

“Run with Endurance”

Hebrews 12:1-4

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Introduction - Stand and read – Hebrews 12:1-4

- This passage in Hebrews has long been one of the most important in my life as has been lately in my life as well
 - To quickly understand the context as most of you know because I know you are a well taught congregation

The book of Hebrews is written to first century Jews who had become believers in Christ

- And all of us today face certain losses when we come to the Lord – loss of certain friends, loss of certain activities that our flesh used to enjoy and that is a good loss
 - But for the Jews of the first century, they often lost their jobs, their land, their families, and often their lives
 - And this loss brought about great discouragement in their lives
- Discouragement is such an often-used tool of the enemy
 - Things can be going so good in our lives and then something happens, and discouragement has the potential to steal all of our joy

Hebrews 12:1-4 as the author tells the original audience and us as we are studying this tonight, how to deal with discouragement and really how to run this Christian life with endurance, not giving up and giving in to the discouragement of the enemy

- And if you are taking notes tonight, I encourage you to write these six things down, if not pray them in and think them through...

Running with Endurance

#1 – Look to the past – Hebrews 12:1a

#2 – Look within – Hebrews 12:1b

#3 – Look to Jesus – Hebrews 12:2a

#4 – Be confident in Him – Hebrews 12:2b

#5 – Understand His motivation – Hebrews 12c

#6 – Consider Him – Hebrews 12:3-4

- And we will consider these one at a time starting with...

Running with Endurance

#1 – Look to the past – Hebrews 12:1a

- As the author begins to encourage these discouraged believers, he does so first by saying, “therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witness...”
 - The motivation to keep moving forward in our faith even in the face of persecution and trials and discouragement is the fact that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses

But what in the world does that mean?

- I have heard pastors sometimes seem to indicate that everyone that we have loved that has died and gone to heaven, that those people are all gathered together watching every moment of our lives
 - I don’t know if that encourages you and for you to know that your Dad who has passed is looking down on you and proud of you – that sounds so good to say
 - But do you really want grandma watching everything you do as you live your life?

For most of us that would sound creepy, embarrassing, and invasive more than encouraging that grandma is watching every moment of every day

- And the flip side of that, I don’t mean to be mean, but I don’t know that is what Grandma really wants to be doing in heaven either
 - I mean can you imagine?
 - I don’t know if I want that to be the activity of heaven

And thankfully, nowhere in the Bible are we told that that is what we do in heaven

- So, this great cloud of witnesses is not grandma and grandpa watching everything you do, that doesn’t sound very encouraging to me
 - The key to understanding what the author of Hebrews is referring to here is the word “therefore”

Whenever a Bible verse begins with the word “therefore” we need to understand what it is “there fore”

- It is always without fail, pointing back to something the author has just been talking about
 - He makes an important point and then says, therefore, this is how that point I just made applies
 - So the “therefore” in Hebrews 12:1 refers back to the content of Hebrews chapter 11, a chapter known as the hall of faith

You see clearly here in Hebrews 12:1, the author of Hebrews is comparing the Christian walk to a race

- And the point here is if you are running a marathon, then as you come to the end of your 26.2 miles, normally you end your marathon in either a stadium, as they do in the Olympics, or at least in some place where many people are watching

And when you come into that stadium or into that arena where many are watching, they begin to cheer

- And I only imagine, because I have never run anything longer than a 5K – so some of you have your 26.2 mile experience, I have my 3.1 – but I imagine, as you come into that arena where people are watching and you hear the cheers of encouragement, it gives you a renewed sense of energy

I imagine your body was done around mile 19, and you have just been putting one foot in front of the other for the next seven miles

- And yet when you hear the encouragement, when you know you have just one lap to finish and then you are done, your body must be filled with a fresh energy it has not known for the last hour plus

Well, the author of Hebrews is saying that it is much like the Christian walk, it is a marathon of trials and overcoming situations that we never think we are going to get through

