

26-Jan-2020-Running-the-Race-of-Faith-David-Adams

I too would like to wish all of you a happy new year. Just three weeks ago, I stood here at this pulpit and wished you happy new year then, but this time it's happy Chinese New Year. Now last time when I wished you a happy new year at the beginning of 2020, I also wished you that the joy of the Lord would be your strength in this coming year. Because that was part of the text for the sermon that day. Today, I chose a blessing I want to leave with you related to Chinese New Year that I think fits fairly closely with one of the themes of Chinese New Year.

From 3-John we see beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health as it goes with your soul.

Now why do I say that might fit in with Chinese New Year? Well look at the translation from the King James, here it says, as it goes well with your soul in the King James, it says, even as thy soul prospereth. Now, I don't know a lot about Chinese culture, but when you can go to McDonald's during Chinese New Year and get I prosperity burger, which I must admit I have not tried. But seems like prosperity and prosper, prosperous are key words at the Chinese New Year time. And so I'd like us to think of a way that we may not normally think related to prosperous and prosperity. Like our text here says, may this year your soul prosper. May this year be a time of spiritual growth. May this year be a time of walking closely and humbly with your God. May your soul prosper in this year and may the words of the scripture that was just read also be a reality in our lives today. May we put aside the weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us and let us run with patient endurance the race that has been set before us as we fix our eyes firmly on Jesus.

Our scripture passage today compares living the Christian life to running a race and our race is definitely a big challenge. There's a lot of effort, a lot of time, a lot of preparation and training put in to get ready for the race. And sometimes this preparation is accompanied with pain, sore muscles. That feeling of being out of breath. But nevertheless, we willingly train for wanting to enter into a race and it's an exciting time and exhilarating time for those involved. The contestants as well as the spectators are looking forward to the event. Excitement, expectation is already beginning to build for the 2020 Olympics, especially in Tokyo. Just a little over a week ago, the Olympic rings arrived in Tokyo Bay. And just two days ago, there was a big celebration to celebrate the fact that the Olympics start six months from two days ago, and even though they may not have been celebrating Chinese New Year, they had a good set part by having a firework celebration to go with that.

So, one helpful way about thinking of the Christian life is to view life with the excitement and anticipation that we would have as if we were running a race because we are running a race. We're running the race that God has placed before us. Now, although our scripture reading covered many verses from both chapter 11 and 12. This morning we're going to focus primarily on two verses. Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 and 2 and I'd like to read those once again.

Therefore, since we are all, since we also have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, putting aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us, let us run with patient endurance, the race that has been set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus. The originator and Perfector of faith who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross. Disregarding the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

This morning in looking at the Christian life as a race, we are going to see, first of all, the qualification for running in the race. Then we're going to look at the motivation for running. Then we're going to see the preparation that we need to take before we run the race. Then we'll look at the actual running of the race itself, and then we'll close with looking at the inspiration for our running.

So, first of all, let's look at the **Qualification for Running the Race of Faith**.

Now, suppose in July of this year, a group of us decided, hey let's go run in the Olympics. And we went to Tokyo and we showed up at the Olympic stadium there and we said, hey, we're here to run. Well, they think we were crazy. We might try to give some reasons why we think we qualify. Some of us might say, yeah, but I come from a long line of athletes. I've attended athletic events. I've competed in races. I could honestly say my father was a coach. We might say, well, I've read a lot about athletics. I've attended lectures by leading athletes. I should be allowed to participate in the race.

But no, no, we know that would be ridiculous. Nobody would try that. We know we don't qualify, but yet it seems like there are some people who want to try to live the Christian life, but they don't because they're really not qualified because they do not yet have a relationship of personal faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Some might say, Oh, well, I've been a Christian all my life. I was born a Christian. My parents were Christians. Well, even in my passport or on my government issued ID, it identifies me as being a Christian. I'm not a Buddhist, not a Hindu, not a Muslim, don't belong to some other religion. I must be a Christian.

