

Run the Race

HVFC

March 15, 2026

Jesus is Better Series

Hebrews 12:1-2

Good morning.

We have arrived at the final two chapters in the book of Hebrews. And with that comes the season to dial in my prayer life to where we are going after we finish this book. I have some direction, but I want to pray through and hear where God wants us to go.

I have thoroughly enjoyed our time in the book of Hebrews. I have gained so much in my studies, and I hope that you have as well.

Last week we wrapped up chapter 11, looking at the cost to becoming a hero of the faith.

We highlighted the 4 judges, Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Japheth as less than stellar men that we have a lot in common with. Yet God was able to take these men and use them to bring salvation to the nation of Israel, just as He wants to use us to bring the message of Jesus to our world. And when we act in obedience to God, we experience the thrill of being a hero of the faith to those who are in need of salvation, encouragement, help. However, Faith comes with a cost and persecution is a reality for those of us who follow Christ.

That persecution allows us to develop and build our testimony. That is a process that comes from daily living our faith, through struggles and trials of life, and then giving a helping hand to those who are struggling.

This kind of life demands living righteous and holy lives before God and man.

This kind of faith demands daily choices to die to self and to take up our cross as Jesus did.

Daily choices to follow God, gives opportunity to impact a world dead in their sins, on a one-way road to Hell, and offer life and a new way to live.

And while that is easy to say standing up here, it can feel lonely and difficult when trying to live our faith out there...

Chapter 12 opens up with that reality.

We are never alone.

We have Jesus who never leaves us, the holy Spirit living within us, and we have a great cloud of witnesses encouraging us to continue the race of faith and to finish it well.

There are things that will work to hinder us, however we can put them away, following the example Jesus gave through his own life, so that we too can enter heaven to be with God for all eternity.

We will begin reading in verse one of chapter 12.

Hebrews 12:1-2

1 Therefore, 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.

NKJV

Let's pray.

The chapter opens with a sort of review of where we have been, going back to chapter 10.

Chapter 10 gives some great scriptures regarding our faith.

Verse 14

For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

And because of this truth we must hold fast to our confession of faith because God is faithful.

Verse 23

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

Faith bids us to move forward closer to Jesus, because there is no other name or way to gain salvation from our sins, and that saving grace comes from our faith in the finished work of Jesus.

Verse 38-39

Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

Chapter 11 gives us the examples we need to understand how we are to live by faith.

And chapter 12 begins with the word “therefore”. It is the tethering word, putting the following statements in context with the previous statements.

Therefore, Run the Race! It is our rallying call.

We are going to look at what it takes to run this race of faith successfully.

I almost feel like one of those influencers on the youtwitface insta-tik social media apps:

If you will just give me 40 minutes of your time, I will give you the cheat codes to slide easily right into heaven, guaranteed to work, no side effects, and is super easy, just 3 simple steps to making heaven's finish line as a winner.

And while there is an element of truth in that statement, we find 3 truths in these verses that layout the path to finishing the race and crossing the finish line of heaven successfully.

The first truth is we have a great cloud of witnesses.

Hebrews 12:1

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...

NKJV

After a whole chapter of examples of faith, it is safe to assume that they are the witnesses the writer is speaking of, including the host of those he didn't have time to write about.

I want to look at a couple things in this portion of scripture.

We are surrounded.

The Greek word implies the idea of being encircled, or encompassed about, and being bound with.

One way to think of it is like the Colosseum in Rome or a football stadium where we are surrounded by fans cheering us on.

God places people in our life that fill the roll of coming along side and encouraging us to keep running.

In a way it is almost discouraging to think about how much I need encouragement to keep running the race of faith.

However, I am thankful that God made us to need each other.

For me to keep my faith on the straight and narrow, I need what you have and you need what I have, a give and take of spiritual encouragement.

This goes back to chapter 10.

Hebrews 10:24-25

24 And let us consider (provoke) one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

NKJV

How many of you have watched the movie Up. Cute little cartoon.

But one character highlights a fatal character flaw we all face.

That character is Dug, the golden retriever.

He is characterized with a deep loyalty to his pack, which is the old man and the boy, which is contrasted by his uncontrollable distraction to squirrels.

Dug is helping the good guys beat the bad guys, but often in the middle of something important, shouts "Squirrel" and runs off chasing it.

That is us.

And we need our herd, surrounding us and encouraging us to keep moving forward, to not abandon our faith.

God has given us each other to help each other finish the race of faith we are running.

We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.

When we think about this cloud of witnesses, if you are like me, we see a great host of people sitting in bleachers yelling when things go right, and getting quite when things go bad. And the reaction swings back and forth depending on how we are doing.

In my reading this week, this thought was challenged, and I am glad it was.

The witnesses moved from shouting spectators in a stadium to a courtroom where they are called to testify about their faith and give me specific encouragement from their life.

In chapter 11 Abel testifies that we can offer excellent sacrifices to God.

Enoch testifies we can walk with God and please him.

Noah testifies we can build a life through the Holy Spirit that will offer salvation to those we bring to Jesus.

Abraham testifies that faith trust promises that seem impossible.

Moses testifies the faith allows us to overcome fear and defeat every plan of the enemy.

Rahab testifies that faith can save anyone who believes.

Each witness testifies that the race of faith is worth running and finishing.

