

AM Hebrews 12:1-2 Striving Forward with Jesus

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[0 : 00] From the book of Hebrews, Hebrews chapter 12, that should be on page 1212, Hebrews 12 and on page 1212, page 1212, and we can read the chapter together.

Hebrews 12, let's hear the word of God. 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.

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. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.

[1 : 20] For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons.

For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the father of spirits and live?

For they disciplined us for a short time, as it seemed best to them. But he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant.

But later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees.

[2 : 16] And make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

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. That no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.

For you know that afterwards, when he desired to inherit a blessing, he was rejected. For he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and a sound of a trumpet.

And a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given. If even a beast touches a mountain, it shall be stoned.

Indeed, so terrifying was the sign that Moses said, I tremble with fear. But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in the festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

[3 : 48] See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens. This phrase, yet once more, indicates the removal of things that are shaken, that is, things that have been made, in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

Give praise to God as always for his word. Pray together. Let's turn back to the word of God, to Hebrews chapter 12.

Excuse me. And we can look at the first two verses of this wonderful chapter. Hebrews 12, I'm looking for a short time together today, the first two verses of this chapter.

[5 : 01] Therefore, since we're surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely. 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.

It's amazing, so it's been three years since I came down to Edinburgh, and when we were packing everything together to come down, thinking what do I need for the next three years of education, you'd be surprised at how much we packed, that I haven't touched in the last three years.

Books which I thought would be essential, still on the shelf, untouched. I've perhaps moved them around one dreary afternoon rather than doing some proper work.

I've probably rearranged them, but I haven't opened them once. Trinkets and bits and pieces, which I thought I would desperately need, but which have remained untouched or unlooked at for the last three years.

It's very hard to think what is essential without taking a good amount of time to plan and to prepare and to whittle things down. It's very hard to leave things behind, especially things that we're so closely attached to, things that we love so much, but sometimes it's in our best interest and it makes perfect sense to leave these things behind if we want to go forward.

[6 : 32] It made our move to Edinburgh a lot easier if I left behind half the books, which instead we carted across all the way down south to Edinburgh. As we look at these verses together for a short time today, a short time this morning, these verses show us there are some things that we just have to leave behind.

There are some things in life we have to let go of, leave behind if we want to keep on going forward in our walk and in our faith. This verse also tells us there's things that we look forward to.

As we leave things behind, there are things ahead of us that we look forward to, that we run towards, that we race towards, that we are just desiring to see.

For a short time today, let's have these two points in our minds. The things we must leave behind and the things we look forward to. So even perhaps what we leave behind and what our future holds, we could say.

This chapter, chapter 12, begins with that simple word, therefore. Therefore. That simple word that connects all of chapter 12 to what's just been said in chapter 11.

[7 : 45] And chapter 11 of Hebrews is a beautiful chapter. It's a chapter that documents in such wonderful, beautiful way the big names of Israel.

The big names of the people of Israel. Those who lived a hard life, a tough life, who suffered much, but who lived a life that was ultimately faithful.

A life that depended on God. In chapter 11, if you have time this afternoon, read chapter 11, a beautiful chapter documenting these men and women of God and how they lived their lives well.

How they lived a life dependent on God. Trusting in Him. A life of faith. The writer is saying then in chapter 12, as he says that, therefore, as he connects chapter 12 to the previous chapter, in light of all these people, in light of the example we have, the examples we have in chapter 11, therefore, let's live our lives.

As we focus on these great people of faith, as these great examples, what it means to live a life, dependent on God, he then says, let's now talk about our journey.

[8 : 57] Let's now focus on us and see what it means for us to live a life focused on God or dependent on God. We see that in the first few words of the first sentence.

We are surrounded, as it says here, by so great a cloud of witnesses. What is the author saying? What is that image supposed to be for us?

Is he saying that because all these great names in chapter 11 are now kind of looking down on us, we better get our acts together. Because these great names, because these great Christians who have gone before us are watching us and taking notes in our lives, we better get ourselves sorted out.

Well, of course, we know that's not what's being said in verse 1. We know that those who have gone before us into eternity, that they are worshipping their Saviour.

They are not looking down on us. They have not time nor desire to do that. They are with their Saviour. They are looking towards Him. What is being said? What's the image being drawn in verse 1?

[10 : 00] The image in verse 1 is that of our race. The idea is that we are part of this race. That those who have gone before us in chapter 11, that those who have gone before these people, that they have lived that good life.

And as we follow them, their lives are witnesses to us. Their good lives, their lives of dependence on God, their lives of faithfulness to God, even in the midst of tough situations, it is our template as we strive to carry on living our lives.

We have many from our nation, many, I'm sure, from this area, many from this church, many in our families who have gone before us and who are now in glory.

Christians who we knew and Christians who we loved who are now gone and who we can look to and say, they had a tough life, but they lived it well because they loved their Saviour.