Others might say, well, I attend church. I've been to the Alpha course. I go to a life group. Well, that's all finding good, but that's not what makes a person a follower of Jesus. Some might say, well, I read the Bible, I attend various courses. I've participated in some Christian rituals, being baptized as a baby, participate in communion or the Lord's supper. And while a lot of what I said is good and helpful, essential for our growth, that's not what qualifies us or enters us in to the race of faith. What is the qualification? How do we qualify to run the race of faith? I'll give two answers and the first answer, how do I qualify? I don't. And you don't. None of us can qualify on our own good deeds, our own actions. None of us can enter into God's presence based on who we are, what we've done, what our heritage is.

The first 10 chapters of the book of Hebrews, which we of course did not read today, but these chapters point out again and again and again, the essential role of Jesus. Jesus is the visible expression of God. He is the ultimate revelation of God. He is the only sacrifice for sin that paid the penalty for our sin once for all. Jesus is the ultimate high priest. He's the only one that can bring us into the presence of God, the father. And we see Jesus as the one who intercedes for us and pleads for us before the throne of God.

So, it's because of Jesus, his death for our disobedience and rebellion against God and his resurrection can we enter in to the life of faith, trusting God for our future and for the overall direction of our life? So how do we qualify for running the race? **First of all, we don't. It's Jesus that qualifies us.**

But a second answer as we realize, it's only Jesus that qualifies us. We need to remember that God does not force anybody into a life of faith. Nobody will be forced against their will to respond in faith and repentance to the Lord, asking him to take control of their lives. We need to each personally respond to God in repentance and faith, giving him our life and faith and trust. So, this qualification for running the race of faith is not mentioned specifically in chapter 12 verse 1 and 2, but it was alluded to at the beginning of chapter 11 as we heard that read. Going back to that, we see how faith is emphasized again and again in chapter 11. Faith makes us sure of what we hope for, gives us proof of what we cannot see.

It was the faith that the men of old, our forefathers had that was pleasing to God and because of our faith, we know and then the text continues and continues to talk again and again about faith. So, this long list of faithful people, which we just read a part of, all the people in this list have one thing in common. They had responded to God in faith. And their faith was more than just head knowledge, more than just knowing facts. Their faith moved them to action. Their faith affected their entire being. Their faith caused their lives to be oriented around God. His will, his purposes. So, the first readers of Hebrews, the original audience that received this letter. They had heard the good news that the gospel about Jesus, they knew that Christ had died for their sins according to the scripture that he had been buried. They knew that Jesus had been raised on the third day, according to scripture, and that he appeared to many witnesses, so they responded to this good news in repentance and faith. When they heard the news of what Jesus had done. And when God's Holy spirit was working in their life, then they allowed God to change them on the inside and with the changes on the inside then gradually changes on the outside become evident. And that's what repentance is. We ask God to, and we allow God to change our thinking, to change our heart, and then when He changes us on the inside there will be evidence in our daily life. And the readers that first got the book of Hebrews, they were trusting God with their lives. They were allowing him to lead them, and as they pressed on in life, confidence of the eternal future that God had prepared for him, they were running the race of faith, following God and trust.

So we to respond to God in faith, a faith that will move us to action, a faith that will give us strength and courage to endure difficulties that we may face as we go along the way. So that's the qualification. The qualification for the race is what Jesus has done. And then the response, the faith that we make to what Jesus has done. And then once you respond to Jesus in faith, you are automatically entered into the race. There are no bystanders among the people of God. The race of faith is not just for a super spiritual team because nothing's such as that exists. The race of faith is not just for elders or pastors or missionaries or life group leaders or other church leaders. All believers are part of the race of the faith. Whether you know it or not, you've already been put on the race track and you're now involved in the race of faith.

So, since that's the case, since we as believers are involved in this race, running the race, let's do as Paul exhorted us in 1 Corinthians 9, *run so that you may obtain the prize*. And the good news is unlike the Olympics, we can all receive the prize. The race of faith is not a competition like other races where only one person wins. All of us who run we can win. And what is the prize? The crown of life, life abundant and fellowship with God here on earth. Life eternal with God forever in heaven, the crown of life that can give us hope that can keep our eyes focused on the finish line as we run this race of faith.

So realizing that all of us who have placed our faith in Christ are in this race. Now let's look at what the text says about the motivation for running. Chapter 12 verse 1 we see the motivation.