That is the first truth found in this passage. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses that testify that it is worth the effort.

The second truth in this passage is this.

If we want to finish the race, we must make every effort we can to finish.

Hebrews 12:1

Therefore, 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,

NKJV

Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which easily ensnares us...

We are told to lay aside these things, two different things mind you.

This isn't some great mystery, that takes 7 sacrificed bulls with a grain offering, and 7 male lambs in the first year, etc.

To lay aside simple means to put them away from you, to cast off, jettison away, to remove them.

We are to put away the weight and the sin.

I want to deal with sin first as it makes the most sense to most of us.

Sins are the things we do that separate us from God. If you are familiar with the 10 commandments, sins are lying, stealing, murdering, coveting, disrespecting your parents, having idols that replace God, fornications (sexual relations outside of marriage), adultery (sexual relations with someone not your spouse), lust, pride, blasphemy, bitterness, wrath, evil speaking and the list could go on.

These are things that separate us from God and produce death.

The wages of sin are death.

And while we are all tempted to sins, there are some sins that easily ensnare us, entangle us and trip us up. We must be careful of those and the temptations that allow them in.

If we don't put them away, they will entangle us and keep us from finishing the race.

We must learn to deal with our sin, or our sin will lead us astray. The writer says that we can put them away as well as the weights.

What are the weights the writer is talking about?

Well first, they are not the same as sins, but they can lead you there.

Several years ago, my sons and I joined a group of dads and sons on a weekend hiking/camping trip to heart lake in the Lincoln area.

It is listed as an easy hike, which it is honestly, and about 5 miles long.

Walking 5 miles is torture enough, but for a three-day hike with two boys, there is plenty of supplies to pack in. So, we all go backpacks, and attached our sleeping bags to them, and I, being dad had the tent. We also need food, and camping supplies, like knives, hatchets and bug spray, yadda yadda yadda. Well, that stuff starts adding up to a heavy weight, and the hike isn't getting any shorter, but longer with every pound of weight I keep adding. And with my former roofing career my back absolutely protests sleeping on hard rocky ground. So, I had a twin air mattress, with a battery pack within it to inflate the mattress. And I was not going without it.

As I finished packing, my bag was heavy, and Billy (12 or 13) and Creed's (7-8) weren't lite, but lighter.

That bag didn't have one bad thing within it, matter of fact, we would have said we "needed" everything in that pack to make the journey. Food, clothing, gear, and some comforts.

It was a weight that ultimately hindered my hike to the lake and back.

We carry weights that hinder our walk of Faith with God.

Only you know what they are.

A weight is something that is not sinful in itself, but slows or hinders spiritual growth.

Maclaren had a long sermon about the subject of weights, and here are some of the things he listed as examples of weights:

Family relations

Affection and love

Joys and pleasures

Talents and abilities

Work and responsibilities

Knowledge and study

Social life.

None of these seem bad on the surface, and most would seem to be synonymous with living a good Christian life.

A weight in this context is not defined by its nature, but rather by its effect on spiritual growth.

Is there something in your life that is hindering your spiritual growth, then it is a weight that needs to be put away.

Here are some examples in scripture of those who allowed weights to drag them off the track of faith.

Matt 19.

A rich young ruler comes and ask about eternal life.

Jesus says keep these commandments, and the young man says enthusiastically, I have done those things. So, he isn't dealing with sin.

Jesus then addresses the weight he is carrying, possessions.

Go and sell your possessions, give to the poor and follow me.

He couldn't remove the weight.

Another one in Luke 10.

Jesus is teaching in the Lazarus's house, and Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus listening. Martha is running around the house trying to serve food and meeting the needs around her, rather than sitting with Mary and learning from Jesus.

Her weight was busyness, because her serving was distracting her from Jesus.

I don't know what your weight is, but I know how to find out what it is.

The third truth to finishing the race is to run the race with endurance looking at Jesus.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, 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,

NKJV

How many of us would agree that reading our bible and praying is a vital part of our walk of faith?

How many of us struggle to read our bible and pray? Don't raise your hand, I will raise mine so you know where my focus is, on me.

To run the race set before us, we must have complete focus on the prize, Jesus Christ.

Weights and sins are the things that keep us from focusing on Jesus, they are “Squirrels” if you will, that seek to lead us away from Jesus.

We overcome weights and sin when we look to Jesus and he becomes more valuable than these other things.

Our race is a marathon, not a 100-yard dash.

It requires endurance, it takes time, and God works with us to help us find true freedom. Like kids, we want God to remove things immediately, to do all the work and just let me have the excitement of a job well done, yet it only robs us of the appreciation of accomplishment.

God chooses to work with us and through us to fix our eyes on Jesus, by teaching us through discipline and persecution that we love Jesus more than anything else, and allows us to submit to God authority even more.

Stand with me.

I will finish verse two next week and continue on.

This morning we looked at the race we must run.

To finish this race we must do three things.

First, we must hear the testimony of all the witnesses that tell us we can live by faith and run the race and finish it. We receive that by reading the word and examining the faith of those who have gone before us and complete the race.

Next, we must put away the weights and sins that seek to distract us and hinder our spiritual progress. Stop chasing the squirrels, they will get you killed.

Third, we must always seek to keep our focus on Jesus, and work to get more and more focused the longer we run the race of faith.

Let's Pray!