I'm sure we all have someone in the mind as we think about someone who has, our people have gone before us. We can look to them and we can say, as we follow after them, we look to their faith. As chapter 11 lists these faithful men and women, the writer in chapter 12 says, look to them, look to their faith and then look to your own life and look to our walk as we seek to follow on after them.

[11 : 27] And we can and we should reflect on those who have gone before us. We should think about their good witness. We should think about how they serve God faithfully, usually in tough situations, in tough circumstances.

Many of us here, I'm sure, have loved ones, grandparents, parents, husbands and wives who are now gone perhaps who once served so faithfully.

As we reflect on them and think on their journey and think on their faith-filled life, we still use that to inspire us. And we see that in the word he uses.

A great cloud of witnesses. That word witness is the same word where we get a word martyr from. In Greek, it's martyrion. The idea of a witness, it's someone who lives a life that others can see that life lived and seek to be like them.

The idea that those whose brave witness, whose brave life, inspires us to have a same or a similar life. So a writer begins chapter 12 by reminding us that we have the example of those who have gone before us.

[12 : 37] We're not the first to walk this road. We're not the first to face the trials and temptations and worries and sufferings that we do face on the Christian journey. It's been walked before us and those who have gone before us have completed that race and that they have joined with their Saviour.

in glory. It's a source of encouragement for us. A source of enlivening for us. As we begin chapter 12 here, these first few verses, that reminder that we're not walking this road alone.

It's been walked before us and we are following after their footsteps. Following in their legacy and striving to serve our Saviour just as they did.

But Paul is clear there's two things we must leave behind as we strive to follow this legacy. As we strive to follow those who have gone before us in the faith, we must leave behind two things.

And we see that in the second half of verse 1. let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely.

[13 : 47] Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Do you know, I'm sure you can guess, the most common New Year's resolution, that's what I could probably do with myself, it's to go to a gym.

The most common New Year's Day resolution is to go to a gym once a week all this year, at least once a week. I was just googling the other day, apparently, in our country alone, in the UK, seven and a half million pounds are wasted every year on unused gym memberships.

People take out a year-long membership and that membership isn't touched for the rest of the year. It's all good to have good intentions but it's actually quite painful when you have to start trying to lose that weight, I'm sure as most of us know.

There's two things here we have to leave behind. We're told, first of all, we have to leave behind the weight. If the idea in these verses is us running a race, running a marathon, running the race to the finish line which is glory, if on that race we're being weighed down then that weight has to go.

That weight has to go away from us. We have to let go of that weight. It's unnecessary, it slows us down, it ruins our run. Now see, there's a distinction in these verses if you can look to Scripture with me.

[15 : 15] There's a distinction here in the weight and in the sin. The weight that clings to us is not necessarily sin, but the sin that clings to us is.

But the weight is something that we hold on to that we could just let go of and improve our race, it would improve our journey, it would help us to run our race that bit better.

So what does slow down the Christian? What drags us down? What weight do we hold on to that we could do with letting go of to help our run, to help our race, to help us follow Jesus better?

See, I could stand here just now and give you a whole long list of examples. Some of them might be true for you but most of them only you know what the weight in your life is that holds you back either from following Jesus in the first place or if you're a Christian here today from following Jesus at all.

What as we seek to strive after our Saviour, what slows us down? What holds us back? What is the weight this morning that you're holding on to from running the race the way we are made to run it?

[16 : 29] Perhaps you're still feeling burdened for your sin. You know that you trust in a Saviour who has forgiven your sins. You know that he has declared you as clean as perfect as forgiven but yet you just you lay hold on that guilt and you can't seem to let it go.

You can't seem to shake the guilt that has been placed onto him. Perhaps this day you're suffering from a lack of assurance. You're doubting or you've always doubted or you've been doubting recently that are you really saved?

That is the Saviour who you love who you believe in who you know has saved you is he really yours? Even though you know that he has bought his precious blood your place with him for all eternity you just can't shake the feeling of a worry am I really his.

