

Heb. 12:1 The Believer's Race

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[0 : 0 0] With me in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 12.! Hebrews chapter 12. I'll read the first section.

Basically, chapter 12 is a specific charge to the believers.! First, to run the race of faith in verses 1 to 11. That's what I'll read, and then we'll focus on verse 1. But secondly, to renew their vitality in verses 12 to 17.

Also, to be reminded that they have come to Mount Zion in verses 18 to 24. And then it ends with an exhortation to not refuse God, who speaks to them from heaven in verses 25 to 29.

I think that the book of Hebrews was written. There's a lot of debate in terms of who the author was. I wouldn't die on this hill, but I think the Apostle Paul wrote it. And he wrote it to Hebrew Christians, those who had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

And they were undergoing pressure to defect from Christ, to go back to Moses and the Levitical sacrificial system and to the temple. And so the Apostle is writing to encourage them and to exhort them to persevere and to endure in the faith and not to relent, not to go back in terms of their going forward with Jesus.

[1 : 1 2] So I'll begin reading in chapter 12 at verse 1. Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin, and you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons.

My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by him. For whom the Lord loves, he chastens and scourges every son whom he receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons.

For what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect.

Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them. But he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness.

[2 : 3 8] Now, no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful. Nevertheless, afterward, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Amen. Well, let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again for this day. We thank you that you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. And we pray now that you would encourage our hearts, help us in terms of endurance and perseverance in a God-hating world, help us to be faithful, help us to do those things you call us unto, and help us always to be mindful that our salvation is not ultimately in what we do or how we run the race, but ultimately upon our Lord Jesus Christ, who lived for us, who died for us, who was raised again for us.

As Paul says, he was delivered up because of our offenses, and he was raised for our justification. And we rejoice in this. We ask now that you would forgive us for all of our sins and cleanse us in that precious blood of the Lamb and guide us by your Holy Spirit, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, I thought this would be hopefully an encouraging message in terms of endurance and perseverance. I know that in a smallish church, it can be a bit discouraging at times, or at times, as I alluded to this morning, you drive by other churches and they seem to be bursting at the seams.

They have all kinds of programs. They have all kinds of money and all kinds of people. And we think, wait a minute, what's going on with us? Well, I think, as I said this morning, faithfulness and a commitment to the infallible Word of God is absolutely crucial above and beyond all those particular things.

[4 : 15] And in Hebrews 12, verses 1 to 11, as I said, the apostle's encouragement is to run the race of faith. And to that end, he not only states the duty, which we'll look at in just a moment, but he gives three incentives.

If I was going to invite you over for a party, I would give you as an incentive, my wife is a great cook, come over because she's going to make lots of good things for us to eat. It's an incentive.

It's to try to provoke you to want to come. And so the three incentives that the apostle gives here for us to run with endurance the race that is set before us is first, the cloud of witnesses that we'll investigate in more detail in a moment in verse 1.

Secondly, it's the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ in verse 2. The Son of God assumed our humanity in order to save us from our sins, and he provides a great example for runners in this present evil age.

And then the third incentive is the purpose of the Father, specifically the discipline that the Father gives us in verses 3 to 11. But as I said, we'll look specifically at the first one, the cloud of witnesses.

[5 : 23] So note first the believer's race. The duty or the exhortation or the command is very simple, and it's stated there very clearly in verse 1.

Notice, toward the end of the verse, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Notice in verse 2, it speaks of Jesus who endured. Notice in verse 3, it speaks of Jesus who endured.

In verse 7, it speaks to saints that endure the chastening hand of God. So endurance and perseverance are the obvious emphases in this passage. And this is not unique to chapter 12 in the book of Hebrews.

If you go back to chapter 2, we'll notice that this is oftentimes repeated by the apostle. And as I said, I think it fits the context to a people who are being tempted or are being disenfranchised by families and workplaces, that they need to recant this faith in Jesus and go back to Moses, to go back to temple, to go back to sacrifice, to go back to that priesthood.

But notice in 2.1, Therefore, we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. So the apostle doesn't want them to drift away.

[6 : 37] Notice in chapter 3 at verse 14, For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said, Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion.

Notice in chapter 4, verse 1, Therefore, since a promise remains of entering his rest, let us fear, lest any of you seem to have come short of it. Chapter 4, verse 14, Seeing then that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

And then over in chapter 10, specifically at verse 23, a similar emphasis. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

And then in chapter 10 at verses 35 and 36, Therefore, do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

So this is yet another exhortation in the book for the people of God to go forward, to persevere, to endure, and to deal with the various things that arise in the life of God's people.

