

# Run with endurance looking to Jesus

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     So the reading this morning is Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 to 3 and that can be found on page 1212 in the church Bibles.

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.

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.

Good morning, everyone. My name is Charlie, if we haven't met, and I'm a member of the church family here, and we will pray before we get going.

[ 1 : 1 2 ]     Heavenly Father, you say that your word is a light to our feet, and we pray that you would light up our path this morning, help us to understand, and give us soft hearts that can respond to your word.

In Jesus' name, amen. Now, our subject today is endurance running, and I wonder what you think of when you hear those words, endurance running.

What does it make you feel inside? I imagine in a room this size, there are some who love endurance running, and we might have some marathon runners in our midst.

Any hands? Here we go. Okay. But most of us, we hate it. Okay? We know it's going to be hard, it's going to be long, and we know at some point it's going to hurt.

Two memories come to my mind when I think of endurance running. One of a friend, and the other a personal experience. I have a friend called Alex, and Alex used to do long-distance races, cross-country kind of thing.

[ 2 : 2 5 ]     He doesn't do it anymore, and when I asked him why not, he said, every race, you know that if you want to do well, you have to put yourself through so much pain.

I remember being in year seven, and one of the rotations we had to do for PE was cross-country, and you'll see that this has left a mark on me. The very first run we did, we went around the perimeter of the football fields, everyone going way too hard, no sense of pacing ourselves, headed off into the farmer's fields.

After a couple of farmer's fields turned left, up what felt like a very big hill back then, and halfway up, I just started uncontrollably retching. It's fair to say that since then, I have not been a sold-out fan of long-distance running.

But I am a fan of making it to heaven, and endurance running is what it's going to take to get there. We're not talking about a literal foot race this morning, rather the life of a Christian as we head home to Jesus.

And you can see that endurance is our subject this morning. It comes up in each of our verses. It's there in verse one. Let us run with endurance. Verse two, Jesus endured the cross.

[ 3 : 43 ] Verse three, consider him who endured. And just like a cross-country race, we can see it isn't going to be an easy ride.

It wasn't for the Lord Jesus, and personal experience will tell lots of us that that's true anyway. But as we come to the end of this awesome summer series, thinking about that cloud of faithful witnesses from the Old Testament, our author's aim is that we would keep going in the Christian life by considering Jesus' suffering and his reward more closely.

So let's get into our first point. Run with endurance. Let's read verse one again. 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.

Now, to illustrate this, Alice very kindly said I could buy one of her weights. This is 10 kilograms, so it's one of her lighter ones. But I think it will still make the point.

Imagine I had one of these strapped to my front and to my back, and I was carrying one in each hand. That is a lot of extra weight to be carrying now. Think in marathon terms for a second.

[ 5 : 11 ] Think what that does to my chances of running the full 26 miles. There is a reason that marathon runners don't look like sprinters with massive muscles. It is too much weight to carry, and it takes a sledgehammer to their ability to make it to the end.

Start panting, Cina, boss. Now, there is an argument to say that the weight and the sin in verse one are the same thing, i.e. that the sin is the weight.

But I think the author has something else in mind. The weight here isn't something that is necessarily sinful in itself, but it does weigh us down.

It might hold back our spiritual growth, weaken our faith, dampen our zeal, reduce our desire to resist temptation, even make it harder to draw near to Jesus.

Such weights, they might be a sport, a club, a hobby, a job, a particular course at university, an ambition, a place, even a friendship.

[ 6 : 23 ] Now, again, the hard thing about that list is that none of those things are wrong in and of themselves. They are fun, intellectual, good things, and we are free to enjoy them.

But if it gets to the point where those things have become my master, where that is the thing that I am striving to serve, and Jesus gets pushed to the side, then it has become a weight that I have to shed.

And the temptation might be that we hear that it's not sinful, so it's not serious, so we switch off. Don't switch off. And that is when we drift.

Perhaps this afternoon with your family, or if you feel happy to share in discussion time, we might like to think, what are the weights in our life that we might be carrying?

Things which hold us back from giving our everything to the Lord Jesus, and running forwards in the faith. And it means we'll have to be very honest with ourselves.

[ 7 : 28 ] And that isn't always easy. But remember what that 10 kg plate does as we run with it for longer and longer. It will sap every bit of energy we have.

Moving on to the sin in verse 1, it's probably slightly more obvious what that might be. Anything that is forbidden by the Lord Jesus, anything that we're commanded to flee or avoid, anything that is contrary to his morally perfect character, get rid of it.

Like water seeping into a boat, get your bucket, fling it overboard, and do it quick. Because the end is inevitable. We mustn't fall for the lie that says we can hold on to anything sinful and still run the race well.

At best, it will slow us down. But more likely, we'll just sink. Or to stick with the running analogy, we will leave the track and we'll fall out the race.