It is not a quick sprint to the finish line, it is not a 40-yard dash, it is mile after mile, year after year, putting one foot in front of the other in a continual process of following Jesus

- And in that process the enemy will clearly be there, trying to get you to quit, trying to get you to become so discouraged that you pack it in and give up

And the first way to combat that discouragement that is common to us all is to remember we are not in this alone, of course we have Jesus and His eternal presence in our lives but we also have the testimony of many have gone before us, many have lived this Christian life, this life of following God in a fallen world with a fallen body and their testimony is all the same

- Whether you want to talk about Noah who trusted God to build a boat even though Genesis is pretty clear it had never rained on earth yet
 - A mist would come up from the ground and water the earth
 - So, Noah and Abraham and so many others had to serve God when God didn't seem to make a bit of sense
- These men and women also had to serve God when it seemed like they were doing it all alone, like they were the only ones of earth who were following God
 - And they had to serve Him when it seemed like His promises would never come to pass
- And all of their testimonies are the same, they rise off the pages of scripture and say to you and say to me – “It can be done, it can be done – you can live for the Lord in the midst of trials and troubles, it can be done and in the end it is absolutely worth it!”

Their testimonies are an encouragement to me and you, but I want more than to just be encouraged by a testimony, I also want to be a testimony and for that we need point number 2...

Running with Endurance

#1 – Look to the past – Hebrews 12:1a

#2 – Look within – Hebrews 12:1b

- the author then tells his audience and us that are learning these things today, that in order for us to run with endurance, in order for us to overcome discouragement and deal with it biblically and be a testimony there are some things that we need to lay aside

As we have talked about in the last point, the author here is comparing the Christian life to a race

- And not a sprint, not a 40-yard dash
 - But the author is comparing the Christian life to a long-distance run
 - Where endurance is even more important than speed

And obviously as is true with any race, but in particular with a long-distance race, if you are going to run effectively, then there are some things we need to lay aside

- **The word there translated into English as “lay aside” is the Greek word “apotithemi” (ah-pa-tith-amee) and it literally means “to put aside, to put it out of the way, or to rid oneself of”**

If we are going to deal biblically with discouragement and the desire to go back to old things like the Hebrew Christians that the book of Hebrews was written to were tempted to do

- If we are going to overcome that and run this Christian race to win, there has to be things that we are willing to put aside, to put out of the way, or to rid oneself of
 - What things?

What do we need to lay aside?

#1 – Sin

- the author tells us that the most significant thing we need to lay aside is sin and not just any sin, but the author says specifically “the sin which so easily ensnares us”

And that can be and is different for every one of us

- What easily ensnares me, may not be the sin that easily ensnares you
 - And what you struggle with and what is always getting you down and tripping you up, may not be what bothers me at all

But we all have a sin or two that easily ensnares us

- And God's word for that sin, for that area of our life, is we need to lay it aside, we need to put it out of the way and rid ourselves of it
 - We are so good at making excuses for our sin, blaming others for the way we are
 - And certainly, how we were raised and our life experiences do affect who we are
- But if we are serious about being all that God wants us to be, we need to put the excuses in the trash where they belong and we need to identify those sins that easily ensnare us as individuals and we need to put them down!
 - We need to pray like David, search me God, see if there be any unclean thing within me – and for me that prayer normally takes about two seconds – this, this and that need to go and God is gracious to only give us three
 - But we need to let God's Holy Spirit identify those things and we need to repent of them tonight!
- But it is not just sin that needs to go, secondly the author of Hebrews says we need to lay aside, weight...

What do we need to lay aside?

#1 – Sin

#2 – Weight

- “Weights?” – is this a weight lose sermon? - What is a weight???

Well, a weight in the context of Hebrew 12 is something that is not necessarily sin, but something that none the less hinders your walk with God

The problem with a weight is not necessarily what it is, the problem lies in what it does to you and your ability, your progress in running to win

- The illustration should be obvious, but no athlete, no one who wants to run to win wants to be hindered by any unnecessary weight.