[7 : 45] And this is unique to the book of Hebrews. In 1 Corinthians chapter 9, in verses 24 to 27, the apostle says, Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize?

Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore, I run thus, not with uncertainty.

Thus I fight, not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. So an overarching concern on the part of the apostle is that not only you make that profession a faith or confession in Christ, but also that you live in light of that reality and you live in a manner that is consistent with that confession.

Philippians 3, 12 to 14, Not that I have already attained or am already perfected, but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

[9 : 00] Now we need to be reminded it's not our running, it's not the way that we do the race that ultimately lands us in heaven, it's all because of what Christ has accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection.

We confess the reality that the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and that word did that to obey the Father's law. That word did that to function as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

So it's not that we are somehow commending ourselves to God by the manner in which we run the race. No, we run the race in a particular manner because Christ has saved us from our sins.

And back in chapter 12 at verse 1, he speaks of a couple of obstacles that we need to make sure that we reckon with. Notice in verse 1, therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us.

And so we need to identify those things. And it might be the case that the latter part of that phrase explains the former, or it might be that there's two things in view here.

[10 : 02] I take it as two things in view here. The exhortation to lay aside every weight. The fact that not every weight is necessarily a sin. Not every weight is necessarily a sin.

There might be those things in our lives that are legitimate, those things in our lives that are appropriate, but if we don't get a handle on them, they can be a weight that do ensnare us.

Matthew 13, 22, in the parable of the sower, Jesus says, now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

Now it's impossible to disassociate from the cares of this world. We need to learn how to manage those cares of this world, but it could be a weight that does ensnare us. Imagine if you were going to set out and run a marathon next Saturday.

If you were me, you'd probably have to drop a few pounds. You can't go running marathons when you're carrying extra weight, and it's not necessarily a sin at this point, but if I want to run a marathon, I have to get rid of that weight so that I can run that race in a manner that is consistent with the rules that I am supposed to follow.

[11 : 12] But then there is that specific emphasis on sin. Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us. This is obvious. Sin ensnares us.

Sin inhibits running. Sin cripples runners along the way and makes it such that we don't do what God has called us to do. One commentator on Hebrews, Philip Hughes, says one of the chief problems with the Hebrew Christians to who this letter is addressed is that they have set out on the race, but after a good start are now slackening in the will to persevere.

Their effort is decreasing. Sin is holding them back. They need to recover their intensity or purpose, to shake off the sluggish mood into which they have fallen, to regain their confidence and their competitive spirit.

I think that's absolutely bang on, and I think that's the emphasis of the apostle. We need to get rid of that extra weight that may ensnare us, and we need to make sure that we get rid of the sin that definitely entangles us and lays us down and causes us not to run with endurance the race that is set before us.

And again, that's the manner. It is supposed to be with endurance, and Christian endurance isn't just knuckling under and slugging it out. Christian endurance is joy-filled.

[12 : 27] It is full of gratitude. It is thankfulness. It is, you know, you don't present yourselves as one of those mopey, depressed people. I'm not saying we're never mopey and never depressed, but we don't walk around like Eeyore, and we say, well, I'm on the Christian race, and it's so hard, and I've got to endure.

No, the orbit of Christian ethics is such that we're joyful. We're thankful. We have gratitude. We love Jesus, and we're running this race because he has saved us from our sins and has given us admission to this race.

We didn't happen on this race on our own. It's because of what Christ accomplished as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now, then we come to the believer's help, and the first one, as I said, is this cloud of witnesses in verse 1.

So look again at 12.1. Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses. Now, the imagery is obvious. There's an amphitheater, and there's witnesses.

But the question is, what and how do these witnesses function? First of all, who are they? Well, they're all the people that Paul or the apostle just specified in chapter 11.

[13 : 35] Chapter 11 is what we call the great hall of faith. If you look at chapter 11 at verse 1, Now, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. Well, which elders? Well, you've got the pre-flood patriarchs. You've got the pre-Mosaic age. You've got the Mosaic age.

You've got the time of the judges and the monarchy and Old Covenant Israel. The witnesses are those he just pointed to as great examples of runners in this race, those who ran with endurance.

Now, again, when we ask the question, how do these witnesses function? I think the common interpretation is that you've got this amphitheater, and you've got Abraham up there, and you've got Sarah. Well, Abraham and Sarah would be together.

