

# Hebrews 12:1-3

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you're physically able and desire to do so, I'm asking you to join with me as we stand together and we read the Word of God. We will be in the book of Hebrews this morning, Hebrews chapter 12. Just continuing to move through the book of Hebrews, we are going to be in Hebrews chapter 12, having finished up the 11th chapter.

And we will be in Hebrews chapter 12, starting in verse 1 and just reading down to verse 3. So Hebrews 12, verses 1 through 3 is our text this morning. We will read it together, and then we will move forward from there.

The author of Hebrews says, Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider him who has endured such hostility by sinners against himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews chapter 12, verses 1 through 3.

You may be seated. As we are making our way through the book of Hebrews, we are rapidly approaching the conclusion of the book. And the author has moved from stating his position to really applying the fact.

[ 1 : 26 ] We realize that the bulk of the book of Hebrews serves the purpose of showing us that Jesus is greater. It is putting on display the preeminence of Jesus Christ, that he is greater than anything that man has ever trusted in.

He is greater than anything that man will ever do. And he is greater than any hope that can be found in any other place and in any other person. And since Jesus is greater, there is the charge to make the decision.

Now, he made that transition somewhere about Hebrews chapter 10, about halfway through, as he began to transition to the application of the fact. Because much like many other biblical authors, He takes the bulk of his time stating the fact, really defending the fact, and over and over and over again repeating the fact that Jesus is greater.

And once it is established, then he calls for action based upon it. Because there has to be action taken upon every fact that is given to us in Scripture, or, as we have said, it becomes useless information.

We do not have these truths given to us just so that we can gather facts. Rather, we have these things given to us so that we can change course or redirect or reorient our life.

[ 2 : 41 ] And the author of the book of Hebrews is doing that very thing. He is calling them, since you know these things, and since you can clearly see these things, therefore, live in such a manner.

And then he pauses in Hebrews chapter 11, and he goes through what we often refer to as the heroes of the faith chapter. And he gives us example, example, example, of individuals who are living with, or who lived with, an enduring salvific faith.

Because if you remember, Hebrews chapter 10 ends, and you want to take all these things in context as they are united together. Hebrews chapter 10 ends with this statement.

We are not of those who shrink back to the destruction of our flesh, but those who press forward in faith. And he shows us what an enduring, soul-preserving faith looks like in Hebrews chapter 11.

He gives us picture after picture after picture. And we are not going to take time to go back through all of those things. But just in case we think that he is just giving us these people, or these illustrations to say, well, that looks pretty cool.

[ 3 : 52 ] Then he makes a transition again into chapter 12, and he puts that great word, therefore, in there. Because of these things, do this. And he introduces this, in Hebrews chapter 12 for us, as a call to the individual.

And I want you to see this morning, a call to enter the race. Much like they were giving a charge in Hebrews chapter 10, to stop sinning on the fence, to be either all the way with Jesus, or all the way to whatever else they were trusting in, which in context happens to be Judaism, and the keeping of the law.

He said, either go all the way with the law, or go all the way with Christ. Don't be caught between two of them, and don't play seesaw with them, because Jesus isn't about playing games, right? He says, either be hot, or be cold.

But make your decision. And here in chapter 12, because of these illustrations given to us in chapter 11, he now issues a call. And that call is to enter the race.

Often, throughout scripture, especially in the New Testament scripture, the life of the believer, or the life of faith, is often referred to in terms of sporting events.

[ 5 : 06 ] Paul refers to it as wrestling, and boxing, and even racing, and pressing on towards the goal. There were so many applications, and so many different pictures, that would have been fitting for the people to see.

There was the wrestling, and even the full armor of God, is a particular sporting event. And Paul would look at the people around him, and he would always say, these are just pictures of what it looks like, to live the Christian life.

What it looks like to live the life of faith. One thing that is never referred to, or the life of faith is never referred to, is a life of leisure. It is never one of ease.

It is never one of passing pleasures. It is never one of comfort. Rather, it is always one of strenuous activity. And this is the call that is being issued, because the word race, or the word to run the course that is set before us, really is the picture of a marathon, not a short sprint.

And here we see the author issuing the call to say, now that you know these things, get in the race. Be willing to pay the price. Be willing to put forward the effort.

[ 6 : 18 ] Be willing to endure. Be willing to persevere. We will see later on, he says that you have not yet resisted to the point of bloodshed. Not yet. But he is anticipating that their enduring would come to the point of bloodshed, and suffering.

But he is here issuing this call, and I want you to see four great truths from this call to enter the race. Number one, there is simply the invitation. There is the invitation.

It says, therefore, therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us. Now, I want to skip over this middle portion of this verse. Don't let it bend you out of shape.

We'll come back to it in just a moment. There's a comma there, so it is at least grammatically acceptable to read the rest of the sentence without the things contained within the comma, right? Hopefully, my educators will tell me I'm okay in that because since it is inside of a comma, it means that the sentence can still stand on its own without that, which is included inside the comma, correct?

