

Hebrews 12:1-3

Hebrews 12:1 (NASB) 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, ² 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. ³ For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

“Let us run with endurance the race set before us.” The Christian life is a long journey. It begins the moment that we entrust ourselves to Jesus as our Savior, and it continues until we die or He returns. It is a marathon, not a sprint. It is for plodding tortoises, not for sprinting hares.

This is why the author of Hebrews emphasizes endurance. He uses this word four times in the first seven verses of Hebrews 12. He describes its antithesis as “growing weary and losing heart” (12:3). Endurance is not flashy, and it is not a popular concept in our quick-fix, convenience-obsessed culture. But it is an essential aspect of Christian spirituality nonetheless.

One reason for its necessity is that we, like the original recipients of this letter, live in a spiritually antagonistic environment. Public shame, material dispossession, imprisonment and death were on the table for these folks – as they have been for most Christians over the past 2000 years. For many reasons, Christians in the West have been spared these threats – but this abnormal period may be coming to a close. Anyway, as Paul says elsewhere, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). If you commit yourself to live the rest



of your life for Christ, you will experience various forms of spiritual opposition all along the way. Thus the need for endurance, the ability to hang in there and keep going.

How can we cultivate this endurance? These three verses supply us with three helpful insights.

- *“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us . . . let us run with endurance the race set before us . . .”* This “great cloud of witnesses” refers to the Old Testament believers described in the previous chapter (Hebrews 11). God had set a race before each of them – and they had run it with endurance. Not perfectly, not without slips and falls and periods of frustration and fear and discouragement – but they played their roles in God’s great plan before they passed on.

They are “witnesses,” not in the sense that they are watching us and witnessing how we’re running (though they may indeed be doing this). Rather, they are witnesses in the sense that their lives testify to us that it is possible to run the race with endurance. Review their stories, and you will find that God supplied them everything they needed for their races. They supplied only one thing – their imperfect faith – and this was enough. And it will be the same for us.

God has supplied us with many more witnesses in the past 2000 years – from the famous Christian leaders recorded in the New Testament right up to those lesser-known brothers and sisters He has put in your life today. From all of them, we can learn about the foundational importance of God’s faithfulness. From all of them, we can learn valuable lessons about trusting God over the long haul. Learn their stories so that they can encourage you to keep running your race!



- “. . . *let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race set before us . . .*” Imagine trying to run a marathon while carrying two heavy suitcases. They would surely drain your energy and get in the way of your legs. Sooner or later, you would have to choose between laying aside your suitcases and getting on with your race.

Surely our author is not suggesting that we must become sinless in order to live the Christian life! He would be contradicting the entire Bible (see for example James 3:1 and 1 John 1:8) – let alone his own letter (see the sinful characters in chapter 11)!

He is simply saying that when God shows you something current and specific that is incompatible with following Him, be willing to lay it aside with His help. It may be an unwillingness to forgive an offender. It may be an unhealthy romantic relationship. It may be an inordinate love for a hobby. Whatever it is, don’t justify it, or clutch on to it, or tell yourself that you are unable to let go of it. Just agree with God that it is a hindrance, and take the step He shows you to let it go. He will break its power over you, and you will be glad as you run with greater freedom!

- “. . . *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.* ³ *For consider Him . . . so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.* Of all the people who have run their races before us, no one is more helpful for our endurance than Jesus. Thus we are told to “fix our eyes” on Him, and to “consider Him.” Both words emphasize carefully focusing on Him.

Jesus is “the Author and Perfecter of faith.” This means, for one thing, that He is the ultimate Example of what it looks like to run



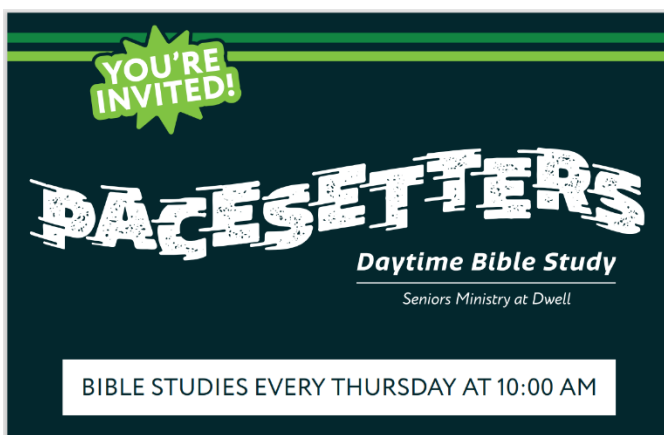
the race with endurance. No one has ever had a more difficult race to run, yet He ran it all the way through the shameful cross to His Father's throne. He kept going because He knew that the joy of finishing would be well worth it. The author implies that if Jesus ran His great race for us, this will motivate us to run our races for Him.

But Jesus is not just our ultimate Example; He is also our ever-present Helper. He is with us, and He will "perfect" (mature) our faith as we ask Him to help us keep running. This is how the author describes Him earlier in his letter:

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Lord Jesus, thank You for running Your great race for me. Thank You for all of the witnesses that encourage me to run my race with endurance. Thank You most of all for running my race with me. Help me this day to run this part of my race.

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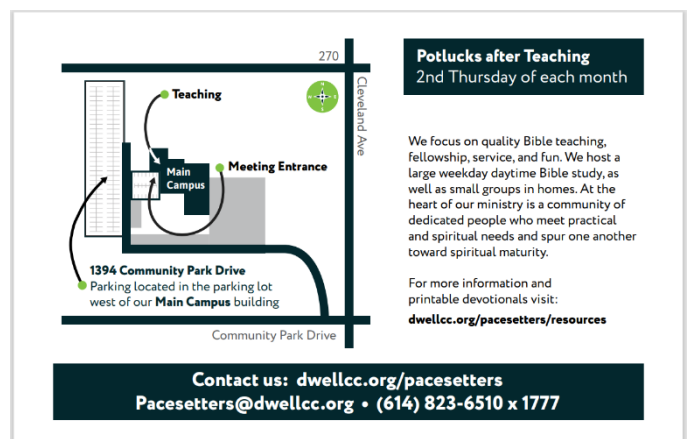


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