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 to us and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us

The very beginning part that I've highlighted. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great cloud of witnesses. That's our motivation, therefore refers back to what has just been read in chapter 11. The great cloud of witnesses also refers back to the great host of witnesses that we see in chapter 11. Many of the people in chapter 11 are mentioned by name. Others are mentioned anonymously, but all of them are there to encourage us. To show us by their example that the race of faith can be successfully completed. We can win the prize. We can receive the crown of life. So, these faithful witnesses that we read about in chapter 11 can motivate us to run the race of faith with patient endurance, and we'll notice that all of the witnesses, 11:39 they were all commended for their faith.

Now, the faith of those mentioned in chapter 11 is more than just head knowledge. These men had such a strong assurance, such a strong inner conviction that what God had said was true, that that moved them to obedience. It moved them to action. I'll give a few examples, including some that we did not read, but that are in chapter 11. Enoch is mentioned. He obeyed God. He walked with God. He lived a life that was pleasing to God and in close fellowship with God, and the scripture says. He didn't die in earthly death. He was taken up. No big spectacular act of faith like we might see later, just a daily simple walk with God, obedient life, a life of faith. Abel is also mentioned, he too just did a simple act of obedience. God said, bring a sacrifice. Abel brought a sacrifice, but that simple act of obedience ended up costing him his life because his brother who did not offer an acceptable sacrifice ended up killing him. But nevertheless, a simple act of obedience and Abel is listed as a man of faith.

Daniel was mentioned in our text. Again, a simple act of obedience, of just praying to God, praying regularly, but yet that ended up getting him thrown into a den of lions. Why would praying throw you into a den of lions? Well, because the government said you cannot do that, and Daniel listen to God rather than to the government and did what he knew God wanted him to do. He was thrown into the den of lions. But God delivered him. So, some acts of faith might be considered to be just simple acts of obedience, walking with God, bringing a sacrifice, praying. Other acts, at least from a human viewpoint, we would see them as more daring or requiring more courage. For example, Gideon, remember the story

of Gideon? He faced an army of thousands of men with only 300. Moses, he was asked by God to go to the most powerful person in the world at that time, the Pharaoh in Egypt, and tell him to let the Hebrew slaves go free, knowing that if his labor pool was depleted, the economy of Egypt would be greatly damaged. And little Moses go into the most powerful man in the world, telling him to do something that he knows might ruin the economy of the country. That takes some face.

So when we look at these men and also women of God that are listed in Hebrews 11 we see faith led to action. Sometimes just simple acts of obedience, sometimes things that we might consider to be great steps of faith that involved a lot of courage going up against insurmountable odds, but yet faith in God brought the victory, or should I say, God brought the victory when the people trusted him, followed him in faith.

In the lives of the people in chapter 11 of Hebrews, we see also that faith was expressed in a confident trust in God, even through extremely difficult circumstances where the future was very uncertain or where there might not have been a foreseeable future, but faith will see enabled them to faithfully endure, to persevere, and to be true even in the face of persecution and death. In just a moment, I'll put up some verses on the screen and I want us to note two things about the verses I'll put up. One notice that all of the verses I'll put up speak about people who lived lives of faith, people who are true to God. But we'll also note there is a big contrast in the outcome of their obedience.

Look at verses 33 and 34 encouraging, inspiring words. Men of faith who through faith conquered kingdoms, stop the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war. Put foreign armies to flight. Yes. All of these were people of faith.

Then we see mighty victories, tremendous success. But now notice the contrast coming up, but remember that the people you're going to look at next are also people of faith. Verse 36 and 37 others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned. They were sawn into possibly a reference to Isaiah. It's not in the Bible, but an extra biblical material. There's the account of Isaiah, the prophet, being sawn in to at the order of King Manasseh. So they were stoned, they were sewn into, they were killed with the sword. Now notice in both sets of verses 33 and 34 and also 36 and 37 all of the people are people of faith.

