

**NBC Sermon 06.21.20 NBC Front Lawn - Hebrews 12:1-3**  
**The Secret to Everyday Faithfulness: Looking to Jesus**

+turn in your Bibles or Bible app to \*Hebrews 12:1

***Happy Father's Day*** - **Pray for:** praise for being our Heavenly Father who will never betray us-who always cares for us-who is patient with us-who provides for us, our nation, seeing all as made in God's image, for missionaries like HOMI and thank you for protecting Haiti quite a bit, for Fathers (new fathers Jared & Andrew) - for wisdom for all as we seek to raise our kids to know you and as we navigate all of the pitfalls in our culture - for strength - for those who wanted children and never could, for those who have children who have passed away, for hearts receptive to you as we open the Word.

+Hebrews 12:1-3 is an incredible passage. One summer when I worked at a Christian camp as a counselor, Hebrews 12:1-3 was our theme, called "Run the Race." Week after week after week we were in 9 or 10 chapel services a week in which the speaker would preach some version of Hebrews 12:1-3.

You would think that we would have been tired of hearing it as a staff by the end of the summer. But what amazed me is that both myself and the rest of the staff noticed that as the summer went on, we never got tired of hearing different pastors preach on Hebrews 12:1-3 because God's Word never gets old.

And I think the reason in particular that we enjoyed hearing Hebrews 12:1-3, today's preaching passage, so much, is because not only does studying God's Word never grow old but also looking to Jesus never grows old!

Jonathan Edwards, one of the preachers used by God to bring about the Great Awakening in New England, once said, "Take notice of Christ's excellence, which is a...feast."

So that is what we are going to do together this morning. We are going to feast on the excellencies of Christ.

So much of the Bible tells us to do this and the Apostle Paul in particular ties knowing Jesus into the race of the Christian life more than once. To just give one example, in Philippians 3:8-9, *"Indeed, I count everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith... [vv. 13-14] Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*

So let's press on. Let's strain to grow in following Jesus together.

We see multiple commands in these 3 verses of Hebrews 12:1-3.

- 1) Get Ready to Run! (v. 1a)**
- 2) Run Without Giving Up! (v. 1b)
- 3) Focus On Jesus, Your Strength & Goal! (v. 2)
- 4) Be Absorbed With Jesus So You Can Keep Running (v. 3)

**1) Get Ready to Run! (v. 1a)**

[12:1a] *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely..."*

v. 1—“Therefore” of course is referring back to Hebrews 11. For 40 verses we have seen people who testify to us of God’s grace and help in their lives. They testify to us that they made it, often through great trials, and that we can too.

**The word used here for “witness” is not the usual word for spectator, but from the context it could mean that. It does seem to have more the idea here of somebody who is giving a testimony, an encouragement to us.**

Because of the testimony of God’s work in so many people’s lives, let’s **also—let’s learn from them.**

Let’s also “lay aside every weight.” Notice here, he will talk about sin next. But right now, first he’s talking about anything that weighs us down, anything that slows us down from following Jesus.

Because he differentiates between weights and sin, I do believe he’s talking here about things that are not necessarily sinful to everyone that slow you down in living for Jesus. They are things that can become sinful to you. And you already know what I’m talking about. It’s probably whatever thing just popped into your mind that is not necessarily a sin but that is slowing you down.

+Just to give a few examples, social media is a big one today. Movies. I enjoy both of those. But maybe you like me have realized at different points in your life that they’re taking more than they’re giving, and that you’re getting lazy in following Jesus because they’re consuming too much of your life? You might think—I don’t have time to serve, but then you write down your time and you realize you spent hours with screen time this week.

It could be a friendship if you realize that that friendship is influencing you away from Jesus more than you are influencing the friendship towards Jesus.

Again, it could be referring to anything that slows you down in being able to run the race of the Christian life and run with speed and endurance.

+When the athletes during this time would enter the arena they would have bright, colorful robes on that they would take off before running. We see this same idea today in the opening ceremonies of the Olympics, those costumes from the opening ceremonies are not the clothes they compete in.

+When I was in seminary, one of my New Testament professors was Paul Felix, who is Allyson Felix’s father. Allyson Felix, the great track star who is sponsored by Nike and who not only has appeared in the Olympics multiple times but who is a world-class athlete in-between every Olympics. He would tell us a little about her latest travels or training now and then, and I can guarantee you this. You would never see her at the starting block of a race wearing ankle weights. Or a net around her feet. Every part of her life, her training and how she eats and lives and sleeps is all designed to give her maximum speed.

The ankle weights in v. 1 would be anything that weighs us down, that slows us down in our Christian life. The net would be sin.

Not only, “*let us also lay aside every weight*” but also “sin which clings so closely.”

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What sin is it for you that you keep struggling with, that keeps coming back to haunt you. There are sins that are specific to each one of us, sins that we struggle with over and over. And he's telling us here, get ready to run! Lay aside not only anything that will hold you down, but lay aside sin because it will just trip you up.