But you've got Enoch, and you've got Abel, and you've got all these patriarchs, and you've got all these judges. You've got all these kings. You've got all these faithful prophets and all these persons. The idea is that they're in the amphitheater.

[14 : 32] We're here on the ground. We're running with endurance the race that is set before us, and they're watching us. They're sort of cheering us on. I don't think that's what it means at all. I think that witnesses function in a courtroom to testify of a certain truth.

So in other words, when we come to this cloud of witnesses, they are witnesses for us of a greater truth, namely that God is faithful. The word doesn't mean spectator.

So Abraham and Noah and Isaac and Abel, they're not watching me. They're beholding the glory of Jesus. I hope that they're not watching me.

I'd rather them be consumed with the glory of Emmanuel in Emmanuel's land. So the idea that they're up there watching us and sort of cheering us on, keep going there. Brother, again, it's foreign to the context.

The witnesses serve on our behalf to manifest the faithfulness of God and to show that God upholds faithful runners, whatever their circumstances.

[15 : 35] So because we have this cloud of witnesses, men and women who have gone before us, who have run the race with endurance, we can look up to them and we can hear their testimony in scripture.

We can survey their experiences. And that motivates us and causes us to persevere and run with endurance the race that is set before us. And then when you look back in this great hall of faith and he starts to sort of unfold the various persons, the various people that people, the kingdom of God, you'll see that they were not altogether unlike us.

And in fact, in their challenges to maintain faithfulness, to run perseveringly with endurance, the race that was set before them, wasn't any easier for them than it is for us today.

Oftentimes you'll hear people say, well, you know, it's a difficulty for me to live the Christian life faithfully because I'm surrounded by unconverted family members. Well, Abel is one of those witnesses.

Abel is a man who ran with endurance the race that was set before him under much opposition from his own brother. So you got a difficult family?

[16 : 45] Abel's up in that amphitheater testifying that God is faithful to runners as they persevere. You've got Enoch. And in chapter 11, verses five and six, it speaks of Enoch.

And we know the story of Enoch. It doesn't tell us a whole lot in terms of the day in and the day out, but it tells us he lived for 365 years and he had sons and daughters.

And all of us as parents understand the challenges that are absolutely necessary in terms of parenting children faithfully. So Enoch, again, we don't have any grand tale other than God took him.

That was a glorious statement. But the reality is that he was a faithful man, having sons, having daughters, going to work, doing the things that were necessary. And he testifies faithfully that God is faithful to us as parents when we're raising our children.

You've got Noah. It's another one that I hear often. Well, it's tough to be holy in a godless environment. It's tough to be holy in a land where abortion is openly promoted, where euthanasia is openly promoted, where we're sort of, we're putting to shame other nations that practice these things based on our per capita population.

[18 : 00] Well, Noah lived in a time when the world was exceedingly corrupt and filled with violence. And Noah was able to run with endurance the race that is set before him. You've got Abraham.

Now, none of us have had the test that Abraham had in Genesis chapter 22. And I think it's typical for us to jump into Genesis chapter 22 and reflect upon the binding of Isaac, to reflect upon the gravity of that particular test, but to neglect verse one, where it tells us, the reader, that God was testing Abraham.

Remember that Abraham didn't have verse one. Abraham didn't know that he was being tested by God in that particular situation. So when God says, take your son, your only son, the son of you love, which sounds a lot like the father and the Lord Jesus Christ, take him to Mount Moriah.

Now, Mount Moriah was quite significant because that would be the site where the temple was built. It was the Mount of Sacrifice. So God tells Abraham, bind up your son, take him up that mountain, and then slay him as a sacrifice before God most high.

Isaac is savvy enough to realize what's happening at least at one point. Father, we've got the wood, we've got the fire. Where's the sacrifice? What does Abraham do? He preaches Jesus Christ to his son.

[19 : 15] The Lord will provide. And we know the story. Abraham's gonna bury that knife in his son, and the angel of the Lord comes and stops him. Well, typically, we understand no angel of the Lord stopped the father when it was pleasing to him to crush the son.

So Abraham definitely had a tough road to hoe. But then you've got Sarah. Impossible physical demands, right? These are witnesses up there in that amphitheater testifying not run, Jimmy, run, but God is faithful.

And in light of that reality, run, Jimmy, run. You've got Isaac and Jacob and Joseph, the various patriarchs. Again, hardships and trials. One of the bits about the Joseph narrative that gets me the most is that when they throw Joseph into that pit, they eat lunch.

Could you imagine that? Hearing your brother howl and ask to be released from this pit while they're chomping on their bologna sandwich? It's a really horrible scenario and a very horrible scene.