All of these people follow God. Yet the result was different. Notice the text does not say that everybody who has faith will conquer armies and when mighty victories, and it also does not say that people with no faith or little faith they are the ones who are going to face problems and trials and difficulties and suffering in life. It does not say that those mentioned in 36 and 37 could have escaped all of these problems if only they had had enough faith. Have you heard that line before? If only you have enough faith, then these verses alone should put to death the prosperity gospel, which is no gospel at all. The prosperity gospel saying that if you have enough faith, you can get everything you want.

All the wishes of Chinese New Year come true. Prosperity, success, wealth, happiness. And it's not only if you have enough faith, it's usually, and also if you give enough money to the

one who is proclaiming this false gospel, but our texts should put to death the prosperity gospel. Because notice again in these verses in verse 34 people of faith escaped the edge of the sword. Verse 37 people of faith were killed with the sword. What's the difference? It's not their lack of faith or their extreme faith. They were both filled with great faith. I'll give some examples of what the author of Hebrews might be talking about. In the book of first Kings, we see the prophet Elijah escaped the edge of the sword. He was delivered from the fury of the wicked queen Jezebel who was killing the prophets of the Lord. But yet, even though Elijah escaped the sword, we see that many other true faithful prophets of the Lord were killed by the sword during that very same timeframe. In the book of Jeremiah, we see that Jeremiah escaped the edge of the sword, but a contemporary prophet, it is a true prophet of God named Uriah was killed by an evil King, even though he was true and faithful to the Lord. And even Jeremiah escaped the sword in the book of Jeremiah. Extra biblical material tells us that after the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah was probably carried as a captive into exile in Egypt and the tradition goes is there, he was stoned to death.

So the same prophet of God with faith once escapes the edge of the sword then ends up being stone. So these passages in Hebrew, they point out that we can follow God in faith. We can take great steps for God and sometimes God will lead us to a victory over armies. Other times, we can be true to God and follow God faithfully and because we're following him and because others around us are evil, we will end up suffering the same death that some of the martyrs and prophets have that have gone before us. But we see that faith in all the situations brought the people to obedient action. They produced a faithfulness that resulted in a confident trust in God, even against insurmountable odds, even in terrible circumstances, even to the point of being faithful in persecution and unto death.

So, all of the faithful witnesses in chapter 11 successfully ran the race of faith, and they were commended for their faith. As verse 39 says, these were all commended for their faith. It's remarkable to me that all of these people in chapter 11 had such great faith in God, even though the scripture says they did not live to see the promises that God had made. Now, some of them had experienced or heard promises from God. Abraham is mentioned in chapter 11, God promised him he would have many descendants. You would become a great nation, and that through one of his descendants blessing would come to all peoples of the earth. Abraham believed God and God counted that as righteousness, but yet at the time of Abram's death, he still had very few descendants, just a little bit of land. And the one for whom blessing would come to all people had not yet arrived, but yet Abraham remained faithful to God even though he had not yet received what had been promised. Another example given is David. David was promised by God that he would have an eternal kingdom, that there would be one that would come that would reign his throne forever.

But yet that one who had reign forever had not yet come, yet David remained faithful to God even though he had not yet received the fulfillment of the promise. Now, of course, we know the one that was promised to Abraham to bring blessing to all people and the one who will reign on the throne of David forever. That's Jesus, verse 39 text where it talks about what had been promised. It'd really be better to say who had been promised, because what had been promised was the coming of the Messiah, the promised one, the savior Jesus who would save his people from their sin. So, it's remarkable to me that these heroes of faith in

the old Testament that are illustrated in Hebrews chapter 11 that they all live lives of great faith even before God fulfilled his promise to send the savior. So, with that example, with that motivation, how much more can we today live a life of faith? Because we have seen the fulfillment of this promise, the coming of Jesus. We have experienced the reality of Jesus and his work in our lives. The old Testament people remained faithful. Yet there's so much more we have. We have many more advantages. Not only has Jesus come, we have the entire Old Testament, which Abraham didn't have. We have the entire New Testament, which none of the people had. We also have God's Holy spirit working within our life to help us remain faithful, to give us strength and encouragement.

