

Run with Endurance

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[0 : 00] I've been asked to say a few words to the younger folk in our midst this morning, and I'd like just to say two or three words on the ABC of the Gospel.

I remember when I was very young, when I went to school first, I'm not quite sure if this was common in all the villages throughout the island here, but those who started in school, they were said to go to the ABC class.

Nowadays it's partially called Primary 1 or something like that. But it was called the ABC when I was younger. And when you went to Primary 1 or the ABC class, you started with the basics, didn't you?

I still remember the teacher hanging a chart over what we had as a blackboard, and at the top of the chart was a picture of an apple and the letter A beside it.

And then underneath was B with a ball and C a cat and so on, all the way through the alphabet. So you learned the basics of the alphabet, the basics of reading and the basics of writing, because you learned the ABC first.

[1 : 28] Now there is an ABC in the Gospel, and there are three texts in the Bible that I want to highlight as illustrative of the fact that there is an ABC of the Gospel.

The first one, A, says this, All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

That means the youngest one here, right through to the oldest person here, we have all sinned, none accepted.

Every single one of us comes under this umbrella and are included in this statement that we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Now sin, of course, makes a mess of our lives. It gives us to be walking in the wrong direction. It gives us, through our sins, to be impure and filthy in the presence of God.

[2 : 33] It gives us to deserve God's wrath and curse, both in this life and the life that is to come throughout eternity.

So that's the bad news about us, that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But God is a gracious God.

He is a God who makes provision for people who are sinners and hell-deserving. And the second verse I want to highlight begins with the letter B.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Isn't it amazing that God knows the extent to which our sin has affected us, that we cannot save ourselves, we cannot cleanse ourselves from our sin, but he says, look, I have made a provision, and look at the Lamb of God who is Jesus Christ.

He is able to take our sins away. Behold him. Look at him. Focus upon him as the Savior for you and continue looking and trusting in him all of your life.

[3 : 59] Behold the Lamb of God. So we've done A, the A of the Gospel, the B of the Gospel, and what do you think is the C of the Gospel?

A verse beginning with the letter C, and it says, Come unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

This is Jesus who speaks these words. This is the Lamb of God, the Savior, the only Savior appointed by God to take our sins away.

And he himself says, Come to me. I know you're laboring. I know life is tough for you. I know your sin is a burden to you. Well, the solution to your problem is, Come to me.

And the promise, I will give you rest. What an amazing ABC that is. And of course, if you went through the whole of the alphabet, I'm sure you can think of many verses yourselves that could fit, for example, the letter D and E and F, all the way through the alphabet, encouraging you to continue looking to Jesus and to walking in his ways.

[5 : 21] But we have to learn the ABC first. God's praise. Our need of a Savior to focus upon the Savior God has provided and by grace to come to him that we might have the rest of eternal salvation at last.

The ABC of the Gospel. May God bless these thoughts to us. Now let us sing again to God's praise, this time from Sing Psalms once more.

Psalms 119, and verses 9 to 16. Psalms 119, and Sing Psalms, verse 9, How can the young keep their life pure?

By doing what your word demands. I seek you with my heart and soul. Let me not stray from your commands. Your word I've hidden in my heart to keep me from offending you.

Praise be to you, O Lord my God. Teach me your statutes, firm and true. Verses 9 to 16. To God's praise.

[6 : 36] I seek you with my heart, O Lord my God, teach me your ways, firm and true.

If all proceeds from your hand, I gladly win my lips at home.

I love to follow you, O Lord, a savage love to count their gold.

I meditate upon your ways, and on your precepts I repent.

I take delight in your decrees, your word I never will be blessed.

[9 : 06] Let us now turn to the New Testament Scriptures and the Epistle to the Hebrews on chapter 11.

I'm sorry, chapter 12. The Epistle to the Hebrews on chapter 12, I'm reading at the beginning.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, it is also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and it is 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, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.

[10 : 43] 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 we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the father of spirits and live?

For they discipline 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 peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lay may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

[11 : 54] 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.

By it many become defiled, but 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 the 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 the sound of a trumpet and a voice, whose words make the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.