What sin is in your life that you have been tolerating but that will only trip you up?

1) Get Ready to Run! (v. 1a)

**2) Run Without Giving Up! (v. 1b)**

*"...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us..."*

So first he has told us how to get ready to run, and now he tells us run—and run without giving up!

The reason that I had Gerry read for us this morning starting in chapter 10 v. 32 is because we see this idea of endurance as a major theme in Hebrews.

*\*If you have your Bible open, flip to chapter 10:32, "But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings...[35-36] Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised."*

- Then in Hebrews 11 we have a long chapter that shows this played out with real people. How did they endure? Then we get back to the idea of endurance in 12:1.

And what is it that we are to run with endurance? "The race" - the Greek word used here is not the normal word for race, it is a word that implies a difficult race. It could also be used in the sense of a "fight" or an "athletic contest."

You're not going to make it with just a burst of energy. It's not a short sprint, because the Christian life is a marathon. That is why I entitled this sermon, the secret to everyday faithfulness—looking to Jesus.

+ Everyday faithfulness. Glenna Marshall is an author acquaintance of mine I know through a Gospel Writers group. She recently wrote a book called *Everyday Faithfulness: The Beauty of Ordinary Perseverance in a Demanding World*. I have been encouraged by it as I have been listening to it on audiobook and I heard this this week and wrote it down because it was so helpful: "Faithfulness to Christ is a daily, lifelong pursuit. A lifetime of daily faithfulness will be full of unremarkable single days of faithfulness...Today's efforts aren't just for today!"

As we are faithful to cultivate the spiritual disciplines like Bible reading and prayer and involvement in church, God will use those when we are tempted to fall away.

+Dads, it's not so much big acts of faith in our life that will impact our kids, although God may use that sometimes, it's more likely the consistency of walking with Jesus every day and teaching them about God that will have the impact on them. Let's run that race with endurance.

For all of us—You have to run your race. I can finish my race and you can run yours, but I can't run your race and that is not what I am called to. I am simply here to cheer you on and to point you to the One who can give you strength. You cannot run my race or your friend's race.

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The race is marked out for each of us by God, who knows exactly what we can handle with our particular make up, what will make us more like Jesus, and what will prepare us to minister to others and spread the gospel. So we trust the One who sets our own race before us.

We don't compete with each other, we help each other. We are competing against Satan, his world system, and our own sinfulness—not against each other.

+At the 2016 Rio Olympics, New Zealander Nikki Hamblin and American Abbey D'Agostino collided in the 5,000m qualifying heat. D'Agostino was able to get up, but Hamblin was in the fetal position on the track, in pain from a shoulder injury. D'Agostino helped her up, and the two ran the final 2,000m together to help each other finish.

That's one reason we are a church, is to help each other run with endurance sometimes helping each other off the ground.

1) Get Ready to Run! (v. 1a)

2) Run Without Giving Up! (v. 1b)

**3) Focus On Jesus, Your Strength & Goal! (v. 2)**

*"[12:2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."*

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.* This is the central theme of Hebrews. He has stated it before. "But we see Jesus ..." —\*2:9; "fix your thoughts on Jesus..." —\*3:1.

"Looking to" - looking away from others and looking to Jesus. He uses Jesus' human name, a common name at the time, probably to focus on Jesus' humanity. Remember, we saw earlier in Hebrews that Jesus can sympathize with us because of his perfect humanity.

So we look to Jesus. You can't look in two directions at once. He needs to be our strength and our goal.

Yes, learn what you can and be encouraged by all of those we have talked about before in Hebrews 11 and otherwise. But they are all fallible and will eventually let you down. We will let each other down. But Jesus never will!

These witnesses are important. He spent 40 verses explaining to us how they were able to triumph, in Hebrews 11. But notice that he doesn't command us to look to these witnesses. We would read this and naturally think ok, so he's going to tell me to look to them. Well, by writing about them, yes. But notice who we are told to look to, in verse 2. It's Jesus! This great cloud of witnesses encourages and inspires us, but the One who keeps us in the race is only Jesus. **He tells us to look to the One they witness about!**

If those we read about in Hebrews 11 are little lights to us that do help us continue down the path, Jesus is the blazing sun! +G. Campbell Morgan says, "See them, and then stop looking at them." Look unto Jesus!

? When John writes to the churches in the book of Revelation he writes in Revelation 1:5, "... from Jesus Christ **the faithful witness**, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth." Jesus alone is THE faithful witness that all other faithful witnesses point to.

And Jesus is not just the example, He is our help.

\*Hebrews 2:18 - temptation - *“For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”*

\*Hebrews 4:16 - receive mercy, find grace to help - *“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

This is not just help because he is an example although He is, **but it is real strength given to us directly from the living Jesus.**

+I ran a marathon in 2007 in Colorado, it was not long before we moved from New Mexico. I chose that marathon simply because we could drive to it. And I have the distinction of saying that rather than running a 26.2 mile marathon I ran a 26.8 mile marathon because it was so poorly planned that they accidentally added an extra 1/2 mile.