But what does Joseph do at the end of it all? He says, you meant this for evil, but God overruled it for good. See, the apostle wants us to think about these men and women. He wants us to see and draw encouragement from what they went through for their God.

[20 : 35] Jacob in Genesis 35. I think Bethel in Genesis 35 was a real turning point for Jacob. I mean, I don't know where he was at experientially in terms of his relationship with Yahweh prior to chapter 35, but he certainly, in chapter 35, he's learned a lot of valuable lessons and we see a bit of a different approach in how he speaks.

Genesis 35.3, Then let us arise and go up to Bethel and I will make an altar there to God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.

Again, if you read the career of Jacob, he didn't always sound like that. There were some grumblings and some things along the way that you say, wait a minute. I'm not sure that's the appropriate response. But what does Jacob teach us?

God is faithful. You've got Moses in the Exodus. We went through or we're going through the Pentateuch on our Wednesday night Bible studies and the book of Numbers is tough.

It's tough for Moses. It's a tough... Yeah. What Moses went through in terms of getting people from point A to point B, I can only liken it to a Sunday morning when you've got five or ten kids and you've got to get them in the van and it's always that morning they lose a shoe or they lose a sock or they lose their minds or whatever it is.

[21 : 54] It's tough to marshal them all together, get them into the vehicle and drive them to the church building. Well, Moses had to do this with a nation that was defiant and rebellious. And in Deuteronomy chapter one, Moses is rehearsing on the plains of Moab prior to the second generation entering into the promised land.

He's rehearsing God's dealings with that. And how do you think Israel interpreted the wilderness? They interpreted the wilderness as if God was out to get them. God was out to destroy them.

God was out to crush them. But here God, through Moses in Deuteronomy 1 and verse 31, and in the wilderness, where you saw how the Lord your God carried you as a man carries his son in all the way that you went until you came to this place.

The apostle wants us to consider these things. When we're running with endurance, the race that is set before us, we're dealing with the weights, we're dealing with the sins, we're focused on the future state, but we run with endurance hearing the faithful testimony of these faithful men and women that have gone before us.

The author here in Hebrews 11 mentions Rahab the harlot. Now, Rahab the harlot risked her neck. Never underestimate the crime that she engaged in.

[23 : 10] We always get hung up on her lie. We don't care about her treason. I mean, she made a way for her city state to be overthrown, to be ruined, to be destroyed.

That took chutzpah, and that took faith and confidence in Yahweh of Israel, and that's exactly what you see there in Joshua chapter 2. We have heard. We have understood. And she says, Please, when you come to destroy and annihilate the city, please remember me and my family.

The shady lady of Jericho, as Davis calls her, was a lady of great faith. You've got the judges, again, in Hebrews chapter 11. Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah.

Gideon, he didn't have, he wasn't an eight-foot-tall, bulletproof kind of guy. Remember when he puts out the fleece and God answers? What's Gideon's response?

Can I do it again? Where's your faith, Gideon? That's what I'd say. If I was God, how dare you? I just answered your particular test. God's like, okay, put it back out, and we'll do this again.

[24 : 16] Gideon did not come across as a guy with, you know, bullets and guns and bravado and all that sort of a thing, and yet he was faithful. Barak.

Barak was the judge. Deborah was the prophetess. Deborah was not a co-judge. When Barak says, unless you go, I don't want to go, people interpret that in weird and wonky ways.

That is the most brilliant thing a Barak could have ever said. Unless the prophetess, the mouthpiece of God, go with us, I don't want to go. That's a confession of faith in Yahweh and an acknowledgement that this woman is going to bring the word.

So Barak was another one. Don't even get me started on Samson. He's one of my heroes. He is probably one of my chief heroes in the entirety of the Bible, specifically Judges chapter 14.

We've got the birth narrative in Judges 13, which sounds very similar to the birth narrative of our Lord Jesus Christ, a supernatural birth, a mission stated.

[25 : 18] He's going to begin to deliver Israel from its oppression. But in Judges chapter 14, we learn that the Judahites or the Israelites did not respond, actually 15, I'm sorry, they did not respond favorably to Samson.

When the Philistines want to come and get Samson, the Judahites are all but happy to turn him over to them. And of course, that's the occasion when Samson takes the jawbone of the ass and he dispatches a thousand of them.

Samson was a man of God. Four times in four brief chapters, you find that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson. Samson was godly.