Can you image if the Olympic runners came to the start point, with a backpack full of bricks

- The commentators would say – what is he doing? – is it legal? I’m sure it is – but it’s not smart because no matter how naturally gifted that athlete is, if that athlete has a backpack full of bricks, there is no way they are going to win the race

- And that is so true in our walks with Jesus

- Because the truth is, you might be the most spiritually gifted person in the room but if you won’t lay down the weights that are slowing down your relationship with Jesus, you will never be all that God wants you to be

There are many things you can do and still walk with God

- But if you are going to run to win, then you need to let God identify, not just the sins in your life that need to be laid down, but we also need to ask the question, “Lord what things in my life are slowing down my walk with you?”
 - And when God shows us those issues, then just like sins, we need to lay those weights down as well

That is how Paul the apostle, one of the most effective men that ever lived, that was how he lived

- Paul said to the Corinthians...

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” – I Corinthians 6:12

- Paul said I do lots of things and God will still love me and if I truly believe in Him I am still going to heaven, but are these things I am allowing helping me in my walk

When I was over in Greece on our footsteps of Paul tour, one of our guides was talking about the original games, the Olympic and Isthmus games and they were telling us how the runners would run naked

- They wanted nothing hindering them in their race
 - And I was thinking about that – not about people running naked – but about what those athletes would consider a hindrance, and it really just hit me that there is nothing too small that is not worthy of my prayerful consideration – Lord is this a weight?
 - In today's world swimmers shave every bit of hair off their body to gain a second, so thankful I played golf

But that ministers to me in my walk with God, there is nothing too small in my life or your life to be given that prayerful consideration, is this a weight?

- Especially when you realize as a Bible student, that it is often the smallest things that are the difference between victory and defeat - It is so often the smallest things that are the difference between usefulness and not being used by the Lord

Do you remember the story from the book of judges with Gideon? – Gideon is up against 132,000 Midianites with only 32,000 Jews – how do you deal with that problem?

- Well, I would suggest 100,000 more Jews or 100,000 less Midianites – but God says Gideon you have too many, tell whoever is scared to go home and 22,000 leave

And then God says you still have too many, so tell your men you go to the brook and take a drink

- And 9,700 men, put their face into the river, and 300 men pulled the water out with their hand and drank
 - And you know Gideon's heart just had to sink because he had to know God did not devise this test to weed out 300 men

9,700 men were eliminated from serving God by how they took a drink of water and church nothing is more common than drinking water but that day, that little thing was the difference

What little thing in your life may be the difference between God really breaking through and using you?

- What little thing may be the difference between victory and defeat in your life spiritually?

A college athlete asked his coach, “Coach can I smoke and run?” and the coach said “yes you can smoke and run, you just can’t smoke and win”

- We want to run, we want to finish well, we don’t want to be overrun with discouragement – so we must ask the Lord, what sin I am not dealing with?

Lord is there a sin, I am not just struggling with, but tolerating in my life – today I want to lay it down

- Lord are there things in my life that I am tolerating and they are not sin, but Lord you know they are hindering my walk with you – Lord I want to lay those things down
 - Then thirdly...

Running with Endurance

#1 – Look to the past – Hebrews 12:1a

#2 – Look within – Hebrews 12:1b

#3 – Look to Jesus – Hebrews 12:2a

- One of the things I love about Hebrews 12 is God who is inspiring whoever wrote it, God is such a great coach

If you had a running coach, they might tell you, yes in between the start and the finish of the race is a long in between and it can be hot and miserable but keep going!