So, if the witnesses in the old Testament can remain faithful to the Lord, that will surely be a strong motivation for us. They're a motivation for us because they testify to God's faithfulness and they witness to the fact that it is possible to remain true to God. Follow him in faith. The great cloud of witnesses that we see in chapter 12 verse one could be seen as a great crowd in the stadium. We're running a race in the stadium and these are the people in the stands cheering us on, giving us encouraging, giving us the motivation we need, but they're not ordinary spectators that you would find at many games because these are all past participants. They know what it's like to live a life of faith. And now through their lives, they're encouraging us. Yes, you can do it. Yes, you can live a life of faith. Yes, you can stay true to the Lord, and there are even more witnesses that are not even listed in chapter 11 of Hebrews more from the old Testament, many from the new Testament such as Peter, Paul, James, John, Barnabas, Timothy.

Still more witnesses throughout the history of the church, even witnesses in our lifetime, witnesses from the 20th century and now the 21st century. And I'm sure many of you can probably think of some people, faithful witnesses to God who have had a very important impact on your life. People who have motivated you, encouraged you in your Christian race of faith. And one day when we have completed our race, we too will become a part of that great cloud of witnesses. Steve Green has written and recorded a very thought provoking song about verse 1 for Hebrews 12 and about the fact that not only are we running the race surrounded by the great cloud of witnesses, but one day we're going to be part of those witnesses.

What kind of a witness? What kind of an impact will we have? The song goes like this. I won't sing it. I'll just read the text. We're pilgrims on the journey of the narrow road and those who've gone before us line the way, cheering on the faithful. Encouraging the weary there lives, a stirring Testament to God's sustaining grace.

The first part, talking about the others who are encouraging us, but then when we get to the chorus is going to change and remind us that one day we will be in those witnesses. Here's the prayer. Oh, may all who come behind us find us faithful. May the fire of our devotion light their way, made the footprints that we leave, lead them to believe and the lives we live inspire them to obey. h, may all who come behind us find us faithful. The next verse continues with the cloud of witnesses that surround us, surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses. Let us run the race. Not only for the prize, but as those who've gone before us, let us leave to those behind us. The heritage of faithfulness passed on through godly lives.

The third verse, I won't read, but it talks about the impact that we will have on our children. And then concludes again with the chorus. This prayer may all who come behind us find us faithful, may the fire of our devotion light their way by the footprints that we leave. Lead them to believe and the lives we live inspire them to obey. Oh, may all who come behind us find us faithful.

Very thought provoking as we realize not only are we surrounded by others whose lives and examples have impacted us, but we too have a role in that great cloud of witnesses as we will impact others.

So far we've seen from our text so far, we've seen that in running the race of faith, what qualifies us for the race is what Jesus has done. So we respond in faith and repentance to him. And we've looked at the motivation for the race, which is the lives of the faithful witnesses, that great cloud of witnesses who are now cheering us on through their example through their life of faith.

So now let's look at the **Preparation For Running The Race.**

All athletes must prepare. They must train. Just recently, our son in law ran a marathon in Chicago. He participated in the Chicago marathon. He trained for months. He worked so hard, I thought he was going to kill himself. Not really, but he was really putting in the time and the energy, the effort, just day after day, hour after hour, putting in so much training to get ready for that race. But all that hard work paid off. He completed the marathon and it didn't kill him. In the race of faith, there are some things that we can do to help us successfully run. Just like if we were going to run a marathon, we would watch our diet. We would get exercise. We get needed rest. While there are things spiritually to do to prepare, and we find that also in verse one of chapter 12, we are told to throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us so that we can run with perseverance the race that's marked out for us.

It tells us to throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. This is not just a suggestion. You know, here's one thing you might want to consider. You know, get rid of this and that. That's not the way he is saying this. It's really more of a command. This is essential. We need to do it. Get rid of the hinder nesses. Get rid of the sin. Get rid of the weights that are slowing us down. What are some of these weights that are slowing us down? Well, I begin with the one that's listed specifically where it says the sin that so easily entangles us. Yes. It's true that if we're running in the race, we have repented of our sin. We have accepted Christ as our Lord, but the reality is that was just the beginning and we still sin. Yes, we've seen changes for the good in our life, but we will never live without sin until we're with a God in heaven. Repentance is not just one thing that happens one time at the beginning of our race of faith. Repentance is a daily thing as we continue running the race of faith. So, look at your life. What sins might be slowing you down? What sins might be hindering you from leading a life of faith that will have a positive impact on those around you and on your family? Some of us might be filled with jealousy and envy, jealous of somebody else's success, their fame, their money, their lifestyle, their good looks, their house, their car. Some of us might be under the control, sometimes of just an uncontrollable anger or a hot temper, or we're filled with the desire for revenge. We harbor