Yes. And then we will come back and we will fill in that place in just a moment. So what we see is, therefore, since we are surrounded so great a cloud of witnesses, what does it say? Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

[ 7 : 32 ] First, we see the invitation, therefore, since we are surrounded so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

And I love what the author says here. It says, therefore, since we are surrounded, now we need to put these witnesses in the right perspective or in the right position, if you will, because I believe even in my own life and even in the life of a number of us, we have put these witnesses in a place where they maybe should not be.

And we always want to put them in a place where Scripture puts them and he puts them around us. Now, there is at least merit to say, well, we have these witnesses in heaven and they're cheering us on and they're moving us forward and we want to be pleasing to the people in heaven and we want these people in heaven that are looking down upon us, those who have went before us, everybody we read in the Heroes of the Faith, chapter 11, we want them to be pleased with us.

The problem with that is that is not exactly biblical accurate. Because it really doesn't matter if Samson's pleased with me, it really doesn't matter if Abraham's pleased with me, it doesn't matter if Enoch is pleased with me, what matters is if God is pleased with me.

And so we don't want to see this great cloud of witnesses first as being those who are cheering us on and going, yes, yes, yes, because I think we're losing a part of the invitation here.

[ 8 : 54 ] These witnesses serve as nothing other than this. they are examples that other people have done it. And since it can be done, therefore, so too can we.

The witnesses that surround us are nothing other than examples throughout history that God has called men to live with genuine, salvific, soul-preserving faith, and people have done so throughout history and since it is possible for others to do it, it is possible for us as well.

I have this great problem sometimes. I get myself in trouble with this. Maybe you don't. Maybe there's no other guy in the room that does this. Maybe it's only me, but I don't mind confessing this. The great problem I have is I feel like if anybody else can do something, then I can probably do it too. That gets me in trouble sometimes. I look and I go, well, if they can do it, then I can probably do it too.

You say, what do you mean? Well, it doesn't matter. I mean, with anything, if I look up there now, I wouldn't say, well, if Brother Jamie can play the trumpet, I can play the trumpet too. Well, no, I could say that. And my personality is I probably would say that.

[ 10 : 10 ] I can play the trumpet too. You just probably wouldn't want to listen to me play the trumpet too, right? But I could sit up here and blow on it if I wanted to. But I have this thing that anytime I'm really needing something done, I say, well, if anybody else can do it, then I can do it too.

Now, it may take me longer. It may be a little bit harder for me. It may be a little bit more effort for me. But if somebody else can do it, then I can do it too. And I started approaching that personality when I started having to pay big money for people to fix things that I thought, well, they're people just like me.

Yeah, but they're talented and they're gifted and they're effort and they're putting it. Well, I'm going to try to figure it out and if it's my stuff and I mess it up, then it's my stuff and I mess it up. But these people were serving as witnesses to me.

Now, that sometimes gets me in trouble because I can't do those things which I think I can do. But one thing that I do like in Scripture, especially in Hebrews 11, when you open up Hebrews 11, you are not looking at super saints.

You're looking at men and women just like us with faults and failures and mistakes and problems. And if they can live a life of which God was pleased, then too, so can we.

[ 11 : 32 ] All Scripture testifies to the fact that while the standard of God is perfection, the faith that God requires is often displayed, not often, it is always with the exception of one, we'll get to that in just a moment, displayed in imperfect people.

David, a man after God's own heart. I would dare say that there are a number of you wives who would not want David as your husband as recorded in Scripture. If you don't know what I'm talking about, maybe you can go back and read it.

There are a number of you husbands that if David's men showed up, maybe we needed to feed him some lamb because if we die, he may take our wife to be his second wife or his third wife, however you want to count it in Scripture, right? But yet, he was a man after God's own hearts.

Now, there's things that I can't define, there's things that I can't understand, and there's things that make me scratch my head, but what I see is David is highlighted even in his imperfections. He's highlighted even in his failures.

He's highlighted so that, not that I can say, well, I want a life that's pleasing to David, so that I can look and say, well, if David can be a man after God's own heart, then I can as well.

[ 12 : 46 ] So the invitation is first extended to us through examples of those who went before us, and we see these witnesses around us, and we see them loudly proclaiming, you don't have to be perfect to get in the race.

You just have to be willing. Because here's what it says. Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

The call of Christ is the call to live a life of absolute, surrendered faith, and he lays it before the people, and the invitation is there. He is giving us everything with the courses already set.

You say, well, I don't know how I should do it. I don't know where I should turn. Well, man plans his steps before the Lord directs his ways, right? And we are to completely rely upon him and completely trust upon him and completely surrender to him, and we are to run with endurance, not with spurts and fits and this.

We are to press on. The word picture here is one that is going to be agonizing, painful, and not really comfortable at all. It's a great invitation, right?

[14:00] Come do something that's going to hurt. Come do something that's not going to make sense at all. Come do something that's going to be painful to you, but it doesn't make sense apart from Christ.

So there is, first of all, the invitation. Secondly, there is the preparation because if we're going to enter that race, if we're going to live a life of enduring faith, if we're going to live a life of soul-preserving faith, then we must be prepared to do so.