Now, of course, this isn't always easy either. The author describes this sin as clinging so closely. The idea is that it easily distracts.

[ 8 : 47 ] It's like the PlayStation or the TV inviting you in when you know you should be doing the washing up or homework or fixing something. It draws us away from what we're supposed to be doing such that we never complete the task.

So it's got to go. Perhaps there's a particular sin we're struggling with. Internet pornography.

Quick to lose our temper and shout. Selfishness. It's not the sort of baggage we can be carrying in a long-distance race. And if you feel like you need help laying it aside, please know that you can speak to people.

You could speak to your growth group leader, anyone on staff, or just someone you trust. And if someone does come to us asking for help, then our job is not to judge, but to pray with them, support them, and love them.

And this is not an individual race. It is a team race. Remember Hebrews 3, exhort one another. Just to be clear then, this verse is not telling us that we have to be perfect or we won't enter heaven.

[ 10 : 03 ] And that would completely undermine everything the author has said so far. We still live in sinful bodies, but we have a perfect high priest in Jesus, who has paid for all of our sin once for all time.

Rather, it is a command designed to help us make it to the end of the race. It is good for us. But we must listen. Let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Final thing to say on this point then. A bit of expectation management. It is a marathon, not a sprint. It is not choosing to follow Jesus in a huge display of devotion for one week or a month or even a year.

It is choosing to follow him every day for the rest of our lives. And for some of us, that will be decades and decades. For others, it will be a little bit less. But when we think of the Christian life, we should think of Kipchoge, famous marathon runner, not Usain Bolt.

Mo Farah, not Jessica Ennis Hill. This is a race that we measured in years, not seconds. Miles, not meters. Basically, we are going to be running for a very long time.

[ 11 : 34 ] How will we keep going? Lots of you have already been running for a very long time. How are you doing in this race? What or who has kept you going all of these years?

I imagine you have faithfully followed the commands of verses 2 and 3, which takes us on to our second point. Run with endurance by considering Christ's endurance.

Let's read verses 2 and 3 again. 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. Let's take those two words first, founder and perfecter.

Jesus is the founder of our faith. Now, this is something that I love about Christianity. If you've been with us this year at Grace Church going through Mark's gospel, you know that we've just got to that point where Peter has declared that Jesus is the Christ.

[ 12 : 59 ] It's a high point in Mark's gospel. And next time we rejoin Mark's gospel, Jesus will say these words. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

Follow. And he doesn't say, off you go while I sit here and have a pina colada. We're not his cannon fodder. He isn't like the army general who controls everything from the back of the battlefield while others give up their lives, though I'm not questioning military tactics there.

He said, I'll go first and then you follow. And what he did first was live the perfect life of obedience, trusting God's word, even when that looked like enduring the most desperate form of suffering.

He led the way. And in fact, not only that, but he has even created a life of faith in us through the gospel.

He is the founder of our faith. And Jesus is the perfecter of our faith. That second word.

[ 14 : 19 ] The sense of that word perfecter is that he brings our faith to completion. In one sense, he makes it whole by standing as our perfect representative before God.

But I think also in the sense that he is the one who will get us over the line. If we're here today and we are feeling spiritually weary, isn't that a lovely tonic?

Jesus is already standing there in my place, perfect before God. In God's eyes, I am now sinless. And he is going to carry me along to the finish line.

He is the Alistair Brownlee to our Johnny Brownlee. And remember that heart-moving image back in 2016 when Alistair Brownlee carried his brother over the line. And brothers and sisters, do we know how deeply invested Jesus is in our progress?

And even if it may not feel like it sometimes, we have not been left on our own. But now, let's consider what he actually endured and why he endured it.

[ 15 : 33 ] And in doing so, I trust we will be spurred on to similar endurance. So, his shame, his suffering, his reward. What I thought we'd do here is imagine a sort of highlight reel of Jesus' last few days.

I want us to picture these in our minds if you can do that. It won't really be the fun sort of highlight reel. This wouldn't appear on Instagram or Facebook. It will be up close and personal.

And we won't shy away from the hostility or the shame. But I think it will help us personally afterwards. So, come with me now to a sham trial.

It's dark because it's night time. And there's just a few lit fires giving off a bit of light. We're in the courtyard of the high priest. Can you see it? Jesus is surrounded by Jewish leaders and some very carefully selected witnesses.

Now listen, can you hear the people giving false testimony? But notice how not one of the things that they say adds up. But notice something strange.

[ 16 : 43 ] Jesus doesn't say anything. Just lets it happen. Now come over to his trial before Pilate. Here's Jesus inside. The crowd are all outside.

And Pilate is flitting between the two. Watch how Pilate proclaims his innocence. I find him not guilty. But listen as the crowd just cry out louder and louder for his crucifixion.

Watch as Pilate buckles under the pressure and just hands him over to the soldiers. Come inside now to Pilate's headquarters.

Can you see the whole battalion of soldiers standing there? There's a few hundred of them. Now they place a crown of thorns on his head. Now they mockingly salute him.

Hail, King of the Jews! Before beating him and spitting on him. Come with me now to our last image. We are outside the city now.

[ 17 : 42 ] Jerusalem's over there but we're at the place that is called Place of the Skull. And watch as Jesus lets the soldiers hold him down and put nails through his hands and his feet.

And watch as he is hoisted up. Watch how the creator of the world endured the cross. And notice how he chooses not to come down even though he could but instead chooses to bear the shame of it.

growing up my mum was a doctor and that meant there was a high bar for receiving any sympathy for illness.

Yeah, you know the feeling. Now I have slightly inherited that response which has meant that on occasion I have not been so good at showing sympathy to my poorly wife when I really, really should have done.

And that especially happens when she's experiencing something that I haven't and I am working on this. But I take it that dwelling on Jesus' suffering helps us to endure because A, it reminds us just how qualified Jesus is to sympathize with our sufferings and our weakness.

[ 18 : 58 ] And when we are tired and we just want someone to hear us, when we draw near to Jesus, we will not find an unsympathetic ear. Rather, one who says, I know brother or I understand sister and he really does understand.

He endured the cross. And B, Jesus is the climax of this awesome parade of faithful witnesses. when the thought of giving up or drawing back is all too tempting, he shows us in the extreme what faithful endurance looks like.

I hope this isn't too contentious in a room full of teachers, but part of good teaching practice is showing kids model answers. And the idea being you show them how to write a top level answer or how to work out a difficult solution and then they can replicate it.

Jesus' example of endurance, I think, is like that. His endurance is what we ought to aspire to. He shows us how to endure the shame and the hostility.

We might not have to endure the cross, but we endure the shame and the hostility. And the answer is we set our sights on the joy of heaven.

[ 20 : 28 ] because this is not suffering for suffering's sake. Christians are not masochists. It's not that we love suffering beyond the fact that it makes us more like Jesus.

We suffer because we know it's worth it. And Jesus knew that. For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross.

and now he is seated at his father's right hand in his kingdom back in perfect relationship with his father. It's something that's becoming more and more estranged to our culture.

In fact, it might already be gone. The idea of suffering and waiting now to inherit the prize later. And we have become so used to instant gratification.

And we have got to be really careful of that as Christians that we don't buy into that or inherit that. That idea that we should have all the blessings now of God's kingdom and his new creation.

[ 21 : 35 ] And that suffering shouldn't be a part of the Christian experience now. Because if we get that wrong, there is every chance that we will grow tired and weary and we won't finish the race.

But if we do wait faithfully, if we can endure this suffering as Jesus brings us home, then the joy we are in for is unimaginable.

And even now, Jesus is preparing a room in his house for you and for me. A place in God's kingdom where there will be no more suffering, no more pain, just blessing upon blessing upon blessing as we enjoy the physical presence of our God.

Brothers and sisters, whatever we suffer now, it could not be more worth it. And Paul says in Romans 8, I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

As we come to a close then, just three brief implications to draw out. Number one, it's going to be a tough race. Let's get that expectation right now.

[ 22 : 57 ] It will be long, and it's very likely that at some point we're going to get tired, but we can help ourselves by shedding excess weight. Number two, running on our own steam is the way to burn out.

Look at verse three again. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted.

So there is a direct correlation between considering Jesus and growing weary. glory. And I think that means that every opportunity we have to come to the Bible and consider Jesus is like a lifeline.

It's not just something for ultra-keen Christians or people who are a bit radical. If we want to be a Christian and stay a Christian, the Bible is our lifeline because it shows us Jesus.

as we head into a new academic year, I'm sure there are loads of things on our plates that we want to get in order. To-do lists are probably already eye-wateringly long.

[ 24 : 17 ] But as we head into this new year, so that we don't grow weary and faint-hearted, let's put considering Jesus right at the top of that to-do list.

Quiet times, growth groups, prayer meetings, jam, Friday night youth, elms, all of them opportunities to consider Jesus. And if we think we can go it alone, think again.

And final implication, number three, we have all the help we need. Need help living in light of God's promise to judge the world?

Noah's my guy. Think that God is opening a door but have no idea where it's going to lead. Remember Abraham. Need help turning away from the fleeting pleasures of sin?

Look at Moses. All of them excellent models of inspiration. But then, of course, there is our ultimate example, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 25 : 26 ] Not just the perfect example of enduring suffering and shame, God's going to home. Our founder and our perfecter.

We have all the help we need to make it home. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you so much that the Lord Jesus is our founder.

He led this life of perfect obedience and faith first, and that he is born in us a life of faith through the gospel. Father, we pray that you would help us to consider Jesus this year, make that a priority so that we do not grow weary.

In Jesus' name, amen.