

THE ENDURANCE OF THE SAINTS

It's time to get a fight back in us again. It's time that we begin seeing ourselves as Christ sees us. It's time to start rehearsing the eternal promises, power, and privilege that Christ sacrificed His life to give to us. We were born for this hour and for this time in human history, not simply to run, hide, and hope that the storm will pass us by without any harm or loss. We were made for this hour to stand as a bright shining light of hope as the witness of Christ Jesus. Take the world and give me Jesus.

Hebrews 12:1-4 *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,² 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.³ For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.⁴ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.*

I. SURROUNDED BY A GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES

- A. The writer of Hebrews is comparing the life of a Christ-Disciple as that of an athlete running in a race. There are many things to consider when coming to Jesus. We enter into a relationship that has a beautiful beginning, enduring middle, and a celebratory and rewarding ending.
- B. When running in an endurance race, there are many things to consider:
 - Proper nutrition—Proper clothing—Making allowances for the weather and the terrain—A mental and spiritual stamina to endure through every mile of the race—Setting your mind on the finish line and the rewards/pay-offs at the end of the race.
 - These are the things I consider when participating in a marathon race.
- C. When we choose to live by faith, we please God and release courage to others to follow Christ in the same manner. This is Christ's example to us.
- D. **Hebrews 11** has been described as the "Heros of the Faith" chapter and the "Heros Hall-of-Fame". The men and women listed in these stories made their marks on human history by deciding to follow God, even when life's challenges were insurmountable. Their promised eternal rewards were of greater value than their temporary pressures of persecution.
 - a. Abraham & Sarah
 - b. Isaac, Jacob & Joseph
 - c. Moses
 - d. Rahab
 - e. Samson
- E. **2 Corinthians 4:17** *'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,'*
- F. **Hebrews 11:6** *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*
- G. **Hebrews 11:6** *'And without faith living within us it would be impossible to please God. For we come to God in faith knowing that he is real and that he rewards the faith of those who passionately seek him.'*
(TPT)

- H. My joy comes from knowing that I am simply obeying my Savior, Friend, and my King. Ask for the smile of your Heavenly Father when your 'yes' is hard and unpopular.
- I. **The Story of Polycarp**- *Polycarp was a personal disciple of the Apostle John. As an old man, he was the bishop of the Church at Smyrna in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). Persecution against the Christians broke out there and believers were being fed to the wild beasts in the arena. The crowd began to call for the Christians' leader Polycarp. So the authorities sent out a search party to bring him in. They tortured two slave boys to reveal where Polycarp was being hidden. When the soldiers arrived to the home, Polycarp offered to serve them a meal before his arrest. Despite the cries of the crowd, the Roman authorities saw the senselessness of making this aged man a martyr. So when Polycarp was brought into the arena, the proconsul pled with him: "Curse Christ and I will release you." Polycarp declared, "Eighty-six years I have served Him. He had never done me wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?" Polycarp's final words, "You threaten fire that burns for an hour and is over. But the judgment on the ungodly is forever." Also, Polycarp's final prayer, "The fire was prepared. Polycarp lifted his eyes to heaven and prayed: "Father, I bless you that you have deemed me worthy of this day and hour, that I might take a portion of the martyrs in the cup of Christ. . . Among these may I today be welcome before thy face as a rich and acceptable sacrifice." (www.christianity.com)*
- J. **William Wilberforce**- *'With others campaigned successfully for the abolishment of slavery. Felt slavery incompatible with his Christian conscience.'* (1759 – 1833)
- K. **Jim & Elizebeth Elliot, Peter Fleming, Edward McCully, Nathanael Saint, Roger Youderian**- On January 8, 1956, five men between the ages of 27 and 32 were speared to death trying to reach a violent, indigenous tribe in Ecuador with the gospel. They all left behind wives, and four had young children. The men knew the task was dangerous, even life-threatening, yet they remained faithful to their calling to make Jesus known. Today, they wives of these men have continued and have reached 2 generations and still going in discipling the indigenous of tribes of Ecuador.
- L. **Hebrews 11:36-40** *Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.³⁷ 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—³⁸ of whom **the world was not worthy**. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.³⁹ And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,⁴⁰ God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.*

II. LAY ASIDE EVERY WEIGHT

- A. **Hebrews 12:1** *"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..."*
- B. *"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." (Jim Elliot)*
- C. The meaning of this phrase is to 'remove or cast off' anything that is 'excess weight or bulky to carry' or is a 'hindrance' to your race/assignment in following Christ. This includes our sin or 'missing of the mark or getting off the path of right living' which is a willful disobedience to Christ's law and leadership.
- D. More clearly stated, the writer of Hebrews is saying, *"Get rid of and repent of anything in your life that keeps you from loving, trusting, and obeying Christ as our highest joy."*

- E. “Younger people today think of changing, leaving, shifting, moving, modifying, and swapping in order to enhance life—almost anything but enduring. People quit. They move. They change their minds. A long, hard, steady, hold-the-course obedience is a rare and wonderful thing.” (John Piper)
- F. There will never be a crown without a cross. There will never be a lasting reward without the labor of our work. We are called to be co-laborers with Christ.
- G. **Philippians 3:10-11** *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,* ¹¹ *if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

III. JESUS IS OUR EXAMPLE

- A. **Hebrews 12:2** *“looking unto Jesus, the author (originator/architect) and finisher (perfector) 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.”*
- B. **Hebrews 12:2** *‘We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.’ (NLT)*
- C. **Hebrews 12:2** *‘We look away from the natural realm and we focus our attention and expectation onto Jesus who birthed faith within us and who leads us forward into faith’s perfection. His example is this: Because his heart was focused on the joy of knowing that you would be his, he endured the agony of the cross and conquered its humiliation, and now sits exalted at the right hand of the throne of God!’ (TPT)*
- D. **Fix Our Eyes on Jesus-** We look and keep looking at Jesus. ‘To fix’ is to keep our eyes on Jesus. We are to lock our eyes on Him. Jesus is now at the right hand of the Father in Heaven (**Ps. 110:1**). We understand this invitation and command to mean setting our thoughts and affections on Christ. Think on Him!
- E. **Jesus Originated Our Faith-** The Greek understanding “of the faith” includes both His faith and our faith. He fulfilled the ideal of faith Himself. Jesus is the object of our faith. Jesus is the ultimate example of faith & obedience to the Father’s will (**Phil. 2:8-9**).
- F. **Jesus Pursued Joy-** Jesus delights in His Father, celebrates when lost sheep come home to Him, desires to obey His Heavenly Father, and longs for the day when He will return to His creation fully and finally and restore all things to His glory.
 - a. **Proverbs 8:30-31** *Then I (the Son) was beside Him (the Father) as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, ³¹ Rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men.*
 - b. We must of this great well of joy in order to endure the life of suffering.
 - c. **Matthew 5:12** *Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*
- G. **Jesus Endured the Cross-** Because Jesus endured great rejection and hostility, we too can endure. He is our example.
- H. **Jesus Sat Down at the Right Hand of His Father-** Now, Jesus is resting with His Father.

IV. A CALL TO ACTION

1. We continue to make one decision at a time, no matter how small, in obedience and faith to the character and leadership of Jesus Christ.
2. We set our priority on the first and one thing before deciding to prioritize anything else.
3. We make a commitment to personal prayer, Bible reading, and worship to Jesus.
4. We make a commitment to gather with and love Jesus' Body, the local Church.