

# Eyes on Jesus

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Date: 13 July 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] Amen. Amen. You may be seated, kids. You are excused to your King's Kids class. 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, 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.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted, so that you wouldn't give up.

May God bless the hearing of his word. Distracted drivers are dangerous. A danger to themselves and a danger to others.

A distracted driver is someone who takes their eyes off the road and fixes their eyes on something else. Maybe it's their phone. Maybe it's their companion next to them.

[ 1 : 35 ] Maybe it's a French fry that has fallen to the floor. Maybe it's an accident on the other side of the road. You're part of the gaper's delay.

Maybe it's a good thought. Distracted drivers are a danger to themselves and others, and they need to fix their eyes on the road. Distracted Christians are also a danger.

Danger to themselves and a danger to others. There are a variety of things that can distract Christians from Christ, and one of which that we are hearing again and again in the book of Hebrews is suffering on account of Christ.

Being marginalized for Jesus. That can cause you to become weary and faint hearted. Want to give up. When you get distracted from Christ, you tend to drift from Christ.

And in some cases, you can actually fall away from Christ. Where there was no faith to begin with. It's a disaster. In Hebrews chapter 12, the author likens the Christian faith to an endurance race.

[ 2 : 48 ] To a marathon. In order for you, Christian, to finish the race and to finish strong, you need endurance.

Don't give up. You need to endure. And in Hebrews 12, 1 through 3, we're shown how to finish the race and finish strong in four ways.

First is run the legacy. Second, run light. Third, run long. Fourth, run looking. Those last three I heard in a sermon about 30 years ago.

Stuck with me ever since. So, four points this morning. Run the legacy. Run light. Run long. Run looking. Do you want to finish the race? And finish strong?

Eyes on Jesus. So, let's look at this first point. We'll see it in Hebrews 12, 1. Run the legacy. We read, therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.

[ 3 : 50 ] The cloud of witnesses that the author of Hebrews is talking about here are all of those 20 plus saints of old. Those people of old commended by God for their faith that we were looking at last week in Hebrews chapter 11.

They are the cloud of witnesses. They're the ones commended by God for their faith. They finished the race that God had set before him.

They endured by trusting God and his promises. It's a cloud of witnesses. The original word for witness is the word martyr.

That's where you get the word martyr from. And when we think of martyr, we think of people who give up their lives out of believing in Jesus and proclaiming him. And so, what we're getting at here are these, this cloud of witnesses are those who bore witness to God to their last breath.

That they believe in him and they believe in his promises. They were faithful all the way to the end. So, what's happening here in Hebrews 12, 1.

[ 4 : 56 ] Is that the author is making a connection between old covenant saints and new covenant saints. Those commended by God.

We're being linked to Abel and Enoch and Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Daniel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah.

All of these commended by God for their faith who've gone before us. We're being connected to them. Linked to them. They're the heroes of the faith. The who's who of the faith.

Faith. And they have left for us a legacy of faith. A legacy is something that those who've gone before us entrust us with.

And what the kind of the heroes of the faith of chapter 11 have entrusted to us is an example of endurance by faith.

[ 5 : 59 ] In chapter 11, verse 40. We learn that apart from us, these Old Testament saints will not be made perfect. Their salvation as ours was found in Christ alone.

Theirs by faith in what Christ would do. And ours by faith alone in what Christ has done. We are all united by faith. We read here that we are surrounded by this great cloud.

It's a very interesting picture. The Ethiopian Tamaral Tola won the 2024 Olympic marathon with a time of two hours and six minutes.

Pretty quick. If you saw it, you would see that the last 100 yards of the race, it led into this massive throng.

A cloud of spectators. And they were cheering him on. And he ran that last 200 yards to the end. It was like a stadium filled with people rooting him on.

[ 7 : 09 ] In chapter 12, verse 1, the author is picturing our holding fast to Christ as a marathon. And we're being surrounded by those who've endured to the end.

They've gone before us and they wait for us in the heavenly city of God. They're the ones who we've been linked to.

They're the ones who surround us. They're the ones who are the legacy entrusted to us. Run the legacy. Here's two ways this makes a difference.

First is this. In our day and age, there's a lot of pressure to signal your tribe. Whether it's politically, progressive or conservative. Whether it's theologically.