But they could not endure the order that was given. If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned. Indeed, so terrifying was the sight 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 festal gathering, and to 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.

[13 : 29] 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.

Amen. And may God bless to us this reading from his own word. And to his name be all the praise. It is now sing from the Scottish Psalter, and Psalm 119, at verse 33.

The Scottish Psalter, Psalm 119, and verse 33, Teach me, O Lord, the perfect way of thy precepts divine, and to observe it to the end, I shall my heart incline.

[15 : 02] Give understanding unto me, so keep thy law shall I, even with my whole heart, I shall observe it carefully. verses 33 to 40, Psalm 119, to God's praise.

Amen. Amen. O God. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[18 : 30] Amen. Now let us again turn to Hebrews chapter 12. And with the Lord's help let us focus for a short while on the words we have in the first two verses of this chapter.

Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. 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.

Each one of the New Testament letters was written with a specific purpose, specific aim in mind, answering a particular situation that the writer saw needed to be addressed.

For example, when Paul writes the letter to the Romans, or much of the letter focuses on the doctrine of justification by faith.

[20 : 14] When Paul writes to the young minister Timothy, he writes concerning issues that Timothy must address in his ministry.

When Jude writes his very short letter, he writes with an emphasis upon the need for believers to contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints.

He sees that there needs to be a focus and an outworking of that faith in their lives, seeking to live by it, seeking to live by it, and to make it known in their society.

When we come to the epistle to the Hebrews, the particular issue concerning which the letter is written, it seems to be that those of these Hebrews who had embraced the gospel, they were encountering difficulties of various kinds, and some of them were wavering in their commitment to the gospel, and some of them even seemed ready to turn their back upon the gospel and re-embrace their Jewish religious practices with which they had been so accustomed before the gospel came their way.

And we see that the epistle, or the letter that we have before us here, highlights this at various points.

[21 : 57] For example, at chapter 10 of the letter, at the very end, he talks about those who shrink back, and those who don't live by faith.

But then at verse 39, we are not of those who shrink back and destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

It's as if the writer is focusing their minds on living a life of faith in God, God whom they have never seen, a Christ whom they have never seen, the work of the high priest, Christ they have never seen with their eyes, as they would see the work of the priest at the temple, and the sacrifices being offered, and so on.

The focus of the letter is away from involvement with Jewish religious practices to a full embracing of a life of faith in an unseen Savior, in a Savior who has finished the work of salvation on behalf of those who believe in his name.

And when he comes to chapter 12 here, he begins the chapter with these very interesting words.

[23 : 27] Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and so on. He's talking about the references he has made to the Old Testament saints mentioned in chapter 11.

And they have all lived their life by faith, looking to a promised Savior whom they didn't see, and who had not come in the flesh during their lifetime.

They nevertheless lived their life by faith, looking to the promised Savior, and they were justified, and they were saved, because they trusted in the Savior promised.

And the emphasis we have now in chapter 12 to these New Testament Hebrew believers is you must, like them, look to an unseen Savior, trusting in all that the Savior has done, and you must continue to do so every step of your way in this world until the end.

And with that kind of background, he now comes to highlight, I think, three specific things. What are required of them?

[24 : 51] Rather than waver in their commitment to the Gospel, rather than think of going back to their old Jewish practices, there are three things he asks of them.

First of all, he talks about separation. In the middle of verse 1, he says, Let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely.

That's the first thing. Things that they have to lay aside, separate from, that's the first thing. The second thing is, he calls them to a new engagement.

Middle of verse 1, towards the end, Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Reengage your lives.

Continue running the life and the race of faith. That's the second thing. And thirdly, he gives them a focus. And beginning at verse 2, Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

[26 : 09] So he tells them to separate from certain things. Secondly, to engage full-heartedly and whole-heartedly with the life of faith, running that life and running that race.

And thirdly, he gives them the best focus for their lives, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith. Firstly, what he asks of them.

He asks that they lay certain things aside. and it's as if the apostle brings them to think of themselves in a large arena, preparing to run a race.

