jesus” motivate you to keep running until we finish the race?

⁸ Mohler, R. Albert. *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)*. B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. This study was compiled and questions were written by Tim Badal (Sugar Grove Campus)—www.villagebible.church/smallgroup