Perhaps the last few months last year you've suffered heartbreak you've suffered pain perhaps this year so far hasn't gone as planned perhaps nothing has gone the way you hoped it to go I don't know your situations I don't know your own private lives but we all know something what it is to have something to we're laying hold of things that we know we shouldn't have to keep hold of but we do and we know that as we lay hold of these things they are slowing us down our walk they are slowing us down as we try and strive towards Jesus we could go on and on and on and list a thousand other things but the offer here reminds us tells us as we seek to run this race as we seek to run after Jesus as we seek to live our life well for Jesus we have to let go of this weight we have to let go of it as we seek to run our race well so the weight the things we cling to which we just don't have to cling to but we still cling to it that has to go then we have the second instruction the second thing we have to let go of we have that which is sin that clings so closely the sin that clings so closely now this verse is describing and talking to Christians if you're here today as a Christian well brothers and sisters we know our salvation it's secure secure in Jesus but we also know that we all suffer from and engage in sin we find ourselves sinning by intention and sinning by omission we find ourselves sinning willfully and unwillfully and as we attempt to run our race well we all know what it is to feel that sin cling onto us and the reality is if we do not kill that sin that clings onto us it will slow our race down to a drag it will bring us to our knees and we'll be clawing of our fingernails to the finish line that's not what our race is meant to look like what's the focus of these verses it's to run the race with what to run the race with endurance we see that in the second half of verse one it's to run the race with endurance that's an imperative that's a command that's been written down there running the race with endurance is not an optional extra that's the command that's the way it's meant to be for us it's a statement we're not saved to drag our legs and sin we're not saved to drag and carry this extra weight behind us we're not saved to struggle across the finish line we've been saved to run the race with endurance that word implies that the race needs it it's not an easy race and we know that the

Christians here we know how hard our race can be we know how painful how difficult it can be but it also tells us it's possible we can run this race with endurance that we can let go of this weight we can let go of a sin which clings so closely if you're being honest I wonder if right now you're saying or thinking to yourself I see what you're saying in scripture I see that I need to lay aside this weight I see that and I know that I need to lay aside the sin it all has to be left behind I want to run the race with endurance I want to keep on going strong this year I want to keep on going strong to the end of a race I know all that I want all that but I just can't do it I just can't do it I know I will fail and fail and fail again in fact I failed today I failed yesterday I failed last week I'm failing all the time I can't let go of a weight

[21 : 37] I can't let go of a sin I want to but I just can't do it I know I'm not up to it if you're honest that's what's going through our heads just now we know it to be true but we say how do we do it well the answer is for us here in verse 2 that simple answer that beautiful answer it's the answer that helps both the Christians here keep going and those here who are not Christians to become Christians it's to look to Jesus for we do all in verse 1 we run this race we let go of the weight we let go of the sin by looking to Jesus that brings us to a quick second point here as we look to Jesus we see what we see the one who is the founder and perfecter of our faith see as

Christians we're guilty I'm guilty I'm sure we're all guilty for Christians here this day of knowing our salvation rests on Jesus alone we know that we confess that we believe that but still in the back of our minds we always think that somehow that by our actions by our efforts that somehow that's doing something for us Ephesians 2 comes into our minds so that no one can boast Jesus did all for us so that none of us can boast about anything that Jesus alone secured our salvation and because of that Jesus alone is the one who holds on to our salvation for us I might risk being thrown out here and never being invited back again I love the footprints in the sand poem as much as anyone but it's a wonderful poem I'm sure we all know it the image of a man having a dream and in his dream he's walking on the beach and he sees in hard times he only sees one set of footprints and it turns out that's when

Jesus carried him and the image is true and it's beautiful but the reality is Jesus carries us all the time not just in the hard times it's all the time because if he leaves us on our own we can do nothing if he left us on his own we would not get very far at all as we look to verse 2 we ask the question what does our future hold what does our future hold for the Christians here well we don't know we don't know what the rest of our race looks like we don't know what the rest of our race holds for us this day this week this month this year but we do know the thing we can be sure about is that Jesus is the one who is running this race along with us as we falter as we fail as we mess things up again and again as we struggle to let go of a sin as we struggle to let go of a weight we do so clinging on to Jesus all the ups and downs of our lives he remains constant the writer tells us simply to look to Jesus look to Jesus it's only in him and through him can we survive as Christians it's simple as that we see

Jesus described in such a wonderful way Jesus who is both the founder and perfecter he's both the originator and the perfecter of their faith it begins with him it begins with Jesus in eternity past out of his love and obedience for the father out of his love for his people that he agreed to come he agreed in the court of eternity before time itself he agreed to come and to be the saviour of his people he entered into this world that he himself had made to suffer and to die at the hands of people he himself had made Jesus fulfills these thirty odd years of life thirty three odd years of his living years of shame and pain and misery he endures the cross he endures death on that cross he endures the weight of our sins being placed on him and he has risen again into life it begins with him begins with Jesus he has done it all for us we bring nothing to the table at all as John

Owen thankfully shortly once famously said we bring nothing to our salvation but the sin that makes it necessary we bring nothing to our salvation but the sin that makes it necessary as we look to Jesus in verse 2 we look to the one who is the founder the starter the beginner quite literally the originator of our faith begins not with us begins not with our efforts not with saying well I'm this or that so I can be a good Christian no it says I love Jesus I look to Jesus and there my faith begins it all begins with him it all begins with him who is the author of our salvation as we carry on through our lives we also see that in Jesus we have the perfecter the finisher it's him who will take us through life it's him who declares us as perfect him as the one who is the perfecter of our faith him who is the one who has brought all things to completion him who is called in revelation the alpha and the omega the start and the end nothing can be added to the work of Jesus he is the finisher of it all it's believe in Jesus and be saved trust in