Samson was upright. Samson was not perfect. No one in the Bible is perfect except Jesus. The best of our heroes in the Old Testament and New Testament point us ultimately to the perfect hero, which is our Lord Jesus Christ.

But Samson was a faithful man, a godly man. And then Jephthah. Jephthah was basically excluded from the commonwealth because of his upbringing or because of his parentage.

[26 : 24] But what happens? They know he's skilled in battle. They know he's savvy in dispatching enemies. So what do they do? They want to appoint him as head. And so the author here is pointing us to these various people that, again, not perfect, not blemish-free, not without issues, not without difficulties, not without sin, but a consistent testimony that God is faithful.

He moves on in chapter 11 at verse 32 to David, to Samuel, and the prophets. And in David's life and career and in David's life in ministry, he makes two statements similar, one sort of in the middle and one at the end.

2 Samuel chapter 4, verse 9, But David answered Rechab and Baanah, his brother, the sons of Rimmon, the Berethite, and said to them, As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life from all adversity.

And then again in 1 Kings chapter 1, verse 29, this is after the adultery, this is after the conspiracy to commit murder, this is after the Bathsheba incident. 1 Kings 1, 29, the king took an oath and said, As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life from every distress.

And then in the book of Hebrews, go back to chapter 11, specifically, you've got triumphant heroes in verses 33 to 35. Notice, verse 33, Who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens, women received their dead, raised to life again.

[28 : 01] It's very easy to read about those triumphant heroes and say, Yeah, God is faithful. The author doesn't stop there. Notice, continuing on in verse 35, the second part, Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

Still others had trial of chains and imprisonment. They were, excuse me, they were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy.

They wandered in deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth. What's his point? His point is, is the God who is faithful in the triumphs of verses 33 to 35 is the God who is faithful in the distresses and the afflictions and the hardships of verses 35 to 38.

And the one that's referred to there as being sawn in two, most Bible commentators and guys who know more than I do suggest that that was Isaiah. It always hurts me a little bit when I think of Isaiah the prophet being sawn in two.

The man who wrote Isaiah 41, verse 10, Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you.

[29 : 17] Yes, I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. That this world took a saw to godly Isaiah and saw him in two is horrific.

But God is faithful. And that's what the author is commending to us. We've got this cloud of witnesses. There's Isaiah who faithfully prophesied, who faithfully served as Lord and Master.

And the world would say, Well, what did it get him in the end? He got sawn in two. Well, we know what it got him in the end. Passageway into the presence of God Almighty. There are other examples.

If we can jump outside of Hebrews 11 for just a moment, turn to Daniel chapter 3. Just sort of populating this cloud of witnesses and filling our minds with who these men are, these men and women, and what they did, what they suffered, and what they continually testify to concerning the faithfulness of God, as that is the apostle's point.

Notice in Daniel 3, specifically at verse 16. You'll remember the scene. They're going to get thrown into the fiery furnace because they've engaged in absolute apostasy because they have defected from the gods of Babylon.

[30 : 31] But notice in chapter 3 at verse 16. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

We could stop right there and that would be sufficient. We don't owe you, civil government, any, you know, defense or apology or rationale for why we're doing what we're doing.

Yahweh calls us to serve and fear and glorify Him. We're going to serve and glorify and fear Him. We're not going to bow to your gods. We're not going to play your religious games. I mean, that in and of itself is great. We have no need to answer you in this matter.

Those are men who are confident in their own skin and they understand who their God is. But then notice in verse 17, if that is the case, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace.

And He will deliver us from your hand, O King. Now, this is the crucial thing that we need to focus on here in verse 18. But if not, that's faith, right?

[31 : 37] They have faith and confidence that our God is able to deliver us from this burning, fiery furnace. They have confidence that God will ultimately deliver us from whatever the Babylonians and Nebuchadnezzar throws their way.

But here's the faith and the expression that God is faithful. But if not, let it be known to you, O King, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.

That's the kind of thing runners with endurance in the Christian race need to understand. That even if not, we're not going to recant. We're not going to renounce. We're not going to break our allegiance to the God of heaven and earth.

Turn to the prophet Micah. Micah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah. Micah was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah. Typically, we remember Isaiah.

We don't remember Micah as much, but they prophesy at the same time and about many of the same things. In fact, if you compare Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 concerning the Latter-day Glory, you'll see that they're speaking off the same page.

[32 : 42] But notice his lamentation in chapter 7. Woe is me, for I am like those who gather summer fruits, like those who glean vintage grapes. There is no cluster to eat of the first ripe fruit which my soul desires.

