

FOR THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM

I. Hebrews 12:1-3

A. Hebrews 12:1-3 (ESV) was the Scripture we sent you all home with this past Easter Sunday and it is our very brief but powerful text this morning: **1** 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, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **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. **3** Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

B. Our text begins with stunning imagery, of saints who have gone before us, like those listed in Hebrews 11, who were faithful to the Lord, even unto death. Hebrews 11 is often called *The Hall of Faith*. Certainly that Hall of Faith has been growing the past 2,000 years since Christ walked here with us. And it would include our loved ones who have died in Christ as well. Just how much they get to occupy stadium seats and watch us is up for debate, but the imagery in this text should encourage our hearts that we are the ones now in the arena.

C. And what are the weights or encumbrances that can entangle us and impede our respective races? Sin certainly entangles and impedes. But good things can also trip us up, slow us down, take our minds and hearts off the race, off the goal, off the prize. The author of Hebrews exhorts us to lay such things aside. What things take your head out of the race or off the prize?

D. Then our text tells us to fix our eyes on Jesus. Christ Jesus is the founder and perfecter of our faith; He's the author, the pioneer, and the reason we are in this race to begin with. What ever distracted Him or tripped Him up or caused Him to veer of course? NOTHING! He is ever our example.

E. "*Who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising its shame.*" Besides the cross being a cruel and painful form of execution, it was also designed to be the most shameful form of capital punishment. The Persians invented crucifixion but the Romans perfected it. It combined excruciating pain with public disgrace. The person was hung on the cross naked and for all to witness. It was meant to send a crystal clear message to all deviants--murderers, traitors, dissidents, and capital offenders that this fate awaited you if you were among that lot. What had Jesus done to deserve such cruel punishment? NOTHING! Jesus took our sins upon Himself and the wrath of God fell on Him instead of us. How could He do this? "*For the joy set before Him!*"

F. How could Jesus have joy heading to the cross? Because of what His suffering would accomplish--for His Father in heaven and for us. Dying on the cross meant God's justice would be fulfilled and likewise His deep and immense love for all of us. Knowing what His painful and shameful death would accomplish, which included the Father momentarily turning His face away, enabled Jesus to go through His death, while anticipating the joy to come. And as we said last Sunday, His resurrection affirmed His atoning sacrifice was indeed found acceptable.

G. So what if we find ourselves facing suffering or trial or difficult ordeals-how can we go through them with any semblance of joy? How can we be assured those ordeals are accomplishing anything? Romans 8:28 says, "...God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose." Listen how beautifully the J.B. Phillips renders Romans 8:28-30: "*Moreover we know that to those who love God, who are called according to His plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good. God, in His foreknowledge, chose them to bear the family likeness of His Son, that He might be the eldest of a family of many brothers. He chose them long ago; when the time came He called them, He made them righteous in His sight, and then lifted them to the splendour of life as His own sons.*" (We take joy in knowing God is at work in our "all things.")

H. Sometimes we also get to take hold of joy because we realize that what we are facing or suffering through is actually to the good benefit of others. If the highest form of love in this life is living for the highest good of our Lord and others, then it is wise and godly to assume that my ordeal may be something more than a trial for my sake but may also be for the good of someone else. A great example of this was when Paul was in prison and didn't know whether he would be executed or released. It behooves us to consider Philippians 1:21-26 (NIV) **21** For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. **22** If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! **23** I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; **24** but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. **25** Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, **26** so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me. (It would've been easy for Paul to just want to clock out. But he knew that staying on the job would benefit the highest good of others. He who has ears let him hear...)

I. 1 Corinthians 9:24 (NIV) says: "*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.*" We find ourselves together in the arena before a great cloud of witnesses. They are the holy alumni. This is our time in the stadium. (Our time in the celestial 'Shoe.!) May the Lord enable us to run our race with endurance, to run like champions, to run for the highest good of our Lord and for the highest good of one another! * Close with Prayer...

Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff

Hebrews 12:1-3 (ESV)

1 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, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **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. **3** Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Romans 8:28-30 (Phillips)

28-30 Moreover we know that to those who love God, who are called according to His plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good. God, in His foreknowledge, chose them to bear the family likeness of His Son, that He might be the eldest of a family of many brothers. He chose them long ago; when the time came He called them, He made them righteous in His sight, and then lifted them to the splendour of life as His own sons.

Philippians 1:21-26 (NIV)

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. **22** If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! **23** I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; **24** but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. **25** Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, **26** so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

1 Corinthians 9:24 (NIV)

24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

Film Clips & Other Links

Running - John Piper (Sermon Jam)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0elhYaESJkY>

Run the Race - The Faith in Christ that Perseveres - Moving Works

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nhk_5c6H-yc

Running the Race "I Am A Disciple"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWDa_7Q9ryI

Weight That Hinders/Hebrews 12 - Sermon by the Late A.W. Tozer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHPJ-M0E-mA>

Running The Race - The Skit Guys :-)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POn06NkO0ds>

Bonus Stuff

1 Corinthians 9:24-25 (Phillips)

24-25 Do you remember how, on a racing-track, every competitor runs, but only one wins the prize? Well, you ought to run with your minds fixed on winning the prize! Every competitor in athletic events goes into serious training. Athletes will take tremendous pains--for a fading crown of leaves. But our contest is for an eternal crown that will never fade.

