Cross Country Faith
Hebrews 12:1-3

November 22, 2026 HDBC

Have you ever notice how quickly things can turn bad? You can be rocking along just enjoying life, when suddenly something happens to invade your tranquility and shake your world. Just about the time we think we've made it to a place where we can coast, this broken world says, ***not so fast, I've got another surprise for you.*** We have to shift into another gear and calibrate just to maintain our sanity.

Football player at Berkeley. Took a survey of the NT course. Taught by same professor for years. Filled every semester. No homework. No tests. No papers. No books to read. Entire grade came from final exam. Every year for 20 years. Same question. Discuss the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul.

This football player, like all the others learned those journeys. Came to class for final. First time in 20 years there was a different question.

The new question was "Criticize the Sermon on the Mount." All sitting there glaring at the question. Frustration, one by one they began to hand in blank books.

All but this football player. He began to write. Spent entire class writing. Then turned in test. When the test were returned . Everyone got an "F" except this football player, who received an "A." All wanted to know how he knew to study that question. Here is what he wrote.

Who am I to criticize the Sermon on the Mount?" "What I want to do is discuss the missionary journeys of Paul.

There was a man who refused to get sidetracked. He had a laser focus and refused to waver.

We live in very uncertain times. It is easy to become fearful. But God has repeatedly made it clear that He wants us to live with confidence even when things appear to be out of control. How can we maintain our faith, refusing to waver when the surprises come?

Hebrews 12:1-3 offers a short and direct answer to that question. Let's look at it this morning.

READ TEXT – Hebrews 12:1-3 Called upon to do three things:

1. **Remember those who came before us.**
   Set the scene. Olympic type stadium. Athletic games 500 years before Christ. Huge arena filled with spectators cheering athletes on to victory. Writer is not looking for recruits to the next track meet. He is using the sporting image as metaphor for Christian life. You and I are the runners.

   Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses.
   Clear reference to the chapter before, in which we have a list of incredible men and women who have already lived their lives and demonstrated great faith in God. **But what does it mean?**

   Witnesses could have three possible meanings.
   1. A witness is someone who sees something.
   2. A witness is someone who is martyred for their faith.
   3. A witness is someone who testifies about something.

   I do not believe previous generations of believers are in a stadium watching our lives and cheering us on. Rather I believe it is used in the last sense. Many of them were martyrs, but not all of them.

   I believe it is used of someone who is testifying about something.
   That is what this group is doing. Not with their words, but with their entire lives. Their lives are still speaking to future generations about what it means to live a life of faith and to stay centered.

They have already run their parts of the race. They are finished. Each generation of believers must run with endurance in order to win their generation to Christ, and then pass the baton to the next generation.

Helps me to see there is more to the overall picture than what I see or experience. More than just my generation. **I am a part of bigger picture**. Some lived before me, others will follow. It is not just about me.

2. **Remove the stuff that hinders our progress.**
   We are to remove two things:

   1) ***Lay aside every encumbrance***
      That which is bulky or massive. Anything which would slow you down. Not always negative, but just not good in race. Ankle weights. Backpack. Hot air balloon you drop off weight to go up.

      What is holding you back in your race? Wrong relationship? Wrong job? Hobbies that you have? Choices which you are continuing to make which are not good.

   2) ***The sin which easily entangles us***
      Entangles. To surround. Robes in that day. Bind them up in order to keep from tripping. Notice the sleek clothing worn by the athletes in the Olympic games? Suits are tight and flexible. Nations spending a lot of money on research to find the right material to give an edge.

      What is it that restrains you in your walk with Christ? What sins are keeping you from being effective for Him? Lay them aside. Like gymnast takes off warmups.

      Pride. Greed. Envy. Lust. Gluttony. Selfishness. Anger.

3. **Run with endurance the course set for us.**
   We are to ***run with endurance the race that is set before us***.

1) **Run with effort**

Running takes effort. This is not something that happens automatically. One has to choose to do so. Remember that other generations have been witnesses for God and now it is our turn.

My job is to live for Jesus while I am on the field. Right now. No time to be lazy. You can't score a TD after the game is over. You play the game while it is your turn to be on the field. Now is our time.