The faithful man has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among men. They all lie in wait for blood. Not every man hunts his brother with a net, that they may successfully do evil with both hands.

The prince asks for gifts, the judge seeks a bribe, and the great man utters his evil desire. So they scheme together. The best of them is like a briar. The most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge.

The day of your watchmen and your punishment comes, now shall be their perplexity. Do not trust in a friend. Do not put your confidence in a companion. Guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your bosom.

He's got no godly fellowship. He's witnessing social disintegration in mass, and even marriage and family had broken down. In other words, he's all alone.

[33 : 42] Well, what's his message? Verse 6, For some dishonors father, daughter rises against her mother, daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, man's enemies are the men of his own household. This is, Jesus uses this in his own ministry.

Note verse 7, Therefore I will look to the Lord. I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me. So the apostle wants us to think of Micah when things seem like they're just a mess, when things seem like they've just risen up against us and has crushed us.

We need to make sure we have a Micah mindset that God is faithful. Turn to the prophet Habakkuk in a similar situation, just on the eve of the Babylonian destruction of the southern tribes.

Habakkuk celebrates God's faithfulness. Now, the way to get there is a bit difficult. Habakkuk asks two very pointed questions of Yahweh.

Basically, why is this happening to us? Why are we going through these things? Why this sort of suffering? Of course, Yahweh answers, you are unfaithful.

[34 : 54] You've broken law. You're not keeping up your part of the covenant. But notice how chapter 3 at verse 17, how it ends. It's devotion in the midst of loss.

Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit beyond the vines, though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food, though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no hurt in the stalls.

If I were to bring that into a popular sort of a reference, we'd say, even though Costco's closed, even though Walmart's, you know, shelves are bare, even though the gas pumps are dry, even though the economy is teetering, even though we're about to be plunged into, you know, years of darkness and misery, this is what Habakkuk is saying.

Again, eve of the Babylonian destruction of the southern kingdom. They're not looking at a walk in the park here. They're looking at horrible things. Look at verse 18.

Yet, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will joy in the God of my salvation. What's he saying? My joy isn't in Costco. My joy isn't in Walmart.

[35 : 59] My joy isn't in a full gas tank. My joy is in God. God is faithful. Notice in verse 19, the Lord God is my strength. He will make my feet like deer's feet.

He will make me walk on my high hills. And then for one New Testament example, you can turn to the book of Acts. Acts chapter 20. Acts chapter 20.

The apostle Paul himself, I think he functions as a great example of God is faithful or a great witness or testifier that God is faithful. Notice in chapter 20, this is the first pastor's conference.

He calls for the elders from Ephesus and he addresses them. He teaches them. He exhorts them and warns them. But in chapter 20, specifically at verse 22, and see now, I go bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.

Now we all have the general warnings of Scripture. I mentioned it this morning, 2 Timothy 3. All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. We have that. We have the example of the suffering saints at the end of Hebrews chapter 11.

[37 : 14] But Paul had direct communication by the Spirit telling him, when you go into this city, bad things are going to happen. We don't have that. We're not charismatics. We don't have a direct line to God.

We're not Gnostics or esoteric. We have the revealed will and word of God and we operate accordingly. Then notice in verse 24, but none of these things move me, nor do I count my life dear to myself so that I may finish my race with joy and the ministry which I receive from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

I know what's waiting for me. I know there's prison. I know there's appearances before civil government. I know there's going to be imprisonment and I know good and well there's quite possibly going to be execution.

But that's not going to deter me. I'm not only running the race with endurance as a Christian man, but as a faithful apostle to the Lord Jesus Christ, he is constantly promoting that refrain that God is faithful.

2 Timothy chapter 4. 2 Timothy chapter 4. Again, the apostle Paul, I think it's very helpful to see this. 2 Timothy chapter 4, verse 6. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering.

[38 : 26] This, by the way, is the second reason why Timothy is to preach the word. Notice in chapter 4, verse 2. Preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching.

Paul then gives two reasons why Timothy is to preach the word. First, because the time will come, verse 4, when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers.

In other words, Timothy preached the word because there's a time coming and they're not going to want the word. I love Paul's counsel there. Right? Timothy fires off an email, they don't like me, Paul. They don't like what I'm saying.

Hoping perhaps that Paul would say, well, have puppets in your church worship service. Have flannel graphs. Get drama. Have skits. Have pantomime. Which were all available to Timothy and Ephesus at that particular time.

