

Will you quit?

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[0 : 00] We're going to read from the Bible. In the book of Hebrews in chapter 12, I try to preach from this same text at this rough time of year, each year.

Hebrews 12 verse 1 and 2, not because I feel I need to, but just this was the first text I ever preached from. And I think it's for my benefit and indeed for yours that the Word of God is so enriching to us and we can dig however far and there are still fresh mercies and truths for us to find.

I want us to focus on verse 2 actually, but we'll read from Hebrews 12 and verse 1. This is the Word of God. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, before the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood and you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons.

[1 : 43] My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline and do not lose heart when he rebukes you. Because the Lord disciplines those he loves and he punishes everybody he accepts as a son.

Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined and everyone undergoes discipline, then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the father of our spirits and live?

Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best, but God disciplined us for our good that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.

Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.

[2 : 55] Make level paths for your feet so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. Amen. This is the word of God.

Let's turn then to Hebrews chapter 12. And we'll read verse 2.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. This is the final Lord's Day of 2021.

And as always, the end of the year is an opportunity for us to look back and to reflect. We hoped that this year would be better than the last.

And we wanted the coronavirus to be a thing of the past. However, we will be changing our 10 and fern calendars with continued uncertainty, looming restrictions and more vaccinations.

[4 : 06] I received, just a week ago, an end of year letter updating me on all that was happening in this individual's family and home life.

But she began by saying this. In many ways, 2021 has flown by. And in other ways, there have been numerous challenges.

There have been crests and troughs, mountaintops and valleys, highs and lows. And times of steadily, plodding on, putting one foot in front of the other.

Here in our text today in Hebrews 12 and verse 2, it says, Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

The writer of Hebrews sets these words in the context of a race. And our journey through this life is like a race.

[5 : 09] But it's not a sprint. It's a marathon. It will not be easy. It will likely be hard. And there will be times of steadily, plodding on, putting one foot in front of the other.

Today you may feel like giving up. You may want to throw in the towel and quit. But for everyone who competes in this race, there is fuel to endure, to keep on, to press on to the very end.

And as we look then to Jesus, we are enabled to start, run and finish the race. So let's just go through the course like that.

Starting the race, running the race and finishing the race. We begin starting the race. And you may spend a little time this week trying to think up some New Year resolutions.

Something you want to get out of 2022, Lord willing. You might resolve to get fitter, read more books, eat less chocolate, eat more chocolate.

[6 : 38] Whatever it is, the most difficult part will be getting started. Walking through the gym doors for the first time or taking the bike out of the garage or sitting down and actually reading the book.

But you don't need to worry about persevering to the very end or finishing if you never start in the first place. Verse 2 says, let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

And this looking to Jesus, this fixing our eyes on Jesus, it's not just a look at Christmas or a look at a wedding or a look at a time of crisis.

This is a look away from my sin and a look towards my Savior. to look to Jesus means to trust him.

To look to Jesus means to trust him. Because we can't look in two directions at once, at one time. You cannot have a foot in both camps.

[7 : 42] You must have your focus on Christ alone. The name Charles Spurgeon will be very familiar to most of you.

He was a preacher. And Charles Spurgeon tells his testimony in this way. At one day he was just going to church one Sunday morning but there was a snowstorm and so he turned down this side street and instead of making it on all the way to his own church, he just walked into the nearest church he found.

And there was only about a dozen people in this church and so he sat there under the balcony and the minister, he tells us, wasn't there that day. He was snowed in and so somebody in the congregation, maybe an elder or somebody else, a man stood up and as Spurgeon says himself, made a lot of hard work out of the text he chose.

He didn't have much to say except he took a text from Isaiah which says, look to me and be saved all the ends of the earth.

And then Charles Spurgeon recounts how this man in the pulpit saw him and looked at him sitting there under the balcony and knew him to be a stranger.

[9 : 02] And fixing his eyes on Charles Spurgeon, this lay preacher lifted up his hands and he shouted to him, young man, look to Jesus Christ.

Look, look, look. You have nothing to do but look and live. Charles Spurgeon says, I saw in that moment the way to be saved through Jesus Christ.

Christ. In our verse today, Jesus is described as the author of our faith. He is the originator, the creator, and that's what an author is.

And you know, the second best-selling book in the whole world is one of Harry Potter, the Harry Potter books, authored by J.K. Rowling.

Many of you have read them or you've watched the films. But none of that story would exist if it were not for Rowling's invention. She authored it.

[10 : 11] She brought the story to life in our minds and in our imaginations. But you know it's not true, the story of Harry Potter.