2) **Run with endurance**

The Christian life is not a sprint, but a marathon. Starting well means nothing if you fail to finish well. History is littered with those have proclaimed allegiance to Jesus, only to quit before the finish.

During the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City, Tanzanian marathoner John Stephen Akhwari suffered a severe cramp from the high altitude, fell hard onto the pavement, and dislocated his knee and shoulder. Medical personnel urged him to drop out, yet he wrapped his knee and kept limping forward.

By the time Akhwari entered the Olympic stadium, the sun had set, the medal ceremony was over, and most of the crowd had gone home. Only a few thousand spectators remained when he crossed the finish line—dead last, more than an hour behind the winner. When reporters later asked why he didn't quit when he had zero chance of winning a medal, Akhwari gave a now-famous reply:

My country did not send me 5,000 miles to start the race; they sent me 5,000 miles to finish the race.

3) **Run with discernment**

The race that is set before you. In a race you have to stay in your lane. You have a course set out for you. Discern the course that God has laid out for you and follow that course. Don't try to live someone else' life.

4. **Rely on Jesus for our direction and motivation.**
   Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith . . .

   This is the key. We must keep our eyes on Jesus. If we take our eyes off of him we will become disoriented and confused. Like the captain of a ship crossing the ocean needs to keep his eye on the stars in order to stay on course, so we must keep our eyes on Jesus.

   Why should be keep our eyes on Jesus? 3 reasons.

   1) **He is the source of our faith**
      As the author, he is the originator of our faith. Without Him we would not even have a race to run. We look to Him because our faith to trust Him was given to us by Him and is strengthen by Him. But there is more to this phrase.

      He is also the greatest example of faith. Look to Jesus and you will see a man who blazed a path for all of us to follow. He was willing to follow the course that His Father laid out for Him and he carried it to its completion.

   2) **He is the sacrifice for our sins**
      He endured the cross . . .

      In the ancient games in Greece, a pedestal stood at the finish line, and on it hung a wreath, which was the winner's prize. No one runs without some expectation of reward. Jesus' reward is spoken of as ***the joy set before Him***. It was the expectation of being exalted once again along with His Father and of bringing glory to Him. For that joy, He endured the cross.

      Jesus went to the cross in order the pay the price for our sins. He bore through His death the penalty for all that you and I have ever done wrong.

At any point, He could have stopped process. Just before incarnation, 12-year-old boy, Gethsemane, raising hammer above cross. What was it that made Him endure? JOY in providing salvation for all who would come.

That is good reason to keep our eyes on Him.

3) **He is the sovereign Lord over creation**
He is now sitting at the right hand of the Father. This speaks of a place of sovereign rule. He is on His throne and is completely in charge of His creation.

We must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

The Million-Dollar Highway is a 25-mile stretch of U.S. Route 550 between Silverton and Ouray, Colorado, known for steep cliffs, no guardrails, and spectacular San Juan Mountain views. It reaches its highest point at Red Mountain Pass (11,018 ft) and forms part of the larger 233-mile San Juan Skyway Scenic Byway. It is one of the most scenic and dangerous drives in the U.S., carved originally in the 1880s to transport ore between mining towns. Today, it is famous for dramatic drop-offs, tight curves, and panoramic mountain vistas.

In 2009 Jan & I took her parents on a trip to Arizona, Utah, Colorado. I drove that highway. My FIL warned me that it was pretty tough. It was much worse than he described. Check out a few pictures. (Not mine)

Show pictures of the Million-Dollar-Highway

If you are diving a dangerous, curvy, mountainous highway, the worst thing you can do is take your eyes of the road and begin to focus on the scenery around you. The key is to keep your eyes on the road and your hands on the steering wheel.

When you are working your way through a difficult season of life the key is to keep your eyes on Jesus and your heart and mind on His promises.

You are a part of this generation by God's design, no accident. He has you here to make an impact of some kind. Relay Race. Baton is in your hand.

The race is before you. You must stay focused and keep doing His will. Satan wants you to waste your life. Thinking you are unimportant or that what you have done in past is enough. God is pointing to the baton in your hand and telling you to move ahead.