What does Paul say? Well, if they don't want sound doctrine, preach sound doctrine. If I were Timothy, I'd be like, I knew he was going to say that. I knew that was coming.

[39 : 29] That is the reason to preach the word, to be ready in season and out of season, to convince, rebuke, and exhort. Why? Because people don't want it. Well, who knows better? When your child says, no, I don't want, you know, meat and fat, you say, well, you should eat meat and fat because it's good for you.

Right? Well, I want cake and sweets. Well, you can have that in a little bit after the fact. God knows what's best for people. It's not tickling their ears, but it's feeding their souls.

So the first reason Timothy is to preach the word is because people don't want the word. The second is Paul's departure. Paul's going to die and he understands that. In Philippians, it's a bit of a hint. He thinks it's possible that he could die, but here in 2 Timothy, he knows.

The direction of the empire had gone in such a way that this is bad. Nero's on the throne or he's the emperor and he's bad. Initially, Nero was actually a good Caesar.

I don't mean in a holy, godly way, but he had a lot of savvy. He was good with people. He reduced taxes. Everything you'd want in a Caesar. But as time went on, Nero got increasingly demented, twisted, and warped.

[40 : 38] So Paul understands that his time is up. So I am already being poured out as a drink offering, verse 6, and the time of my departure is at hand. Notice verse 7. I have fought the good fight.

I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day, and not to me only, but also to all who have loved his appearing.

So when you're running this race with endurance that is before you, put off the weight, you put off the sin, you're looking at the amphitheater, you see it peopled with godly men and women from the Old Testament, you see them there from the New Testament, we have the benefit of church history.

Polycarp of Smyrna in AD 155, he's going to be executed for his faith in the Lord Jesus. And Polycarp makes this statement just as he's about to die.

They want him to recant, just, you know, relinquish your hold on Jesus, confess that, you know, Caesar's Lord and Savior, and we can make all this go away. He says, 80 and 6 years I have served him and he has done me no wrong.

[41 : 40] How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior? You threaten me with a fire that burns for a season, and after a little while is quenched, but you are ignorant of the fire of everlasting punishment that is prepared for the wicked.

Polycarp was burned at the stake and was pierced with a spear for refusing to burn incense to the Roman emperor. On his farewell, he said, I bless you, Father, for judging me worthy of this hour so that in the company of the martyrs I may share the cup of Christ.

That's one you should probably tuck away in your thoughts as you're running with endurance the race that is set before you. You put off the weight, you put off the sin, and you're running. Think of those Old Testament heroes.

Think of those New Testament heroes. Think of those church history heroes. Think of the modern church. Our brother Josh prayed, my son Josh prayed for the persecuted church. We try to do that.

We try to remember that not everybody has Costco's. Not everybody has Wal-Mart's. Not everybody has gasoline. Not everybody has food. I mean, we have for a long time been praying for the situation in Myanmar.

[42 : 44] There's a fellow there who's leading, at one time I guess was a church, but now his job is to look after orphans. Hundreds and hundreds of orphans. And they're very fortunate if they get enough rice to sustain them for a day or for, you know, for the day for however long they can go.

I've often thought, reflected, and prayed that that guy is the hardest working pastor alive on the earth today. that he has been called to perform in ways that no one in North America knows at all.

And so Peter is doing that. I'm sure. And I've never talked to Peter. I wouldn't know him if I bumped into him at Wal-Mart. But I'm sure if I picked up the phone and said, Peter, can you give me one, you know, one-line testimony about God?

He'd probably say, God is faithful. This is the consistent testimony of the cloud of witnesses that the apostle wants us to listen to. They're not witnessing my running.

We're witnessing or rather listening to their witness testimony that God the Lord is faithful. Whether you're in the old covenant, whether you're in the new covenant, whether you're subsequent to that in church history, wherever you find yourself in the continuum, God is faithful.

- [43 : 57] That's the encouragement from the apostle. And I would just like to end with two observations quickly. The nature of the race, it's a marathon, not a hundred yard dash. It's a marathon, not a hundred yard dash.

A lot of people make a good showing right out of the gate and then collapse. We don't want to collapse. You need to pace yourself. You need to lay aside the weights. You need to lay aside the set, and you need to run with endurance the race that is set before you.

That's what we need. I remember years and years ago, I read a little meditation in a devotional book, and it was called The Middle Mile. And basically, The Middle Mile was a sort of an emphasis on the middle mile in a race.

I don't go to races, but if I did, I'd probably go to the beginning of the race or the starting line or the finishing line, right? I want to see how they start off, and I want to see who wins.

I don't care about the middle. I just don't. I mean, I hope they make it, but if they don't, eh. We're excited about the start, and we're excited about the end.

- [45 : 00] It's the middle mile that oftentimes is characteristic of the runner. Are we running faithfully when nobody's watching? Are we running faithfully when we're not being harangued?

Are we running faithfully, listening to the faithful testimony of all these witnesses of God who tell us that God is faithful? And then I would suggest, secondly and finally, the blessedness of the race.

We mustn't ever lose sight of that. As I already mentioned, we're not going to heaven based on our performance and the race. We're going to heaven based on Jesus' performance, if I can use the language, of the race.

The fact that he lived in perfect obedience to the Father, the fact that he died as a sacrifice and a substitute on the cross, and the fact that he was raised again the third day. We're going to heaven by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ Jesus alone.

But another incentive along the way is to consider the blessedness of the race. I'd rather be a runner in a middle mile, struggling and yearning and persevering and enduring than enjoying all the things this world has to offer without a living faith in Jesus.

- [46 : 09] It's a blessed race. You're surrounded by this cloud of witnesses. You've got the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. You've got the likes of the Apostle Paul and the prophet Isaiah and Holy Moses and Abel and all of these men, all of these women.

I'd much rather be found in their company than the company of the wicked. It is a blessed race and along the way in the race, God gives refreshment. You've all read Pilgrim's Progress.

If you haven't, you should. There's refreshment along the way. There's encouragement along the way. The Lord's Day, I love the fact that you're bringing your children to church.

That rhythm and that routine of Lord's Day worship is crucial to running the race with endurance. You've got to do that. Family devotions is great.

There's a book by Terry Johnson emphasizing family worship. I love Johnson's emphasis. He's definitely all in and he's going to teach you and he's going to tell you, yeah, read some scripture, maybe do some catechism, sing out of the hymn book, you know, those sorts of things.

- [47 : 11] Do those at the family altar. You know what his first emphasis is? Bring them to church on Sunday. Bring them to the corporate means. Teach them that that is absolutely crucial in the routine and rhythm of life itself.

And so there are great encouragements and great inducements along the way as we run this race. And then notice in chapter 12 in verse 2, when we look at Jesus as an example, it says, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

So, who for the joy that was set before him, the text says, endured the cross, despising the shame. Yes, he went through the cross. Yes, he went through the shame.

But why? For the glory of God and the salvation of his elect. There was an end in view for him. And there's an end in view for us. And that end is Emmanuel's land.

Well, hopefully that encourages us to continue to run with endurance the race that is set before us. Of course, everyone in here should be looking unto Jesus, not only as an example in terms of running the race, but first and more importantly, we look at Jesus as the Savior for sinners.

[48 : 31] We've all sinned. We've all transgressed. We've all come up short in those things that God has commanded us. And if we don't come to Christ, there's going to be judgment. There's going to be punishment. There's going to be discipline in a way that we can't even describe.

And so the emphasis in Scripture is that we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. We look to the Lord Jesus Christ. Has anybody read Numbers 21? Abel? About the brazen serpent?

Anybody familiar with that story? Yeah. What happened? The children of Israel were grumbling and they were whining and they were complaining. So what did God do? God sent fiery serpents to bite them.

And when they got bitten by those fiery serpents, they would die. And so they cry out. They're in distress. They cry out to Moses. We want some help. These fiery serpents are not the sorts of things we'd like to have on our trek through the wilderness.

So what does God say? He says to Moses, build a bronze serpent. Raise it up in the wilderness and everyone who looks at that bronze serpent will live. You mean you don't have to drag yourself over there and kiss that bronze serpent?

[49 : 35] No. You don't have to suck the venom out of your own wound first and then? No. You look and live. The interesting thing is that Jesus uses that as an analogy for sinners being saved.

Just as Moses lifted up the serpent, so must the Son of Man be lifted. And the emphasis is everyone who looks to him will live. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for this great cloud of witnesses and that their consistent and constant testimony is that God is faithful. We know that to be true in our own lives. We pray that we would be encouraged by these passages, encouraged by the faithful saints of old and new covenants, and in the history of the church and even modern heroes of the faith that are persevering under great difficulty and hardship and calamity.

May you cause us to run in a way that is consistent with what we find here in Scripture and to bring glory and honor and praise unto you. And we ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Amen. For our doxologist evening, we'll turn in our hymnal, say hymn number seven. Amen. I'm alone. Mim number seven, and we'll stand and sing together.