It is just a story. It's filed under the category of children's fiction. The story that has been authored by Jesus, through Jesus, and to you, is very real and true.

No amount of wishing or imagining or hoping for the best can save you. Christ is the originator of our faith.

He is the one who begins it. And you are invited like Charles Spurgeon. Look away from every other hindrance. And today, look to Jesus.

Harry Potter is the first, is the second best-selling book in the world. But what is the first? It's the Bible. It's not Harry Potter or the Da Vinci Code or even Taste and See, Tain and Fern's cookbook.

[11 : 26] It is the Bible. The Word of God. And I wonder, is God speaking to you through his Word today?

Look to Jesus and be saved. So we need to start the race. But secondly, run in the race.

Being a Christian is not about one moment, one day that I looked and cried out to Jesus. But you've discovered if you're a Christian today that being a Christian is about every day looking and crying out to Jesus.

It is the first step of faith and it is to be every step of our faith also. But if we're honest, we can feel sometimes fatigue setting in.

And whether that be due to the pandemic or lockdown restrictions or health issues or financial trouble or difficulties at work or the loss of a loved one.

[12 : 41] But even within your faith, you can feel fatigued with Satan always at your heels. With the fact that we give in to temptation, we fall into sin or we find Bible reading hard.

Our prayers feel like they go no higher than the ceiling. the preaching goes in one ear and we just let it out the other.

We may feel like just giving up and quitting sometimes. I think I've told you before, I used to have this quote on my study wall that says, you will not be able to keep going but you will be kept going.

In other words, mustering up the courage or digging a little deeper or trying a little harder, that's not what the Bible says. What does the Bible say?

Look to Jesus. And I think that is a relief to us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author of our faith.

[13 : 55] And that's how we will be kept going. But what happens when we fix our eyes on Jesus? How does that enable us to keep going?

Well, ask Peter, the disciple, when he took his eyes off Jesus. When you don't fix your eyes on Jesus, you remember in the Gospels we read of when Jesus came walking on the water towards the disciples.

They were out in the boat and Jesus comes walking towards them and with his eyes fixed firmly on his saviour, Peter steps out of the boat.

He walks on water. He makes his way to Jesus. Then he begins to think about what he knows about basic science.

Grown men don't walk on water. We don't float when we walk on it. And he took his eyes off Jesus and he began to sink. He began to sink because he took his eyes off Jesus.

[14 : 56] And I think that is the feeling we get. When we feel the pressure and the fatigue of running this race through this life.

We feel like we are drowning with the weight and the pressure of the world around us. All because we've lost perspective.

death. We have removed our focus from Jesus. It's always the work of the Holy Spirit to turn our eyes away from ourselves and towards Jesus.

But Satan's work is just the opposite of this. He's constantly trying to make us regard ourselves instead of Jesus Christ.

He insinuates your sins are too great to forgive. You don't repent enough. You don't have the joy like you see other Christians having.

[16 : 01] You have such a shaky hold of Jesus. But listen to the Holy Spirit. He turns our eyes entirely away from Satan and ourselves.

He reminds us that we are nothing but that Christ is everything. Remember it's not your hold of Christ but Christ's hold of you.

It's not even faith, your faith in Christ though that be the instrument. It's Christ's life and sacrifice. We're not going to be energized by thinking about our own prayers, our works, our feelings.

It is what Jesus is, not what we are that energizes us. He is the one who anchors our soul, who keeps us firm and sure, who keeps us pressing on.

So keep your eyes on him, on his sufferings, on his death, on his merits, on his glory. And may they be fresh in your mind each day as you wake up and each night as you lay down to sleep.

[17 : 19] Fix your eyes on Jesus and he will enable you to persevere. So starting the race, running the race, and then thirdly, finishing the race.

The verse says, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. You know, this is the only time that this word is ever used in the Bible.

Perfecter of our faith, it literally means completer or finisher. And it obviously speaks of bringing something to its conclusion.

In this case, bringing you as a Christian all the way to glory, to God's home in heaven. So putting these two words together, the author and the perfecter, we see that Jesus as God both creates and he sustains our faith.

We know that saving faith is a gift from God. It's not something that we come up with on our own. He is the author and also the sustainer of our faith, meaning that true saving faith, you as a Christian, can't be lost.

[18 : 41] your faith can't be taken away. Your faith can't be given away. It will be sustained. That should be a great comfort to you as a Christian, especially in times of doubt and spiritual struggles.