bitterness in our heart, ill feelings, even hatred. Some of us express that by incessant and gossiping or talking badly about others, slandering others, saying hateful or hurtful things, either about others or directly to their face.

Some of us struggle with dishonesty, deceit. Some of us struggle with lust. Some of us struggle with greed, almost everybody and know maybe everybody struggles with pride, in committed Christians sometimes struggle, especially with a spiritual pride. So these and other sins and tangle us, they trip us up. They cause us to stumble. So we're advised, we're told, throw them off, get rid of them. Repent, turn away from then turn again to focusing on Jesus and walking in a close relationship with him. Other sins that might hinder us would include a lack of faith, a lack of trust, unbelief. That did seem to be a problem for the original readers of the book of Hebrews.

Other sins would include not doing the good things that we know God wants us to do. Disobeying God, not doing things he has specifically instructed us to do, saying God, I want to do my will not listen to your will. So we're told to throw off everything that hinders us. Yes, get rid of the sin. But there are also other things that hinder us in faith in the life of faith that we may not look at as sin. For example, one thing that hinders many of us is a fear. Fear to trust, fear to obey, fear to give and support of God's work. I fear to witness of our faith to others. I fear to face God's direction, a fear to step out in faith. The step that God is showing us. Another thing that can hinder us would be a lack of spiritual disciplines, a lack of prayer, lack of Bible study, lack of Christian fellowship.

All of these can hinder us in our life of faith, so do something about it. Our author is telling us. What else might hinder us in running the race of faith. Well, there's some things that aren't sin but they can end up being a hinderness. Do you remember the parable of Jesus? The parable of the sower or the parable of the soils talked about a sower who is throwing seed out and it lands on four types of soil. And the third type of soil was the soil that was filled with thorns. And it said when the seed fell on that soil. Then the seeds spring up, but the thorns choked it out. What are some of those thorns. Well, let's look at the words of Jesus. Jesus said, those thorns are the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, the desires for other things. So here it appears that things that are not sin can sometimes choke out the word of God. There are a lot of good things in life that if we're not careful, they can become worries of life or they can become gods in our life. We get so caught up in just living and surviving, making an honest living. We're so concerned about getting a good education, getting a good job. So concerned about normal everyday activities that sometimes we lose our focus and we forget to focus on God.

Oh yes. Sunday morning, we remember maybe if we go to a live group, we remember then, but on a daily basis throughout the day, oftentimes we get so preoccupied with other things. So again, our scripture is telling us to do something about this. Get rid of things that hinder, bring things back into proper perspective, get priorities straight, throw off everything that might hinder us, including of course, the sin that so easily entangles us. Another translation says, throw off every weight. Every weight that would slow us down. Can you imagine running a marathon being 20 kilos overweight, even 10 kilos overweight? Can you imagine running a marathon and carrying a heavy suitcase weighing about 25 or 30 kilos? Ridiculous.

Nobody would do that, but yet. We think in the Christian life, sometimes we can run through successfully with all of these weights. No, we can't. Get rid of the things that are hindering us. Lay aside every weight that will slow us down. So, we prepare for the race by setting aside hindrances and sin. And the fourth thing we want to look at is the actual running of the race itself.

Let's go back to chapter 12 verse one where it says, let us run with perseverance the race that is marked out for us says, let us run. How do we run? We run with perseverance, with faith, with faithful endurance, and we run the race that has been set before us. The plan, the path that God gives to us. It's when he says, let us run the race. Just talking about let us live the Christian life as we walk with God, as we pray, as we study his word, as we want to live in close fellowship and harmony with him as we live by faith, a faith that brings action, a faith that brings obedience and perseverance, and we are to run with this perseverance with the faithful endurance. The Christian life is not a sprint. It's not like a hundred meter dash. It's more like a marathon and really even longer than a marathon. It's days and weeks and months and years at least I hope your Christian life is not just a sprint. I hope we all have time left. So when we approach the Christian life, we need to realize it's not just the sprint.