Greek games were commonplace in the apostle's day and he knew that he would touch with something with which they were familiar when he brought this kind of concept of a stadium full of spectators looking at those who were going to run the race.

And he says, we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses. these are the spectators. And who are they in particular?

[27 : 41] Well, you have to consider those mentioned in chapter 11. All these men and women of faith mentioned in chapter 11, they have run their race of faith and as was customary during these part-off times, those who had finished their race, they would take their seat in the stands and there cheer on those who were in succeeding races.

And that's the picture he has here. We are surrounded, he said, by Moses and Abraham and all the rest of these men of faith and women of faith mentioned in chapter 11.

It's as if they're looking on, their lifestyle speaks to us, the witness that they left. It's as if it's shouting in our ears, you run the same kind of race as we have done because we have run it successfully and we are now in glory.

enjoying the blessings of eternal life in the nearer presence of God and he places them in that kind of situation. And what does he say?

He says, now that you are surrounded by all these triumphant runners of the race of faith, what do you have to do first of all? It says, let us lay aside every weight, everything that would hinder me from running the race successfully.

[29 : 16] You wouldn't give tuppence for a runner coming into an Olympic race to try and run the hundred meters, let's say, clothed in his overcoat and in his winter gear and in his Wellington boots.

It's inconceivable that you would expect a person like that to win. But that's the picture he draws of them. That's the way you've been living. It's as if you've been carrying extra weight, things that aren't necessary, things that aren't really God glorifying, are found in your lives, and you have to lay all these things aside.

You know, they have, those who are into sports, they have written papers on the aerodynamic design of sports garments.

They have tested sports garments in wind tunnels to see what kind of weave offers least resistance as the runner makes his dash to the line.

And this is the kind of thing, spiritually speaking, that the apostle here is using. He says, lay aside everything that would hinder you from running the race of faith successfully.

[30 : 39] You know, the servants of Christ writing in the scriptures and other places refer to this. Think, for example, of the verse we have in 1 Peter in chapter 2, verse 1.

And Peter says, put away or lay aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander like newborn babes long for the pure spiritual milk that you may grow up into salvation.

These things that are loading your lives, these bad attitudes to people, the desire to harm people, to get one over people, the deceitful language, the hypocrisy, doing something and thinking something else, envying somebody for getting on and for being successful, and that kind of burdens your spiritual and clogs up your spiritual life in such a way that you cannot run your life of faith the way you ought to.

And the apostle says, lay it aside. Or come into the epistle to the Colossians, the same kind of thing from a different angle, and the apostle says there in Colossians chapter 3 at verse 5, he says, put to death therefore, what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

It's as if he uses a stronger picture altogether than Peter does. Peter says, put away these things, malice and so on, but Paul says in Colossians, put them to death.

[32 : 34] There is no place for these awful sinful activities and traits in the race of faith.

I wonder if there is anything in my life today that equals the baggage that the apostle here is talking about. Well, I ask the Lord, Lord, please take it away from me, that I may run my spiritual race as aerodynamically efficient as is possible, that I may not be hindered by the weave of my thinking or the pattern of my life that would entangle itself with worldliness and pick up aspects of worldliness that are not God glorifying.

Lord, take it away, that I might be able to live my life to your glory. But then he goes on, still under this first heading, lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely.

Clinging closely, some people describe it like a garment, like that loose flowing garment that hangs right down to the ground.

It doesn't matter which way you move, you touch the garment, it's as if it's always there. Or somebody else describes this word, the sin which clings so closely, as if you're running in a race and you've seen this happen and the competitors are so closely bunched together and somebody in the middle of that bunch wants to break free and make for the finishing line, but he's hemmed in, the others don't let him go.

[34 : 34] And that's the way sin is. It keeps you from running the race efficiently and effectively. I'm sure the sin that is particularly before the apostle's mind here is the sin of unbelief, which was the sin that was clogging the arteries of these people, spiritually speaking.

They weren't exercising faith upon Christ the way they ought to. They weren't living by faith the way they ought to. And they were ready to turn back, ready to turn aside.