Christ has created your faith and he'll watch over it and care for it and sustain it to the very end of your journey through this life.

You know, as I reflect myself on 2021 and look back over the year, for me, one of the highlights obviously has to be when I ran that marathon from the villages here all the way down to Edmonton, to Blytheswood, and I started that run feeling good and fresh and cheered on by many of you, but join me again at mile 20.

I wasn't feeling so good and I most certainly was not fresh. One major disadvantage I see now is a disadvantage I gave myself was not fueling my body properly for the race.

For the full 26 miles, I only had a few sips of water and two wine gums. And if you don't know, that's not enough. I was, I think, quite close to dehydration by the time I finished, but the questions did start coming into my mind.

[20 : 20] You know, will I make it? Could I keep going? Will I finish the race? Our neighbouring colleague, Reverend Carl Macmillan, he, in Roskeen, he joined me for the last few miles.

He ran with me and he told me afterwards, I could tell that you were struggling because you stopped responding to me. You weren't speaking anymore.

And I think that's a major sign for us spiritually too. But we are struggling in our Christian walk when we have stopped responding, when we have ceased speaking to God anymore.

And so are you at a low ebb in your faith today? And I think you should be encouraged to know the answer is not dig a little deeper, pretend you're okay, just show up.

The answer is look unto Jesus, the perfecter of your faith. I've since discovered some more proper nutrition and there's specific runners, gummy sweets, not wine gums, which you can take in the middle of your run amongst other things and you place it in your mouth and you just suck on it.

[21 : 44] Don't bite it or chew it, but over a length of time, let it dissolve and it'll do your body good. how much more do we need to fuel our souls by meditating on Jesus, not just for a moment or for a length of time, but throughout our lives.

What does it mean to meditate on Jesus? Well, let me give you just a few examples. Meditate on Jesus and the fact that if you're a Christian here today, he chose you.

He chose you. He asked you to look to him because he is looking at you. And perhaps you can remember as a child being picked for some sport or not being picked for some game or activity in the classroom maybe and it hurts if you're not chosen, but you're delighted when you are.

God has chosen you and we should never get over that delight. he hasn't chosen you because you're the best or because you're better than somebody else.

He's chosen you because he loves you. And so meditate on that. Meditate on the fact that he chose you and that he loves you.

[23 : 10] That's why he came into the world. Look at him. We're seeing him these last few weeks. Look at him as that little baby in the manger lying there. this is good news of great joy.

He was born to die, but to die on that cross to take away your sin. Meditate on the fact that he chose you, he loves you, and that he's with you.

He is our Emmanuel, God with us. And the writer of Hebrews here in verse two, he deliberately uses the name Jesus in this verse.

That's his earthly name. And it's using, we use the name Jesus here to relate to you and me, because we can see his footprints in every circumstance through our lives.

But lastly, how do you know? How do you know as a Christian you're going to cross the finishing line? How do you know that you're going to make it?

[24 : 15] meditate on the fact that he chose you, that he loves you, that he's with you, and meditate on the facts of scripture.

Jesus said in John 14, in my father's house are many rooms. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

And Paul says later in Ephesians 1, when you believed you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit who has a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession.

And if you want it in a nutshell, Paul also said, he, Jesus, the author of your faith, he who began a good work in you, will bring it on to completion.

And so, on this final Lord's Day of 2021, I end another year of preaching and I ended with one more plea to you who haven't even started this Christian race.

[25 : 30] God's sake, I love you. The finish line of life is coming nearer for every one of us. Whoever you are, whether you believe in Jesus or not, whether you're looking to Christ or not.

I don't think probably any of us in here have gone through 2021 without having lost a family member or friend.

friend, I was so aware that my prayers earlier this year for one of my family members were numbered as she neared the end of her life.

The Lord made that very clear to me that there was less and less opportunity for me to pray for her, to pray for her soul, to pray that she will be saved.

saved. And there is less and less opportunity for you to hear the gospel, to respond to the good news and to be saved.

[26 : 38] But today, there is one more opportunity. Today, the offer is given for you to respond.

there is at least one more opportunity. And so may I call out, like that layman did in the pulpit to Spurgeon, look to Jesus.

Look, look, look. You have nothing to do but look and live. Let's pray.

Gracious God, we thank you and praise you for yet one more opportunity. And we pray that today that the people here would look to Jesus and be saved.

Forgive us for our sins. Encourage us as Christians to carry on, to press on, not by just digging a little deeper, but by looking to Jesus Christ.

[27 : 43] forgive us, go before us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.