We've got some people, they approach the Christian life to begin with and they do well for the first hundred meters or so for this short period. They have spiritual disciplines. They read the Bible, they pray they're able to abstain from some sins. At least most of the time. They'll serve faithfully God for a while, for a few months. They might share the gospel with one or two people, but then when they get some kickback, they stop. They might even be willing to put up with a little bit of minor persecution for a while, but then there's a tendency to get tired. To get weary, to want to stop, to want to give up, to quit the race. And that's the exact problem that the original audience that received the book of Hebrews was facing.

Some of them were wanting to give up. Yes, it's true. They had come to faith. And they had been faithful for a period of time in following Christ, they had already endured difficulties, including persecution, but they had stayed firm in their faith for a period of time already. But now as we read this book of Hebrews, we see that they're beginning to grow weary. Beginning to become faint and some were considering turning away from God, turning their back on the faith. And so we're reminded if you turn away from God, there is no other way to life eternal, no other way to abundant life and fellowship with God. Now. And so we are encouraged. They were encouraged. We're encouraged to not give up, to persevere, to run with faithfulness, just like all of those who have gone before us. And in just a moment we'll see an even greater example as we're encouraged and inspired by the example of Jesus.

So as we run the race of faith, we know we will come upon obstacles. There are going to be difficulties. They're going to be problems, sometimes even suffering because of our faith. But our text encourages us to look at these sufferings and difficulties in a positive light because persecution, problems, troubles, can serve a valuable purpose. The purpose of discipline. And here I think discipline is used primarily in a positive sense. Discipline for guiding, for training, for instruction to help us learn, to help us grow, to help us mature. The author reminds us in verse five of a word of encouragement from the book of Proverbs, or

the author of Proverbs is say, and do not make light of the Lord's discipline. Do not lose heart. These are words of encouragement, talking about the Lord's discipline.

Why? Because the Lord disciplines the one he loves and he continues to encourage us, endure hardships as discipline because God is treating you as his children, we all encounter difficulties for a wide variety of reasons, but God can use these difficulties in our lives. He can use these difficulties to help us grow, to learn more about him and to experience his love and his great faithfulness in ways we have not yet experienced.

Godly discipline can give us a more godly perspective on life. It could help us to live a more victorious life. As a Christian, we can be assured of God's love and we can be assured that he has a plan for us. When we experience his discipline, his training, his guidance is correction. So part of the race that is set before us is being conformed to the image of God's son.

The race that is set before us. While that might differ and it will differ from person to person in some areas, it's going to be the same in many areas and one purpose of discipline and one thing that is in the path of all of us, the race marked out for all of us is our events that will help us to then become conformed to the image of God's son.

The race marked out for us also includes the fact that we are God's workmanship. As it says in Ephesians 2 we were created in Christ Jesus to do the good works that he has prepared in advance for us to do. What are these good works, well the Bible mentions many. What specifically for you? You need to talk to God and find out because we are to live for the praise and the glory of God.

Hebrews 12:11 says that when we run faithfully, the race marked for us, and when we are guided by God's discipline, then we will experience the peaceful fruit of righteousness. So let's run with perseverance the race marked out for us. And even though it's not explicitly stated, I would be a mist if I did not mention. When we run, we need to run confident in faith that God's Holy Spirit is there to give us strength and endurance. There's a song sung by Hillsong titled, I will run to you. That includes this text, not by might not by power. But by the spirit of God, yes, I will run the race till I see your face. Now this text is not original with Hillsong, not by my, not by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord is from the prophet Zechariah chapter 4:6. So when we're running the race, we can be assured when we're running in faith, God's spirit is there.