What is True Faith? Not Even Giants of Faith Get Exactly What They Want

By Tim Stafford - NIV Student Bible

"These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised." (Hebrews 11:9 NIV)

What is faith? And how can you be sure you got it? Some Christians think of faith as an almost magical force: if you muster up enough of it, you'll get rich, stay healthy, and live a contented life, they say. Yet how does one "muster up" faith? What are signs of true faith?

The author of Hebrews launches into a detailed description of faith, complete with references to several dozen biographical models. (Some have dubbed Hebrews 11 the "Faith Hall of Fame.") "Without faith," Hebrews says bluntly, "it is impossible to please God." (11:6).

Not What You'd Expect

But the picture of faith emerging from these chapters contains some surprises. The author uses words and phrases like “persevere,” “endure,” “do not lose heart.” In many instances, the heroes cited did not receive the promise they hoped for; some ended up flogged and destitute, hiding out in goatskins (11:36-38). Many died—horrible deaths.

Faith, concludes the author, most resembles a difficult race. The runner has his or her eyes on the winner’s prize, and despite nagging temptations to slacken the pace, refuses to let up until he or she crosses the finish line. “Throw off everything that hinders.” Hebrews coaches (12:1). “Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees” (12:12).

Is It Worth The Struggle?

Why do people punish their bodies to run a grueling marathon race? Most runners name two reasons: the sense of personal reward they get and the physical benefits of the exercise. The same two reasons apply in the spiritual realm: great prizes await those who persevere, and the very process of living by faith builds strong character. In this race, no one loses. If you finish, you get the reward.

Here, as elsewhere, Hebrews holds up Jesus, who endured great suffering for our sakes (12:2-3), as the ultimate example. The faith described in Hebrews is not sugarcoated; God does not guarantee a life of luxury and ease. It is tough faith: a constant commitment to hang on and believe God against all odds, no matter what.

8 Ways Satan Keeps You From Worship

by Tim Challies

<http://www.crosswalk.com/blogs/challies/8-ways-satan-keeps-you-from-worship.html>

Satan wants to keep you from worshiping the One he hates. He wants to keep you from doing the right thing, whether that is spending time alone with the Lord in Scripture and prayer, attending and participating in public worship services, or any other thing that will draw you closer to the Lord. Here, courtesy of Thomas Brooks, are eight ways Satan will keep you from worship.

Here’s how I would encourage you to use the list. Think of the times that you decide to stay in bed instead of getting up to read the Bible; think of the times you scrapped family worship for no good reason; think of the times you stayed home from church instead of going to worship. Think of those things, and see which of these temptations is the one Satan brings to you.

He makes the world look beautiful, attractive and desirable. Many people profess Christ and see him as desirable for a time. For a while they enjoy private and public worship and do it all with enthusiasm. But before long Satan presents to them worldly things and makes those look more beautiful and desirable than Christ, and many souls are drawn away. “Where one thousand are destroyed by the world’s frowns, ten thousand are destroyed by the world’s smiles.”

He makes you aware of the fact that those who worship the Lord have often faced danger, loss and suffering. There are many men who would obey the Lord and worship him, except that they fear the consequences. Satan loves to present the high cost of obedience. This was the case for many in Jesus’ day: “Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue” (John 12:42).

He gives you an awareness of the difficulty of worshipping well. Satan will whisper, “It is difficult to pray well, it is hard to spend time with the Lord and to persevere until he speaks to you through his Word, it isn’t worth the effort of going to church and being warm and friendly and engaging with other Christians.” Whatever God tells you to do, Satan will present it to you as a great burden or as something you do poorly, and in this way he will keep you from it.

He leads you to wrongly understand the implications of the gospel. Christ has done everything for you and given everything you need in his death and resurrection. There is nothing left for you to do but rejoice in Christ and to serve him out of the joy of salvation. But Satan will lead you to make wrong inferences from what Christ has done, encouraging you, for example, to believe Christ has freed you from the need or desire to spend time with him or to gather with other Christians. He will allow you to see the gospel, but do all he can to make you understand it all wrong.

He shows you how many of those who follow Christ with obedience are poor and despised. Satan will ensure you see that those who are most interested in worshipping God are the poorest and most despised of all. You can see echoes of this in John 7: “The Pharisees answered them, ‘Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.’”

He shows you that the majority of the people in the world, along with the great and mighty of the world, do not worship the Lord. Satan will ask, "Don't you see that the great, the rich, the honorable, the intellectual elite, the wise, the most honored, and the sheer majority of people do not trouble themselves with worshipping the Lord? You would be much better off to be like them. After all, why would you think that you, of all people, have this figured out?" To have success here he will intentionally draw your attention away from Exodus 23:2 and many similar passages: "You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit, siding with the many, so as to pervert justice."

He fills your mind with unimportant and distracting thoughts while you are attempting to worship. He afflicts you with so much distraction and futility that you are tempted to say, "I have no desire to hear from the Lord in his Word, no desire to speak to him in prayer, no desire to spend time with other Christians in worship services." He crowds out the very thought of worship by the sheer weight of lesser concerns.

He encourages you to take comfort in past performances of your religious duties and in that way he convinces you to stop trying. He reminds you that in the past you read so much and prayed so much and spent so much time in worship. And having reminded you, he convinces you that you have earned the right to coast for a while. "You already know this. You've already done this. You've already prayed this. You've been to better worship services than this." And through it all he inclines you to rest from worship.

- **Tim Challies** is author of the weblog Challies.com: *Informing the Reforming* and lives near Toronto, Canada. He is also author of [The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment](#).