Whether it's ethnically. What's going on here is, brothers and sisters, we've got a tribe. A tribe of faith. We're to identify with them.

[ 8 : 14 ] We're to check the box that we are in this group. Have you ever filled out a government form where it asks for your ethnic heritage, whether you're Caucasian or you're black or you're Hispanic or you're Asian?

Just imagine another box. By faith. By faith. Check. This is who we identify with. This is our tribe. Tribe of faith.

Second thing this thing does is it locates us in God's story. God has always had a gracious and glorious plan for the fullness of time to gather a people for himself from every tribe, tongue and nation in Christ.

And we're part of the story. We're part of the unfolding story of God's plan. We are numbered with this multitude.

We are to be part of this great cloud of witnesses unto God's grace and unto his glory. This is the fulfillment of the promise he made to Abraham to bless all the nations of the world through his offspring whom we know is Jesus Christ.

[ 9 : 35 ] Run the legacy. You want to finish this race? You want to finish strong? Run the legacy. The legacy of faith. The second point in how to finish strong is you run light.

We read in verse 1, Let us also lay aside every weight and the sin which clings so closely. The New International Version of the Bible says, Let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles.

Have you ever noticed a marathon runner what they wear? When they're running the race, they don't wear much. They usually wear like really short shorts.

Who wears short shorts? And then they have a tank top. And that's all that they're wearing. On cold days, they usually put on a stocking hat and have gloves on, but that's it. They're running light.

In fact, the Greco-Roman Olympics, which began in 776 BC, they wore no clothing at all. Which would boost the Olympic kind of viewership if they did that today.

[ 10 : 51 ] But the point is, competitors run light. They compete light to minimize hindrances to the running the race.

They lay things aside that would distract them or hinder them. Think about it this way. If it is not helping you run the race for Jesus, it's probably hindering you from running the race for Jesus. And the author points to two different types of hindrances in this passage. The first is every weight. Let us also lay aside every weight.

A marathon runner may show up to the race in a full-blown body warm-up suit, but when it's race time, he or she will take off that warm-up suit and lay it aside because they want to run the race and run it strong.

They don't want anything hindering them from running as strong and as best as they can run. There are things that aren't in and of themselves sinful that become hindrances to us running the race.

[ 12 : 06 ] Let me give you some examples. Would you say that sleep is bad or good? It's good. But if your sleep habits are resulting in your neglecting your pursuit of Christ, you've got a hindrance.

You've got to lay that aside. It's not helping you pursue Jesus. It's hindering you. It's keeping you from reading the Bible, from praying unto God.

Another example would be work. Is work good or bad? The Bible is very clear. Work is good. But if you are working so much that it's resulting in you neglecting, tending to your soul, it's something out of proportion there.

You need to rein something in. In our culture, one of the things that people deal with on a regular basis is busyness as a family.

We have families who are trying to do it all, to have all of their kids involved in as much as possible, whether it's athletics or whether it's performance arts or even serving at the church.

[ 13 : 26 ] You're trying to do it all. But over time, it is thinning you out. Busyness. Is it good to give yourself to important good things?

Yes, of course it is. But you can only do a few things really well. Do you remember back in Luke 10? Mary and Martha. Martha was a busy body.

She was getting everything ready because Jesus was there. And she's like, Jesus, would you please tell Mary to help me? Because Mary was sitting at his feet. And Jesus says, Mary has chosen the better.

There are first things, brothers and sisters. When we're thinking about weights to lay aside, here's the question to be asking. Is this good thing helping or hindering me run the race?

You might need to cut something out completely or just simply rein something in a little bit.

Something's gotten away from you. The second hindrance is outright sin.

[ 14 : 33 ] And the sin which clings so closely or the sin which so easily entangles. Sin is any thought, feeling, word, or action that contradicts God's character or His command.

It is always by nature wrong, evil, grievous in God's sight. And we are to lay it aside.

We're to put it off. The picture here is not of someone who is being necessarily hindered by something but being tripped up by something. Do you guys know what shackles are?

Shackles are like these steel cuffs that will go around your wrists and there's this chain in between that really limits you. They're also leg irons, leg shackles that go cuffs on your ankles and there's this chain in between you.

Could you imagine if Tamaral Tola, the 2024 Olympic champion, he came up to the marathon line, the starting line, with shackles on his legs?

[ 15 : 42 ] Do you think he would finish? Do you think he would run strong? No. He would need to remove the shackles to lay them aside.

There are some sinful shackles pointed to in Hebrews 12. Let me point them out to you. Later on in verse 15, we read, See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.

Bitterness is a shackle on a Christian. And it's dangerous for them and it's dangerous for those around them. It defiles people. Bitterness is holding a grudge.

It is a hardness of heart. It is resentment. It's blaming someone for something that has happened and it's this hatred. It's hatred.

It's unloving. It defiles the people. And it runs in the opposite direction of verse 14. Strive for peace with everyone.

[ 16 : 53 ] You are to lay it aside. You are to put bitterness off. You are to repent of that.

There's another shackle. It's in verse 16. That no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau who sold his birthright for a single meal.

Sexual immorality is sexual sin. Whether it's adultery, when you have a spouse who's been sexually unfaithful or fornication, when you have two unmarried people being sexually unfaithful to God.

Pornography is this visualized sexual sin and it is wickedly wrong. What makes this so grievous in God's sight is it runs against the grain of his good design of marriage.

This sexuality that he has given us as a gift is to be enjoyed in the context of marriage alone. And when we seek to experience and enjoy sexuality outside of the good confines of marriage, it's grievous in God's sight.

[18:07] These are shackles. These will hold you back from running the race and it will affect other people. And then of course, there's unbelief.

If you, Amy actually referenced this when she was praying moments ago. In Hebrews 3, 12 and 13, we read this. Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God.

But exhort one another every day as long as it's called today that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Unbelief is a denying of who God is and what he's done.

And you're to put that off. That will shackle you. So here we have shackles that will immobilize you as you seek to run for Christ.

You gotta put them off. I've been praying that God would put his finger on something in our lives.

[19:14] Has God been putting something, his finger on something in your life? Some weight that you need to lay aside, some sin that you need to repent of?

That's his loving kindness to you. He wants you to share in his holiness. And he wants you to run the race. He wants you to finish the race and finish strong.

So receive that and turn from these things. Lay them aside. When we run, we run the legacy, we run light, and the third point is that we run long.

In 12.1 we read, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Eugene Peterson, a title to his book, helps with a definition.

Endurance is a long obedience in the same direction. Endurance is the ability to press on in the face of difficulty. Endurance is not giving up.

[20:26] It's not quitting. It's not falling away or folding like a cheap suit. Endurance is pressing on. It's getting back up and moving forward unto Christ.

It's holding fast to Christ all the way to the end. Your very last breath. And if you're a Christian, and you're seeking to live by faith, it's just a matter of time before your faith, your life, will get challenged. Before you'll be marginalized. You will need to endure that. You'll need to press through that by faith. We got a baptism coming up in August, and we have a good group of people, like I mentioned, being baptized.

It's down at Eichelman. It's highly public. And anyone who comes out in the water, I'm going to ask them two questions. First question is this. Have you put your faith in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of your sin and the promise of eternal life?

Yes. The second question is the endurance question. It's the finish the race question. It goes like this. Have you resolved to follow Jesus all the days of your life, no matter what happens?

[21:46] Are you going to finish the race? As far as it depends on you, trusting in the living God? Yes. We baptize him. Endurance.

The opposite of endurance, of an enduring faith, an endurance by faith, is a falling away because of unbelief. faith. Remember, faith is like a muscle.

And if your faith goes unused, it atrophies. But with use, your muscles, faith muscles, strengthen, and you are able to press through hard things by faith, trusting in God's character, trusting in his promise.

It's by use. endurance. This is endurance. And we are to run with endurance the race that God has set before us.

It's his paths that he's laid out before us. It's a path, a race for us to run. He's laid it out. He's laid it out according to his word.

[22:57] And we are to finish and to finish strong. God sets this race before us.

It's a path of faith. Nowhere does he promise to us that this race is going to be easy and comfortable. Nowhere.

In fact, if it's anything, he duly warns us Jesus said at the end of John 16, in the world, you will have tribulation.

You will have difficulty on account of me. You know, we sing a song, Amazing Grace, Amazing Grace, and there's this line, through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come.

Brothers and sisters, that's just normal. Through many dangers, toils, and snares, blessed be your name in a world that is marked by suffering.

[ 24 : 07 ] We just sang it. You'll be marginalized by being a follower of Jesus. Don't be surprised by it. Rejoice in it. Just like Paul and Silas rejoiced in the Philippian jail.

Now, this is an endurance race. In September, I'm going to preach three sermons on Psalm 23.

I can't wait. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down and greet pastures.

He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.

Verse 3. And then it says, He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. He's got a race set out for us. And then verse 4.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, the deep darks, I shall feel no evil for you are with me. Even David knew.

[ 25 : 07 ] Being a follower of God in the paths that God had set would lead through deep darks, hardship, difficulty, suffering on account of Jesus for us.

He does not promise ease and comfort. Hardship and difficult will surely come. We must endure.

Not giving up, not quitting, pressing on.

You're going to have some hard decisions to make. What are you going to do when your gay nephew invites you to come to his gay wedding?

What are you going to do? What does it look like to walk by faith there? Because in God's eyes, it's not a wedding. Students, what do you do when your classmates are cheating on their schoolwork? what do you do? What does it look like to walk by faith? It might mean getting marginalized, taking some heat.

[ 26 : 19 ] He doesn't promise ease and comfort to those who walk uprightly. But the thing is, we get to do this together. together. We run this race together.

We're like a pack. Remember the chariots of fire, those guys and runners and white on the beach in England running together?

If you look back at Hebrews 10, 24 and 25, I'm going to read this, but be thinking in terms of running the race. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.

And all the more as you see the day drawing near. As you're running the race together and gathering together every Sunday, be encouraging one another as you see that day approaching when Jesus comes back.

our Sunday gathering is an encouraging gathering. It's encouragement. It is strength for your soul to press on.

[ 27 : 33 ] We do this together. Do you want to finish the race and finish strong? You need to run long with endurance. The race marked out and we do that together.

One last point. We run looking. In verse 2, we read looking to Jesus.

In verse 3, we read consider him, Jesus, who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or faint hearted. You know, there's just a general principle in life.

It goes something like this. You move in the direction to which you're looking. You move to where you're looking. Whether you're driving a car or riding a bike or running a marathon, if you look over your left shoulder, typically you're going to move a little left, right?

Or if you look over your right shoulder, you're going to move a little right. The general principle is you move to where you're looking. Spiritually speaking, your looking aims your living.

[ 28 : 41 ] you live for what you're looking at. If you're fixing your eyes, scrolling, scrolling for new purchases, again and again and again, you make the purchase and you're scrolling for a new purchase, you're looking and your living follows.

If you're fixated on something that's happened in your past and you're just looking and looking and looking at it, it's like trying to move forward, but you're just staring in the rearview mirror, you're going to be living in the past.

If you're fixated on illicit images, you're setting your heart on these things. You're living for that which gives no life.

They're broken, empty sin cisterns. There's no life in these things. we're told to lay these things aside. There's no life.

They distract us from Christ. They're impostors. If you're a Christian, but not regularly looking to Jesus, and what I mean by that is this.

[ 29 : 58 ] Have you ever heard someone say, every one look at sin, you look ten looks at Jesus. every one look at this past wrong that you need to work through, you need to take ten at Jesus.

It's that kind of looking. If you're not looking to Jesus, you're going to be looking at something else. There's dangers there. There's the danger of drift.

That word looking, looking to Jesus, has a very interesting nuance to it. it means to purposefully stop looking at one thing and to start looking at another.

To very intentionally, to consciously, purposefully, take your eyes off one thing and put your eyes on another. I've got a confession.

Sometimes I come home from a hard day of pastoring. And I walk in the side door and I grab the mail and I walk into the kitchen and sometimes Jenny's there and we'll start talking about our day.

[ 31 : 07 ] But you know what I'm doing? I'm looking at the mail. Jenny's asking me about my day. Yeah, huh, huh. But I'm, I'm looking at an AARP letter.

Do you know what I've got to do? I've got to lay it aside. And I need to fix my eyes on Jenny. And I need to be there.

Does this make sense? I've got to take my eyes off one thing and put my eyes on another. In order for you to finish the race and finish strong, you need to learn and practice turning your eyes from lesser things in order to fix your eyes on the greatest treasure of all, Jesus.

Eyes on Jesus. And in verses two and three, the author gives us some things about Jesus to look at.

We've got a couple titles, a couple places, and one example. the two titles, essentially two titles are these. Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of your faith.

[ 32 : 27 ] Maybe the founder and finisher of your faith. Two titles. The founder, the originator of the faith of our salvation. Jesus.

The finisher, the perfecter, the completer of our salvation. Jesus, all of Christianity, begins and ends with Jesus.

He is our everything. He is our salvation. If you're familiar with Revelation, in Revelation 22, 13, Jesus says this about himself, I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

And if you don't know the Greek alphabet, it starts with alpha and ends with omega. He's the beginning and the end. It's all about Jesus. Have you ever heard the song, He's got the whole world.

We can adjust that a little bit to Jesus singing, saying of Jesus, He's got our whole salvation in His hands. He's the beginning and the end.

[ 33 : 36 ] These are two titles. Now let's look at the two places. Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.

Place number one, the place of His humiliation and our salvation. That place, the cross, was a shameful way to die.

It was the Romans. They designed crucifixion to be the most shameful and painful experience anyone can experience to die.

It was incredibly painful physically, emotionally, and socially. It was shameful. You died naked, suffering greatly. But for Jesus, on that cross, He bore God's wrath for our sin once for all.

At the cross, He founded our salvation. Despising the shame. Whatever.

[ 34 : 50 ] He had a place of His grace and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

His place of exaltation where He is now. Sitting on His throne, welcoming all that comes to us at the cross.

He's the source, founder of our salvation. On the throne, Psalm 110.1, He is sustaining us. He's perfecting us.

He's finishing what He started. He's pouring out grace. It's Hebrews 4, 14 through 16. Do you have a need? You make a beeline to the throne of grace. And He will give you grace in that time of need to sustain you so that you endure to the end.

He gives us grace upon grace. It's a beauty. He's the founder of our salvation cross.

[ 35 : 58 ] He's the finisher of our salvation throne. But in verse 3, we have an example. Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself.

You see, not only is Jesus the source of our salvation, He is the ultimate example of finishing the race. It's all of Hebrews 11 climaxes in Jesus as the greatest example of endurance who finished doing God's will at great cost.

He was mocked, beaten, unjustly convicted, imprisoned, humiliated, put to death the ultimate example of endurance, such hostility against Himself.

And it's there so you don't grow weary or faint-hearted as you pursue Him. You know why He did it? For the joy set before Him. It could have been the exaltation of the throne. I think it's more likely that it's the joy of bringing many sons and daughters to glory.

[ 37 : 19 ] Of gathering for Himself a people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. A people that have been flipped by God's grace and delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the beloved Son.

And it's us around the throne with all of those who've gone before us singing the praises of God for what He has done. That joy, all of the blood bought of God, gathered together for eternity in the city of heaven, which He's prepared for us.

We become part of His great cloud of witnesses. He's the one to whom we fix our eyes on. We run looking to Him.

Do you need help looking to Jesus? I do. To help you lay aside every weight in sin and fix your eyes on Jesus, do you need help?

Of course. prioritize coming on Sunday. Prioritize gathering together. It's God's good design.

[ 38 : 35 ] It's a habit of grace that we endure together by gathering together. Another way to, for help, you're going to get an email this afternoon from me.

And what I do is I lay out this week, Monday through next Sunday, and I give you something from the Bible to fix your eyes upon. It would be great for you to start your day that way.

It would be great if you've been looking for something to do devotionally with your family, to be in God's Word, to fix your eyes on Jesus, to pray together. This would be an easy start. You'll get that at one o'clock this afternoon.

But here's a way that has helped me this week. Parents, use your discretion with your kids. it's writing something.

On my left index finger, earlier this week, I've been writing E-O-J. Eyes on Jesus.

[ 39 : 39 ] So whatever I'm doing that day, driving, eating, working on things, eyes on Jesus. it's been so helpful.

I can, I look to Him throughout the day. We must finish the race and finish strong. Run the legacy, run light, run long, run looking to Jesus.

Distracted drivers need to keep their eyes on the road. Christians prone to distraction, and that's all of us, need to learn to fix our eyes on Jesus.

Eyes on Jesus. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we do acknowledge that You are exalted at the right hand of God right now, the throne, and You give grace to those in need.

and we are in ongoing need. We need You. You are everything. You are the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega.

[ 40 : 58 ] Would You sustain us this week? Would You help us to look to You with eyes of faith and endure to the end day by day?

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.