The last and really the most important thing I want to mention is the inspiration for running, and we'll find that again in chapter 12:2

fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith for the joy set before him. He endured the cross scorning its shame and set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

When it says we fix our eyes on Jesus. This is not just an occasional glance. It's not. Look there on Sunday morning and look elsewhere the rest of the week, and the word in the Greek looking at fixing our eyes on implies that first of all we turn our view away in order that we can fix our eyes on Jesus. A runner is not going to run the race looking all around him or looking behind him. He's going to keep his eye on the goal. I'll go in straight ahead. So we fix our eyes on Jesus, who the text says is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith or other

translation, the author and finisher of our faith. In other words, faith begins and ends with Jesus.

Everything in the race of faith from the starting line to the finish line centers around Jesus. Jesus is the pioneer. The trailblazer earlier, we sing all the way my savior leads me. He shows us the path to go because he himself has run the race, so he can not only encourage us. He will also enable us. He will give us the power as he shows us the way Jesus is.

Jesus is also the Perfecter of faith. His race ended in triumphant completion. Jesus help the saints. Jesus enables us today. He will bring our race to completion to triumphant completion and look at the next sentence. It's a strange combination of words. I think. To put the word joy and cross in the same sentence.

How can joy and cross go together for the joy that was set before him? Jesus endured the cross scorning its shame. Well that doesn't mean that it was fun to go to the cross. There was tremendous pain. Physical pain was terrible. There was also the shame. Only the lowest of criminals were crucified and crucified naked, and Jesus did not enjoy that moment of separation from God as he cried out, my God, why have you forsaken me? As the sin of the world was placed upon him, but he was willing to endure that because he saw the joy. That awaited him. The joy of bringing forgiveness and salvation for all people. The joy of being true to God, completing the mission.

We were speaking with a family from another religious background over a period of several weeks, sharing stories from the Bible, and when we got to the story about the crucifixion of Jesus. The lady from another religious background made the observation, you know, Jesus could have come down off that cross and saved himself. After all, he had raised a man from the dead. That would have been no problem, but he stayed on the cross because he wanted to complete the mission that God had given him. That brought him joy. Bring being faithful to complete the mission, being faithful to God, knowing that his mission within bring reconciliation of millions and millions of people to God and also the joy knowing that then he would be seated at the right hand of God. They're seated, shows that he is accomplished triumphantly what he wanted to do, what he intended to do, the reason he came to earth and at the right hand of God shows his power, his authority, and in that position and power and authority, now he's interceding for us.

So not only is Jesus inspiring us, he is enabling us, he is showing us the way to run the race of faith. So today you look at it, the race of faith. We've seen the qualification, all of us who have responded to what Jesus has done in faith. We're in the race. We can be motivated by the lives of others who have been true. We can get more prepared to run successfully the race by laying aside things that hinder and so run the race with patient endurance. Being inspired and enabled and empowered by Jesus. The Christian race, the Christian life is really an amazing race. Yes, we've just recently spoken about problems we face. We saw the problem some of the saints face see the problems Jesus face, but it's also tremendous adventure. It's a wonderful experience. It's an amazing race. Do you remember the television show a few years ago? The amazing race there was even the amazing race Asia five seasons. The most recent one was aired the end of 2016 so just a little over three years ago.

Each year they were contestants from Malaysia. The very first year Malaysians won the very last year, and the Malaysians came in second. Each year. They did a good job. But in advertising for participants to participate in this race about three and a half years ago, they were auditions or interviews at the Sunway Pyramid here in Subang, and some of their advertisement was like this.

We're seeking people that have an attitude that is smart, tenacious, determined, strong. We're going to offer the world's most thrilling adventure. Or drama, surprise, intensity, all come together in a highly dramatic edge of your seat experience. This is a once in a lifetime experience, but then they also said you will be competing in a series of challenges, physical challenges, mental challenges, emotional challenges, but if you win, there's a hundred thousand us dollars.

People from many countries trained and trained and trained to enter this amazing race. The obstacles were no hindrance. That just motivated them to even try harder. The amazing race of running with God, running in faith, offer so much bigger a reward than just a couple of hundred thousand ringgits per person. The amazing race running with God offers us the crown of life. May it be said at each one of us when we come to the end of our life, the end of our race, what the apostle Paul said. Well, he said at the end of his race, I have fought the fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith and henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing.