

Making It To The End Of Your Race

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[0:00] Well, again, good morning to those who are listening online. Thanks for doing that. My name is Jesse, one of the pastors here, and we're going to jump in the passage really quickly. It's a long passage.

Again, we're going to be in Hebrews chapter 12, going through verses 1 to 17. So we're covering some territory. If you have your Bible in your hand or it's on your phone, you can go ahead and turn there. Before I read, I just want to say, you know, some church traditions, before they read the sermon text, they begin with this little intro phrase, as the Holy Spirit says.

And it reminds us that what we're reading is not just any book, right? We're not just reading out of any other book. It's actually God's written word that we believe to be inspired by the Holy Spirit.

And therefore, the truths in it are eternal. They're timeless. They're wise. They're full of wisdom.

They're actually perfect in wisdom, but they're also powerful, right? God's word at creation, he spoke nothing, and then something became something out of nothing.

And so God, through his word, from the beginning, is this creator that through it, life comes about.

And so I would invite us to just lean in and read along with me and listen to each word as I read this passage.

[1:14] So the Holy Spirit says, Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

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

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

For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them.

[2:36] Shall we not much more be subject to the father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he, our Father in heaven, disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

Strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled, that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.

For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. This is God's word.

So when I was in high school, a friend of mine, a very dear friend of mine, decided to run the mile race at a track meet, right? He was a pretty good long-distance runner.

[3:57] When we were ever in sport together, when we did training, he was always one of the guys out front in endurance racing part of getting in shape. And so it seemed like a pretty good idea.

And when the race began, he actually leapt out really quickly. It was right out of the gates, and it was just like, you can imagine, like chariots of fire. Na-na-na-na-na-na-na. I mean, he's running around the track, just crushing it.

And actually, by the end of the second lap, he was doing so well, he was a half a lap ahead of the group racing behind him in the mile. And we thought, oh my goodness, he is crushing it.

And as soon as we thought that, everything fell apart. Very quickly, his pace slowed to that of a geriatric walking club. Okay? His face was still strained with pain and sweat.

I mean, you could see it from the stands. And we knew everything was not okay. And then suddenly, came the moment where he actually couldn't, I mean, rigamortis set into his muscles. He couldn't move his leg one more step.

[5:00] And he fell over. Humiliated. He never finished the race. And of course, as his good, kind, empathetic friends, we mocked him for the rest of high school about this.

These verses that we just read liken following Jesus to running and finishing an endurance race. And passages of scripture like this can be tough to embrace, especially if you've come out of a legalistic background or very moralistic background.

You're discovering and understanding God's grace for the first time. We hear these things and we're like, oh no, no, no. This isn't, this is anti-God's grace. And I just want to say, you know, it's in the Bible.

And so we have to wrestle through with what this means. And something that's really helped me is this guy named Dallas Willard says this about grace. It's not against effort. It's just against earning. Okay? Grace isn't against us putting in effort as we follow Jesus and are being disciples. It's against trying to earn our salvation. And this call to action that we see from the writer here comes on the heels of 10 chapters of looking at who Jesus is and what he has done for us.

[6:12] And it's important to remember that. But out of Jesus' finished work, we are called to persevere in the faith to the end like a runner finishing a marathon.

And that's all we are called to do is finish. We run to finish the race not to be the best. See, some of the best truths are the most obvious and simple and I want to have this one sink deep into our hearts.

following Jesus is not a competition. There's only one gold medalist in heaven who's going to be on the throne or the podium and that's Jesus. And he ran faster, he ran farther, he ran harder and he did it first and he did it for us.

And we are racing along the path that he paved. That is the race that is set before us. We are following in his footsteps. And this is part of the good news of the gospel.

Getting into heaven isn't being better than other people and that's kind of the big problem with the idea or the notion of like, I don't have to believe in Jesus, I just need to be a good person to get into heaven.

[7:19] Well, what that does is that ideology immediately puts you in a race where you are competing against everybody else. And in having these conversations with very sincere people that believe getting into heaven just requires living a good life, I always ask, okay, well, what's that measure of being good enough?

What is it? What does that look like? What's that baseline? And then, who doesn't get it? And at some point, their measure of good enough comes down to a moral comparison with someone else like, well, I just have to be better than Hitler or Charles Manson, right?

I mean, the bar gets pretty low. And I suppose if you're standing next to them at judgment time, you really might like your chances, right? But what if you were standing next to Mother Teresa?

See, the problem with comparison is that we can always find someone we are better than, but at the same time, we will always find somebody better than us. And if your ticket into heaven rests on an arbitrary measure of comparison to somebody else, you are constantly going to be working harder to pad your resume, to be better than.

But the good news of the gospel is that you don't have to do that. By faith, you get signed on to Jesus' resume. That's the awesome thing. And that's the best one to have and that's the only one you have to get into heaven.

[8:42] No one is going to beat that. You can't beat that. And yet, at the same time, what we see in this passage is we shouldn't take Jesus' finished work as meaning we don't have a race to run.

That's not the good news of the gospel either. The good news is that we just don't have to run to beat out anyone else. I remember hearing a Christian give their testimony and along the way, he made a statement that ended up being prescient to his leaving the faith years later and he said, man, Lord, when I get to heaven, I want to hear you say to me, you outshine them all.

And I remember the whole church really erupting, oh, isn't that so amazing? He's so passionate. He's so zealous. But that kind of thinking is deadly.

That isn't the kind of race we are running. We aren't running to impress. We aren't running to be better than. We are running to finish. That's it.

Which means this, we run with each other and not against each other. Isn't that nice? That is the beauty of Christian community. We are running the same race.

[9:50] It says, let us run, not you run by yourself. Let us run. And that's why disciples are meant to be integrated and part of a local church. That's where we run with each other.

I don't know about you, but working out with someone is much better than working out alone. So a few years ago, Haley and I joined a body pump class, right? And if you don't know what that is, don't look it up.

I'll probably just, you know, you'll be embarrassed for me. So when I was in there, I didn't realize how out of shape I was until five minutes in and I am like, this is crazy hard.

And I realized we were still in the warm up. I'm like, oh boy, I'm in trouble. But here's the thing, that the class wasn't a competition of who was best. It was about finishing together.

You had people in there of all shapes and sizes, ages, fitness levels, but we were all in it for that hour together. And at the end, we would high five because we accomplished something.

[10:51] We all finished. We all made it to the end of that hour. Nobody died, right? That is the beauty of Christian community. We are in this together. There is a diversity of spiritual fitness in this room, but we recognize that we need each other.

And in all of this too, in that class, just like that class that I was talking about, what was really important and what we needed was an instructor. We needed somebody with experience.

We needed somebody who had wisdom. We needed somebody who had gone there before us in every way to show us what to do and also what not to do and to admonish us and encourage us not to give up.

Now, the Bible's word for that is discipline. Discipline is a necessary part to being a disciple of Jesus, but you and I have to be humble enough to receive it.

And finishing the race requires a humble and submissive heart. See, in the verses I'm about to read, don't think of a coach or a drill instructor yelling at someone.

[11:57] Don't have that picture in your mind to like, hey, do one more rep or just push through that runner's wall. Rather, think of a very caring father teaching and encouraging and correcting their child.

In verse 5, it says, have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons, sons and daughters? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be wary when reproved by him.

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

For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them.

Shall we not much more be subject to the father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time, our earthly fathers did, as it seemed best to them in perfect wisdom.

[13:04] But he, our heavenly father, disciplines us for our good that we may share in his holiness. And for the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields a fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it, a peaceful fruit of righteousness.

See, God's discipline, he doesn't do it to get us to perform better. He's not looking at us and saying, oh man, they're just not performing up to the task.

It's actually about him teaching us obedience. That's what it says in verse 7. It's for discipline you have to endure. And he said something similar to Jesus. And the Hebrew writer says this in verse 5,

chapter 5, verse 8, although he was a son, speaking of Jesus, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

God doesn't discipline us in order to make us his children, but because we are his children already. That's what he does. But before you and I will submit to God the Father in this way, we have to believe a few things about him.

We have to believe that he knows best, he knows better than we do, he is good, and that he loves you, and he is making us, he's making you more like him.

[14 : 25] And when this becomes a revelation, it changes your willingness to trust and obey the Father regardless of the circumstance. And this produces, out of it, it produces faithful obedience to the Father, which in turn yields fruitfulness in its time.

But on that way, on that way to that fruitfulness, on the way to seeing those results, he's going to teach you, stretch you, and correct you. You know, when I was 19, I was in the best shape of my life, peaked early.

Things have not going well since then for me, like fitness wise. But when I was 19, I owed my fitness to this trainer from Guam, his name was Rob Mesa.

And he was a trainer at the gym and he befriended me and this guy was built like a Sherman tank. I mean, this dude, his legs were bigger than my waist. I mean, it was nuts how big this guy was and muscly this guy was.

And he also had a degree in kinesiology, which basically means he was on his way to training Olympic athletes. But on the way, he took up this charity case. So my fitness at that point was going nowhere fast.

[15 : 31] I had just thrown out my back working out, but under Rob's tutelage, I added a little over 20 pounds of muscle in six months and learned how not to injure myself. The transformation was absolutely miraculous.

But here's the thing, I couldn't do it on my own. I needed his wisdom, I needed his experience, I needed his guidance. And I had to submit to the fact that he knew better than I did and he had good intentions for me.

I mean, he put me through intense workouts, right? And I had to trust that in that intensity he wasn't trying to kill me. Sometimes it felt like that. It's funny now that I think about it, but in submitting to his wisdom and not running out of those painful workout sessions is I ended up actually not looking like him, but looking a lot more like him.

And this is our father's goal, our heavenly father's goal in his discipline. He wants his children to become more like him. But the father's discipline isn't just transformation through intense suffering, it does involve some correction as well, which was one of the important things my friend did as we exercised together.

He taught me the correct form for each movement. And if I started to get sloppy, he would stop me and say, Jesse, you can't do it that way, you're going to hurt yourself. Do it the right way.

[16 : 50] And in following Jesus, we call that the Holy Spirit's conviction on our lives and correction through God's word. And it's not punishment. That's what it is.

It's just correcting us. It's making what's out of line straight again. And if you're doing something wrong because the father loves you, he is going to point it out, not because he's mean, because he knows that if you keep going that way, you are going to hurt yourself and probably hurt others.

And here's the thing I want to ask us. Are you and I, are we humble and teachable enough to receive the father's corrections? Are we submitted to the authority of the Bible over our lives?

Do we allow it to speak to us? And here's one of the clearest messages the Bible constantly gives us, that we constantly see in that, is to repent and turn from sin because sin weighs us down and trips us up.

That's what it does. It says very explicitly in Hebrews 12, 1, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely. Now, I've never run a marathon, have no desire to.

[17 : 57] I think I'd rather have a root canal than do that. You know what, the only thing that would be worse than somebody forcing me to run a marathon would be having to do with like 50 pounds on my back and my legs tied together.

And that's the imagery we're getting here from the Hebrew writer. If we have sin and we're entangled in sin and the weight of sin on us, it's trying to run that race with a huge weight on you, a huge burden on you and your legs tied together.

And that is going to do one thing. It's going to get you frustrated and it's going to wear you out very fast. You'll develop what Hebrews 12, 12 refers to as drooping hands.

Think of like a boxer. You ever seen a boxer who's out of shape or who's been hit too many times? Their hands start to get lower and lower. And if you've ever done any type of fighting in the ring, you'll realize like, man, there comes a point where you can not bring your hands up.

You can't even do this. It is crazy. It is crazy. Drooping hands, weak knees. That's why God brings that correction and discipline to lead us to repentance.

[19 : 11] Repentance isn't a mean thing God puts into our lives. It's actually a gift of grace that he's given to us because through repentance we get set free from the sin that is weighing us down.

And the Holy Spirit here, he names two biggies that I think we all struggle with, we can all identify with, and I think definitely in our cultural moment, is all over the place. That's bitterness and sexual immorality.

Let me just say this about sexual immorality. That word sexual immorality in the Greek, it's pornos. It's where we get the word pornography from. So it's basically everything in the junk drawer of sex. So what is at the root of these sins? Well, it is a broken and distorted version of love where we love ourselves more than God and others. And when we indulge in that, we start to mistreat people, right?

That's what these things are focused on. I don't get bitter towards trees, I get bitter towards people. And if I'm bitter towards someone, it's going to come out either aggressively through gossip and slander and lying and envy and coveting and stealing and anger, even murder, or it's going to come out passively.

[20 : 20] Standing at a distance, judging them, building walls around my heart, detaching emotionally, cutting them off. See, a bitter person that they're really struggling with is the fact that they don't have love for their neighbor.

That's the issue at heart. They care too much for themselves and their needs about what they want and what they think they deserve. And to be honest, that's also at the heart of what drives sexual immorality.

See, God, he designed us for intimacy. That is the longing of our heart for deep, intimate relationships. And sex is a sacred expression of that desire.

It's actually a gift from God to us. But, here's the thing, guys. Intimacy is a fragile place to be in. It's a place where you are significantly vulnerable emotionally, physically, spiritually.

And so, the greatest expression of intimacy, which is sex, was placed by God within the safest of environments, a lifelong, committed relationship of love between a man and a woman.

[21 : 26] And in our modern era, sexual fulfillment is all about self-serving. It's all about needing your needs. It's all about fulfilling your desires for yourself.

But in marriage, God designed it to be an expression of giving yourself away and serving your spouse and trusting each other. And it's a beautiful thing.

So, when we give into bitterness in our hearts and sexual temptations, something happens to us. They grow into heavy burdens that make running really hard.

It makes running the race really hard. And so, we have to fight. We fight with repentance. We fight with that amazing gift of grace from God. And as we repent, those burdens of bitterness and shame and guilt, they roll off of our back.

And instead of running under the heavy yoke of sin, what we do is we end up running under the light and easy yoke of Jesus. And that's an important way in which we strengthen weak knees and drooping hands through repentance.

[22 : 30] But let me add to that, and I think the Hebrew writer does this too, and I would argue comes first, just as it does in this chapter, another way that we run under the light and easy yoke of Jesus is by never stop looking to Jesus.

Start, this is like, it starts at the beginning. Verse 2, look to Jesus. Looking to Jesus. Looking to Jesus. The founder and perfecter of our faith.

Before the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him. Consider Jesus who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or faint hearted.

See, the more you and I, the more that we are desiring God, the less we will desire sin. The more captivated you are with Jesus, the less you are going to be captivated by sin.

And I want to ask us this, are we spending regular time in our lives looking to Jesus? The Bible calls us to do that. It says here, it's not an option, it's a command.

[23:39] It's not a simple glance, it's not like a, oh, there you are Jesus. No, it says to look at him, to fix your eyes on him, to behold him, to consider him, to dwell on who he is and all that he's done.

And when we stop doing that, it's the first big step toward feeling weary in our faith. Now, I want to say this, there is room for rest in the race.

There is room for changes of pace. The Holy Spirit is our pace setter. And if we choose not to run by the pace he is setting, you're going to be like my friend who decided to run the mile his own way and conked out in two laps.

We have to realize that the Holy Spirit is the one to guide us. We keep in step with him. And sometimes he says, Jesse, it's time to pause. It's time to rest.

Sometimes he says, we need to run a little bit harder. Sometimes he says, you know, let's slow the pace down. We don't need to stop, but let's just slow the pace down a little bit. And so that requires us regularly being in tune with him and abiding in Christ, where we get to become more sensitive to the Spirit's leading and guiding in our hearts.

[25:00] Because the temptation is always going to be to rest too long or stop the race altogether or to think we have to constantly be sprinting in our race and running harder and harder and harder.

many years ago, a young pastor asked Dallas Willard the question, what must I do to stay spiritually healthy? Dallas Willard at this point, he's just a wise sage of the faith by that time.

And he has long pause. The young pastor remembers this long pause because Dallas never seemed to be in a hurry. And he said this to him, hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. you must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life. The Holy Spirit says to us through this passage, look to Jesus and consider him.

If the great enemy to this is a hurried life, the question for you and me is how then shall we run this race? How then shall we live?

[26:06] To quote Francis Schaeffer. by giving ourselves time to look at Jesus, to take him in, all that he is. And as the old song goes, fix your eyes on Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and when you do that, the things of this world grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

As the band comes up, if you aren't a Christian, I want to invite you today, look to Jesus. He is calling you to look to him, look to the cross that he died on for your sins.

And as you do that, consider the weight and the burden of the sins that you are carrying. And man, come to Jesus. He takes our burdens off of us. They roll away and we do that by coming to him and repenting and believing in him.

And I want to invite you to do that today. Now, if you're a Christian, I want to ask you this. What is the correction that the Holy Spirit is calling you to? Is it letting go of being the best?

Is it giving up running alone? Is it ruthlessly eliminating hurry from your life so you have time to look and consider who Jesus really is?

[27:28] And I want to give us a minute just to allow time for us to ponder those questions to let the Holy Spirit kind of work in our hearts of how we should be responding to that.

And I'm going to give us a minute to just close our eyes, quietly pray, and do business with God. So let's do that right now together. prayer prayer prayer Amen.

Amen. Father, we thank you that you are good.

We have talked about that this morning from the very beginning. We sung about it. It's here in this passage that we read. You know best. You have our best in mind.

And you are good. Help us to trust you and Lord everything that you are doing. Holy Spirit, everything that you started in our hearts. You would finish. You would carry on for the rest of this week.

[28:43] Pray this in your name. Amen. Amen. We are going to take communion right now, which is looking and considering Jesus. It's a nice little pause.

It's a nice little meal of slowing down and considering who he is and what he's done for us. And what it does, it reminds us that Jesus is our Savior who won our victory.

And he did that by shedding his blood. He did that by suffering for us in our place. It says, For the joy set before him, he endured the cross and thus deserved and took his place sitting at the throne in heaven at God's right hand.

His victory is ours, not because we earn it, but because he is full of grace and gives it to us. And so we're going to take his body broken for us and his blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins. Let's eat and drink together. And now will you stand with me?
[29 : 56] We're going to continue responding by singing one more song. Thank you. Thank you.