The Old Testament uses a marvelous picture, and it's so simple, but it's said of some people in the Old Testament who were God-fearing, they didn't turn to the right hand or to the left.

It's as if they kept their focus and kept going on the straight and narrow. Sin doesn't want you to do that. Sin wants you to trip up.

Sin wants to frustrate your progress. Sin wants you to make a mess of things. So what's the prayer we ought to have?

[35 : 53] If lack of faith or unbelief is the problem described in this sin which clings so closely, how are we going to deal with it? Well, ask the Lord, increase my faith, give me grace to repent of this sin, grace to look unto Jesus, and live more and more by faith in him all the days of my life.

So, that's the first point. Things that we have to lay aside in order to enable us to run this race to the glory of God.

Secondly, there is the matter of engaging with the race. Engagement, let us run, he says, with endurance the race that is set before us.

running gives the picture of people in haste, going from one place to another.

And that's the way the apostle here is using it. He says, you have to be determined in your commitment to the Lord.

[37 : 14] you have to have full heart commitment to following Jesus Christ. Otherwise, you can't be said, you cannot be said to be running the race.

You don't want to be ambling and opening yourself up to all kinds of temptations and worldly inclinations. You know what the apostle Paul is saying?

1 Corinthians 9, Do you not know, he says, that they who run in our race all run, but only one receives the prize?

So, he says, run that you may obtain it. It is our full heart commitment to living the life of faith, living what the Lord Jesus commands, a life that is God glorifying.

you see, run this race. What typifies this race that he is talking about?

[38 : 22] He has the picture of the stadium full of people willing those who are running to run as best they can.

What kind of elements must be involved in this race of faith? faith? Well, of course, there must be, first and foremost, faith itself, faith in operation.

And what does faith really mean? Well, the Catechism says that it is a receiving and resting upon Christ alone, freely offered to us in the Gospel.

Christ alone for salvation, freely offered in the Gospel. Now, we cannot do this by ourselves. We need the grace from God to enable us to exercise faith, to look beyond the visible, to touch beyond the touchable, to feel beyond the emotional, to know something of the other world.

faith. And only God himself can do this for us, to give us this grace of faith to begin with. But once we have it, we need to exercise it.

[39 : 42] And we ask the Lord, Lord, may I grow in faith, and grow in knowledge, and grow in my commitment to you, in every situation of life.

So that's the first thing. There is faith itself. But there is also repentance. in this race, there must be a parting with every known sin, and a mourning over every known sin, and a coming on our knees before the Lord, asking that the blood of Jesus Christ be applied to us, and that our sins be cleansed.

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains. So come with repentance.

There is also marking this race, and the boundaries of the race that you are running.

There must be obedience to God, obedience to his word, commitment to doing what God asks.

[40 : 57] not what we think ourselves. There must be love to God. This must be dominant. There must be self-denial.

All of these things enter into the real running of this race so that we will run successfully and to the glory of God.

how long is the race? How long is the race? Well, it's as long as your life is. That may be long, it may be quite short.

it may be a very uphill race for things seem always to be against you.

Depravity is so hard, heartaches are often experienced, disappointments are the order of the day. there must be thousands of people throughout the world today who are questioning why?

[42 : 08] Why is this in my cup? Why, why, why? Well, the Lord knows why. But you see, this is where the next word comes in.

We have to run with endurance this race. Endurance steadfastness, constancy describes a quiet waiting upon God despite the difficult circumstances that might come our way.

There are a number of texts I want to just quote to you to highlight the meaning, I believe, of what he is saying here. Run with endurance. What does it say?

Well, when David wrote Psalm number 40, he was running with endurance the race set before him. What does he say? I waited for the Lord my God and patiently did bear.

At length to me he did incline my voice and cry to hear. In his difficult situation, rather than go back and throw his hands in the air and say, I'm not having any more of this life of faith, he waited for the Lord.

[43 : 26] And he prayed, and he prayed earnestly, and he prayed a long time. At length to me he did incline my voice and cry to hear.

And then he took me from a fearful pit, from the miry clay, and on a rock he set my feet, establishing my way, and he put a new song in my mouth, our God to magnify.