It was around mile 12, not long before the 1/2 way point, and when you have trained for a marathon and put in countless hours timing and pacing your miles, you notice when there is a 1/2 mile too much. Several around me in my pace group started to despair, and say, I'm getting really tired and something is wrong, this timing isn't right. We should have reached the next mile by now. A few started walking and I don't know if they ever finished. But those of us who kept running would tell those around us, just keep running. Remember the goal. The finish line is up there. We will get our finisher's medal.

You have to remember the joy, just like Jesus did. The joy that is coming even in the pain now. Even when things are difficult now. **Remember the joy that is coming. For Jesus** that was the joy of entering Heaven triumphant, of being the Savior of a people He bought with His own blood, of being seated at God's right hand. **For us** it is the joy of entering Heaven, the joy of bringing others with us and encouraging them on their path, the joy of hearing our Master's voice, well done, good and faithful servant.

I love this phrase in verse 2, “despising the shame.” - Not ignoring the shame, but holding it as of little value compared to the joy. Roman citizens were exempt from the punishment of crucifixion because it was so shameful. But the Son of God wasn't. He had to die a shameful death, because He took our shame.

“Seated at the right hand of the throne of God” - very important phrase in Hebrews that comes up 5 times to show us that Jesus' salvation work is done and that He is now in the position of authority at the Father's right hand. In other words, in terms of salvation being accomplished, it is finished. But in terms of salvation being worked out, He is in the position of authority so He can work in our lives today.

- 1) Get Ready to Run! (v. 1a)
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*“[12:3] Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”*

“Consider” - weight up carefully. Analyze Him.

One thing we will see if we carefully consider Christ is that he went through incredible hostility and yet he endured.

**You have never faced such intense evil as Jesus did. And you never will. But knowing that He did stabilizes us when we look into the face of evil and stand for truth.**

But Jesus' endurance in the face of persecution is not the only benefit we will have if we commit to considering Christ and continuing to consider Christ.

There is so much in Him that helps us see how we were designed to live. There is everything in Him that shows us who God is.

+I want to invite you in this morning. If you are not a Christian, I want to invite you to get into this race, because you have to enter the race before you can hope to win. ... **share the gospel**

+If you are a Christian already, run with endurance, don't give up. Don't jog, don't walk slowly, don't sit down or lie down from exhaustion. Stay in the Christian life, keep pursuing Jesus. Keep walking with God day by day.

Why are we told to consider Jesus? "So that we may not grow weary or fainthearted." This is a phrase used to talk about an athlete collapsing from giving everything. This would be language that you would hear on the ESPN of the day when Hebrews was written.

How will we not grow weary and fainthearted? Consider Jesus. This is one reason we read and re-read the Gospels. This is one reason we spend so much time studying the Epistles, trying to better understand the theology of the cross as we consider what Jesus has done on the this side of the cross. This is why we look ahead to Jesus when we read the Old Testament.

- Consider Jesus, the **compassionate one**.
- Consider Jesus, **the One who is truth**.
- Consider Jesus, **the bold One who was not afraid to confront those who distorted God's holiness**.
- Consider Jesus, **showing grace to the most outcast by society**.
- Consider Jesus, **your provider**.
- Consider Jesus **on the cross, paying for every one of your sins**.
- Consider Jesus, **raised from the dead**.
- Consider Jesus, **your King!**

**We will either drop out of the race from distraction or collapse from exhaustion if we don't continue to consider Jesus.**

Some of you need to be refueled this week. The world and all of the sickness and fighting and politics is suffocating you, just zapping the energy right out of you. Sure, stay informed as far as you really need to be, but don't try to refuel your spiritual tank on what is happening in the world or politics even in our own community. That would be like trying to put water into your gas tank of your car.

**But look to Jesus and be refueled. Look to Jesus and draw strength for every single day.**

In Luke 24, Jesus found some tired, discouraged disciples and he met them. Two disciples were walking away from Jerusalem on the same day that Jesus had been resurrected. They were stuck in their sadness and discouragement with how they thought things were going, but without them knowing who He was, Jesus Himself, risen from the grave, came alongside of them on the road to Emmaus.

JJ

Jesus asked them what they were talking about, and Luke tells us, “they stood still, looking sad.” This is how Jesus finds us sometimes, and maybe how He finds you today, looking sad and standing still instead of running the race even though He is risen from the dead & right beside you.

The two disciples told Jesus about a man from Nazareth they thought would be the Messiah. But they explained that he had been arrested and killed, and they now were not quite sure what to think about the reports from the women and the other disciples that he was risen from the dead.

What did Jesus do? He explained the things in the Scriptures about Himself, and their hearts burned within them while he opened the Scriptures to them.

If you find yourself standing still or sad in your walk with Jesus this morning, look to Jesus. Consider Him.

Analyze Him. Worship Him.

Feast on Him and be filled. Look to Jesus!