- And a coach that lets you know the middle of the race is tedious and difficult is a good coach, because you need to know what to expect

But an even better coach would then give you some help as to how to run with endurance, how to keep putting one foot in front of the other without quitting - Long distance runners know that part of the “how” to run with endurance is to keep their eyes focused on a goal in the distance

Long distance runners know, just looking down at your feet can get rather discouraging

- But getting your eyes on a mountain up ahead, a building you are running toward which is the near the goal, the finish of the race
 - Having that kind of focus can mentally change everything as you run

And the author here gives us as Christians similar advice, he tells us what needs to be our goal and our focus. He says if we are going to run with endurance, number one we need to look to Jesus

➤ And that word “look” there is very important as well
The word translated into English as “Look” is the Greek word “aphorao” (off-or-rao) and it means “to turn your eyes away from something and to fix them on something else”

- And just think about how important that definition is for you and me to run this Christian race with endurance

We must first get our eyes off of so many things

- We need to get our eyes off of ourselves

How discouraging it is to have the focus and trust of your life and finishing well in this thing called Christianity, how discouraging it is in all of that to be looking to you

- I don’t know what I am doing, I don’t have it all figured out – And if this is all up to me, I am in big trouble
 - And yet even though we know that, we still keep our eyes on ourselves – how am I going to figure this out?
- That is not a great strategy for finishing well, that is a great strategy for being discouraged and quitting
 - So, we need to get our eyes off ourselves

And we need to get our eyes off of each other

- Not only am I discouraging, but other people are too
 - And they are discouraging either because they have failed to run their race and it is so easy to think ‘if that guy couldn’t do it, if that pastor couldn’t finish well, what hope do I have?’ - That can be terribly discouraging

Or the opposite in our world today, everybody only seems to put their best self now on their Instagram account and if I am looking at that, I can think “how come they have it all together and I am lost in the sauce?”

- And of course, we know it is all a show, we know that what gets posted on Instagram is not the full story of how their life truly is
 - But even though we know that, the enemy still uses it to discourage us

So, we must get our eyes off of ourselves, off of one another, off of our sinful ambitions and ungodly goals, we need to get our eyes off all of that and we need to fix our eyes on Jesus

- There is no better goal, there is no better perspective to have as you are running this Christian life, than to keep your eyes on Jesus - To have that time every single day, when you sit before Him and pour out your heart in prayer of all that concerns you

Then to sit with your Bible open, listening to Jesus speak to you through His Word

- Letting His priorities shape who you are
 - There is no one better to fix our eyes on and hang out with and listen to, than Jesus
- Turning our eyes away from any and every other focus and then focusing them on Jesus and then...

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#3 – Look to Jesus – Hebrews 12:2a

#4 – Be confident in Him – Hebrews 12:2b

- Next the author tells us why it is again so important to focus our eyes on Jesus, and that is because He is both the author and the finisher of your faith
 - It is so important that you get this

Jesus is the author of your faith

- Why am I going through what I am going through, why am I in this Christian life to begin with?
 - The answer is clear and powerful – Jesus called you to it!
 - It wasn't a whim or an emotional response to a message, you are following Jesus because Jesus called you to follow Him

And this is so important, I want all couples we do premarital counseling with to tell me why they feel God is calling them into their future marriage

- And that is so important because those of us who have been married a while, you know, in the best of marriages there are really hard days - And if you get married because she is hot, or he is fine and I love him so much, well there will be days when all of that is hard to see

And we must come back to the fact, God called me to this, this was not just an emotional decision, God called me into this marriage

- And therefore, I can choose to do the right things, even if I don't feel like doing them at the moment
 - And when I do the right things, that is so often when the feelings, and the passion returns

Well it is similar in our relationships with the Lord

- I am in this because He called me to it!
 - So hard days, bad days, good days, I am in this because God has called me to it

And then even more importantly than that, Jesus is not just the author of our faith, He is the finisher of our faith as well

- He is going to get us to and through the finish line

And that makes Jesus way better than anyone in the Hall of faith from Hebrews chapter 11

Each one of those heroes of the faith, we can be encouraged by their story, we can be challenged by their faith and the fact that they stayed with the Lord

- But Jesus is so much better because He doesn't just say, "It can be done" Jesus actually helps you get it done
 - And truly understanding that can be such a blessing to your Christian race

The King of Prussia, an area in what is today Poland, around the time of the American Revolution was a man by the name of Fredrick the Great and he sent a message to his top general that he was sending a force of 60,000 men to the battle against Silesia (sa-lee-za)

➤ Well, when the troops assembled there were only 50,000
So, the general wrote to Fredrick the Great a letter of protest saying, you said I would have a force of 60,000 men and I only have 50,000, there has to be some mistake!

- And Fredrick the Great wrote back and said, "there is no mistake, I counted you for 10,000 men"

Now I don't know how you would feel if someone said that to you – maybe encouraged, maybe...

- you would say, well thanks boss, but I would rather have 10,000 more actual men

But history aside, I was thinking about that story from history when considering this verse and I really want us to ask ourselves, "what do you really count Jesus for in this race?"

- What does Jesus count for in your estimation in considering your ability to finish well?
 - And of course, the proper answer to that question should be – He counts for everything!
 - No matter how outnumbered I am, no matter how impossible what I am going through seems

As Paul says in Romans "If God is for me, who can be against me?"

If God is for you, it doesn't matter who is against you, again I repeat, God is for you! - He said, "Let there be light" and there was

- He said to the red sea "part" and it did
 - He gave sight to the blind and life to the dead and then loved you enough to die in your place

What you are facing right now in your life precious men and women is not too hard for Jesus

- What do you count Jesus for in this whole process?
 - We need to lay aside the sins and weights that so easily ensnare us - We need to run looking away from so many other things and looking toward Jesus and be confident in His ability to get things done, then...

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#1 – Look to the past – Hebrews 12:1a

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#3 – Look to Jesus – Hebrews 12:2a

#4 – Be confident in Him – Hebrews 12:2b

#5 – Understand His motivation – Hebrews 12:2c

- It is important if you want to be great at something to study those who have gone before you who were great
 - When I was trying to be a competitive golfer as a young man, I would read anything I could get my hands on concerning how Jack Nicklaus would practice, how Tom Watson would prepare
- I got to see right in front of my eyes Tiger Woods when he was 12, 13, 14 years old, how he would practice and prepare because we learned to play golf at the same golf course
 - And I was determined to learn from those guys in order to be the best golfer I could be

Well, the one we need to look to again for Spiritual guidance is Jesus

- What made Him tick, what did He do to deal with discouragement and pain? - Because you remember, He endured a lot

He endured the cross, He endured paying for my sin and your sin

- He endured a world full of humans He created, rejecting Him and mocking Him
 - And we should really ask ourselves, how did our hero Jesus deal emotionally with all of that? What can I learn by what motivated His heart?

And what we learn there in verse 2, is that Jesus was motivated by what was going to happen after He died on the cross, the joy that was set before Him, being reunited with His Father in heaven, sitting down at the right hand of the throne of God

- Heaven was Jesus' motivation
 - And friends we are fools if heaven is not our motivation as well

Heaven is not just a destination but a motivation for us to live a life pleasing to God

- But if we are honest, for many Christians, heaven is just a destination
 - It is place we are going to go some day
 - And of course, it certainly is

But heaven needs to be more than that, more than a destination

- It needs to be a motivation – when life isn't fair- it doesn't have to be fair – because things will be made right, not in this life, but in heaven

When I wonder why I don't get the thanks I think I deserve for serving people – again heaven, where I get to hear Jesus say “well done”

- When I am not fulfilled by even the greatest of life's experiences and I wonder what is wrong with my life?
 - Nothing – you are going to heaven, where in His presence is fullness of joy and at His right hand are pleasure forever more

Heaven is not just a place you are going to someday, heaven is the motivation to finish well, to run to win, to be all that God wants you to be, to run with endurance because heaven is coming soon!

- well then finally the author of Hebrews says “consider Him”

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#6 – Consider Him – Hebrews 12:3-4

➤ And this is another important Greek Word to take note of **The word translated into English as “consider” is the Greek word “analogizomai” (aw-nola-geed-zo-my) and it means “to think over, consider or ponder by weighing and comparing”**

- And what specifically does the author say we are consider by weighing or comparing? - We are to ponder, to weigh and compare the suffering Jesus went through

And what are we to compare and weigh what Jesus went through against?

- We are to compare and weigh what Jesus went through to what we have gone through or are going through

Now for most of you right off the bat you know in your heart, there will be no comparison, not that you won't do it, but what you are going through cannot compare to what Jesus went through

- That fact that Jesus was beaten so badly, you could not have even recognized Him after the beatings
 - Scourged and crucified for you!
 - And not just the pain, but bearing sin and all that meant to Jesus – being separated from the Father which is the only time He cried on in the crucifixion

When we consider all that Jesus suffered for us, I don't know what you are going through, but I think I can safely say, it's not that!

- “But even with that understand, see how the author states he knows you haven't suffered yet to the degree Jesus did
 - The author answers that question in verse 4, and the answer is because you are still alive

The fact that you are still alive is evidence that what you are going through, as difficult and painful as it is, I am not trying to diminish that, but if you consider, if you weigh and compare what you are going through to what Jesus went through, it doesn't even compare

- And in saying this to the original audience and to us there is some sanctified shaming that is happening in the text, sanctified and very healthy shaming
 - And the reason it is so important that it happens, is what the author says in verse 3, we have to go through this comparison, so we won't give up

You see the danger of thinking we are suffering more than any other human ever

- The danger of thinking what I am going through is so much worse than what anybody else has faced

The danger of that is self-pity and self-pity if not dealt with by some sanctified shaming, will lead to you giving up this fight

- Notice this verse in the New Living Translation

“Think of all the hostility He endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up.” – Hebrews 12:3 (New Living Translation)

- Self-pity will lead to some horrific things in your heart and will put you in danger of quitting

You see, listen carefully to me precious ones, we must never expect Christ living in us to be treated any differently by the world than Christ was actually treated by the world in the first century (let me repeat that)

And I hope and pray this brings some needed perspective in our lives to our trials and our suffering and our persecution

- Because honestly this message is not taught in American Christianity today, oh it is here in this church, but out there
 - The message so often is God wants you happy, God's wants you wealthy, so put on your fake smile and go for it!

But God's Word actually is, yes at times life is hard!

- Yes, at times life doesn't make sense!
 - Yes, at times, the world treats you terribly!

But this great cloud of witnesses rises off the pages of scripture and says to you and me, that is exactly what life was like for us!

- And you can do it, and it is worth it, when you step into eternity and hear the God of the universe say to you "well done!"

The Word of the Lord for you tonight is, it is always too soon to quit on your walk with Jesus

- There is a great story from World War I, in our day and age we are very familiar with World War II because of all the history channel shows that currently cover it, but World War I was devastating as well
 - It was a war that was fought on many fronts, but one was the British verses the Turks

And on March 15, 1915 in the battle for Dardanelles – the British brought in the biggest part of their fleet to that part of the world

- and the British began to bombard that fortress, it was a terrible battle that saw several British ships sent to the bottom of the ocean and many lives lost
 - so eventually the British commanders decided to pull out, they decided the cost was too high to take that fort

Now what would not be known until many, many years later is when the order came to pull out by the British commanders, the Turks were down to sixty seconds of ammunition and were already planning their surrender

- If the British forces had waited one more minute, the British would have split the enemy forces in two - and World War I, which was pure carnage of young life, could have been over months if not years earlier and millions of lives could have been saved

Sixty more seconds!

- Every time I think of that story from history, I think of many Christians

Many Christians who are just being bombarded by the enemy, bombarded by trials and struggles

- I think of many Christians who just give up and think victory will never happen!

And when my heart starts to feel that same way, I think, hold on for one more minute, hold on for one more season

- You have no idea what God is about to do
 - So often the enemy fights the hardest right before he is defeated
- Precious men and women, don't quit, don't give into the discouragement and self-pity – you keep going, you keep running to win, you keep putting one foot in front of the other - It can be done!