[27 : 47] Jesus as we have here look to Jesus look to him alone and doing that looking to him alone he will carry us through even the toughest storms of our life and we know this is not just something we say we know in our experience this to be true as we try and let go of the sins and weight of verse one we do so looking to Jesus who is the founder and perfecter who is all that we need who is all that we can ever need for our salvation for our ongoing race Jesus who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross we know we know that Jesus as we see God willing this evening when he entered again into glory he entered back in to the father the father's right hand he saw and received joy but also there's more to this verse what is the joy that Jesus had before him of course his joy of again being the father we know that also there's more to this what is the joy that Jesus had it was to have a people for himself to have us to have his people to have a people he could say are his that he died for us rose again for us that we are now his and he calls us he claims us as his own but as he suffered on that cross he did so for the joy set before him he did so for us for his people he also did so as this verse tells us that as we look to

Jesus we think about Jesus we think about the Jesus who despised the shame despised the shame of the cross we know this to be true but it's good to remind ourselves the cross was not easy Jesus suffered on that cross as fully man and fully God he suffered the full pain on that cross he suffered the pain the physical pain of dying of suffocating slowly over hours but he also faced the pain as we see in the garden as we see throughout his whole life we see Jesus suffering the pain of knowing that on that cross he was taking on to himself the punishment of every sin of every one of his people we can't begin to imagine what that means and we praise God that we don't have to if we trust in him this morning if one sin against God merits an eternity of wrath from God what does every sin of every person who trusts in him what kind of wrath was on

Jesus' shoulders what did he endure we can only begin to imagine he despised that shame he knew what the cross would mean for him he knew what it would be for him to come and to suffer and yet he came he knew from the start what it would mean for him to suffer and to die on that cross yet he came and he came why?

he came so we could look to him as our saviour out of love for the father out of obedience to the father out of love for us he came this is our suffering saviour it's to that Jesus we look to as we try and run the race well from verse 1 it's the suffering Jesus of verse 2 the triumphant Jesus of verse 2 we look to the Jesus who suffered but who now has triumphed over all who is now as the last few words remind us who is seated at the right hand of the throne of God see we look to Jesus today we look to him as our suffering servant we look to him as the one who endured it all for us out of his love for us we look to him with thankfulness that he knows what it is to suffer he knows what it is to have felt pain and misery to come alongside those who are also suffering we look to him also as the one who is at the right hand of the father the right hand of the throne of God who is reigning and ruling as king this very moment of this very day our suffering saviour and our reigning king that's the

Jesus we look towards this day that's the Jesus we cry out to of our sins we cry out to of our weight we cry out to as we try to run our race wells we endure this race as we try and live every day serving him and for his glory we remember our Jesus as a suffering saviour but also the exalted king that's the glory that's the wonder we have this day of worshipping our Jesus Jesus who knows us who loves us who has shown his love for us who has shown his care for us but also who is able as king of all kings to intervene to be involved in our lives who is able to reign in a way that we can place our trust in him knowing that he is king of all with that in mind that is our encouragement as we look to live out well verse 1 and verse 2 as the rest of this day the rest of this week we try and strive to serve Jesus well as we try to live

[33 : 19] Christian lives that reflect him well as we live Christian lives where we try and give him all the glory we try and let go of sin let go of a weight we do so looking to our suffering saviour who is also our risen king again I don't know many faces here I don't know where you stand before Jesus today if as of yet you don't know him then please come and know this Jesus come and know the one who has suffered for you who lived and who died and who rose again so that you may be saved who right now is at the right hand of the father reigning as king of all kings come and know him come and believe in him come and trust in him come and love him life is hard the race is hard but with him we know we have the sure hope but he is with us now right to the end let's bow our heads now word of prayer lord god we thank you again for the chance we have to have come around your word lord encourage us and forgive us lord thank you for it lord thank you that in your word we have the living truth sent from you lord you would forgive me for anything I said that was incorrect we give you praise the power is not in the jar of clay who stands here lord the power is in you and in your living word as it comes from you lord encourage us as we carry on this day to do so humbly to do so lord setting our hearts and our minds on you help us even just now as we come to sing our final item of worship to do so of hearts and minds set on you lord encourage us the rest of this afternoon to spend time with you in prayer and reading your word to spend time in fellowship with each other growing in our love and growing in our appreciation of who you are and what you've done for us lord help us never to grow tired of praising our Jesus of the one who came down to suffer and to die but the one who we now worship as the risen king reigning at your right hand awaiting the day of his return lord until that day comes help us to serve you well and to serve you faithfully ask all these things in and through and for his name's sake amen let's conclude begancio man to some two years we and— to come here to there you