Many shall see and shall fear, and on the Lord rely. A man waiting upon the Lord in difficult circumstances. The devil will say, give up, the Lord is never going to speak to you again.

The devil will say, what's the use? 99% of the people around you couldn't care less about this race of faith that you say you're running.

but the people who are truly waiting upon the Lord will wait for him. Isaiah 8 verse 17 I say in a similar sort of situation to David I say I will wait upon the Lord who hides his face from the house of Jacob and I will hope in him.

[44 : 43] What an amazing commitment that is when the skies are dark and when the clouds as it were are closing around you and nobody seems to be able to help you in your Christian endeavour and commitment you consider that it is best to wait upon the Lord although he hides his face from you and he will come in his own time.

Habakkuk 3 17 I think says it all doesn't it? when he says though the fig tree should not blossom nor fruit be on the vines the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls yet I will rejoice in the Lord I will take joy in the God of my salvation that is running his race with endurance despite trials despite difficulties uphill struggle the wind blowing against him he nevertheless anchors himself by faith in the Lord and he waits for him and when the Lord comes he will bring relief and he will bring joy so engagement run the race with endurance and it's the race set before us it lies before us the Lord has planned it and he says my grace is sufficient for you and my strength is made perfect in your weakness run in your weakness look into the one who is able to pour grace upon you and strength upon you to run the race to its end that's the second point then the engagement and thirdly and finally we have the focus looking to

Jesus I think this is a very interesting word to use looking to Jesus because the word looking here means looking away from what may be drawing you and focusing instead upon Jesus now what was seemingly drawing these people well it seems to have been the activity of the temple worship temple worship that the Lord was soon to finish off because Jesus who was portrayed and symbolized by the temple worship had already come and had finished the work and now had risen from the dead and ascended and sat down at the right hand of God in heaven and he says my focus needs to be on him rather than go back to the old symbolism of the

Jewish religion he says look unto Jesus the one who came in the fullness of time the one who came the God man mediator the one who demonstrated his power over sin over death over the devil the one who rose triumphant and ascended gloriously and now sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high all power given unto him in heaven and on earth he is the one that must be our focus looking away from all other objects I know that there are plenty other things in the world that would call for our attention the things of the world are polished up so much by the devil to make them look attractive and there are millions of people following the attractive worldly attractions that the devil seems to use so successfully to put so many people astray but we need to look to

Jesus where do we see him where we find him in the scriptures he's reported in the scriptures so gloriously you read the word of God it tells you about this Jesus who came to seek and to save the lost came to call sinners to repentance able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him look to him with the look of faith look to him with the look of expectation he promises never to leave his people never to forsake them he says I am with you always even unto the end of the world he who has begun the good work in his people promises to perform it until the day that he comes again all look to him trust in him rely upon him and he goes on and he says he is the founder and perfecter of our faith he is the great exemplar of faith despite the difficulties that he encountered in his life despite the opposition from men the sufferings of the cross the shame of crucifixion and all these awful things that he endured he nevertheless continued in the way until at last he said it is finished isn't it amazing that he says to us this morning take Jesus as your example he is the one who is able to give you grace the one who finished the course himself he is able to stay with you every step of the way he is able to take you at last into his nearer presence because he finished his work and now he is rejoicing seated seated at the right hand of the throne of God these three points the separation things that you have to lay aside think of what they might be in your own life ask God to enable you to lay them aside an engagement run your race commit yourself by grace by faith to doing what God asks to living the life that glorifies him and always seek to please him and not please yourself and thirdly the focus looking to Jesus the author and finisher of faith

[52 : 25] Amen let us pray Lord our God help us to be thankful that we have your own word as a rule of faith and life and we thank you for the ministry of your spirit who is able to take this word and apply it to us in our individual and very personal circumstances we thank you that you are able to give your people grace in the most difficult of situations and that they will sing in thankfulness for all that you have done for them bless the congregation here we pray bless them as they gather in the evening may you lay liberally to the hand of your servant that the word of God may be powerful and saving as it issues forth from this pulpit go before us now and forgive our sin in Jesus name we ask it

Amen