And there is the preparation. This, by the way, is what is in between the commas because it says, therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses, let us prepare ourselves, and we prepare this way. Let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us.

Let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us. How do we prepare? We prepare by freeing ourselves to be able to run the race of faith.

And the thing that we see here is the things that we must get rid of are not all bad things. The word encumbrance there does not necessarily mean something that is bad because if that included sin, then he would not have had to put and the sin which so easily entangles us because the reality is this, and this is something that I believe that American Christians have a hard time wrapping their mind around it, and the reason I believe they do is because I personally do that some things which hinder us in the walk and the run and the endurance of faith are the good things.

[15:31] And that sometimes good things can encumber the best things. It doesn't necessarily have to be sinful to be wrong.

And there are times in life, and we ought to understand this and we ought to acknowledge this, there are times in the walk of faith where we must lay aside those things that were good.

Again, I have in my mind Paul. Paul, I think Paul experienced the freedom that very many believers in biblical times experienced. Paul experienced the freedom, I mean, if you think about it, he came from very Jewish, he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees.

According to the law, he was blameless. He was schooled in the school of Gamaliel. I mean, all these legalism, but I think when Paul accepted Christ and he found out, when Christ called Paul to himself and Paul was really freed, all of a sudden Paul started liking things, you know, like meat. He said, oh, meat is good for me. He wrote that, right? He said, I like meat, it's okay, I can eat this thing, I'm not so worried about if something's kosher or not. He said, I'm free, all things are free to me, but I'm not free to do all things.

[16:45] Because he says, if the meat that I eat offends my brother, then this thing that is good to me needs to be laid aside so that I don't hinder him.

This is something good that I must put aside so that as I run this race of faith, I don't fall short, as Paul would say. He says, I press on. So we first prepare ourselves by looking at that which is good. I met an individual not too long ago. I met him, I was actually buying something from him and I was there, I was talking to him and he was sharing his testimony with me. Actually, as I was going through his farm, I was buying fence posts from him.

He had a great deal of some fence posts. And I was getting ready to buy a fence post and we were walking through his barn, which was an amazing barn, and we were getting ready to buy some fence posts. I said, man, I love your barn, but the thing I love the most about your barn is what you have sitting on your table over there.

Because sitting on the table, he had a Bible sitting there and it was opened up. I said, of all the cool things you have in your barn, the best thing that I have found is that book that is sitting on the corner of your workbench. And he said, oh, let me tell you my testimony because at that time, you know, I didn't really look like a pastor, right?

[17:48] Because I'm in this old beat up truck pulling the trailer and getting ready to go get some fence posts. And he said, well, let me tell you my testimony. He said, man, I was, he said, not too long ago, I had a business, had my own business and I was doing things well and everything was going great.

He said, I was diagnosed with cancer. He said, I had to start making a life decision. He said, so I just laid everything out there. I said, okay, God, what of all these things do I have that I don't need anymore?

Everything. He said, I sold my business, I sold my farm, I sold everything. He said, for a year, I've been here, just hanging out, growing.

He had a beautiful farm. He said, now I'm selling this farm. I didn't ask him why, I knew why. He said, these are the things that God, he said, I started living open-handedly saying, okay, God, is there something good that's keeping me back from what you want me to be?

That's a hard place to be, but that's a place of preparation, right? God, is there something that is encumbering me? Is there a weight when we're running the race?

[18:56] We don't want anything extra weighing us down. We don't want anything extra holding us back. So it says, the first thing we do by preparation is to lay aside every encumbrance.

And then, it says, the sin, which so easily entangles us, which means we must separate ourselves from the sin which Satan uses as a stronghold over ourselves.

So sure, there is preparation to enter this race. We live open-handedly saying, okay, God, what is it that you need to remove? If it's good, I'll get rid of you. We don't have to ask him if he needs to remove the sinful things because those things we know.

We must push them aside and we must cast them off. We do that through the last two things, right? We don't do that in our own strength. We don't do that in our own power. We do that through the last two things.

So here we see the invitation, the preparation. Number three, we see the fixation. That is, what we are fixed upon. What we are fixed upon. Everyone who is in something for the long haul has to have a point of fixation.

[19:59] They have to look beyond something and focus on something and say, well, if I can get to that point, I remember immediately following my back surgery. When I had back surgery, let me go back how many years ago, six years ago it was now, the doctor told me, he said, okay, he said, the day after your back surgery, I want you to get up walking and you need to be moving, you need to be moving and you need to walk maybe about a half a mile.

The next day, he said, by the time you come back and see me in three weeks, you need to be walking about two miles a day. I've got a great loving wife. You've got a great caring pastor's wife. So the day after surgery, she took me out for a two mile walk and didn't, you know, we didn't take two weeks to get there.

We did that the day after and we did it every day after that for a while. I was so much more disciplined because it's amazing what pain will do to you leading you up to that point and I lost that discipline as you can tell. But anyway, so for about a year and a half there, we were walking three or four miles every day.

I don't know where we found the time but we did the time and some of those times we were pushing a stroller with that little man, Braden, and he was so heavy and I remember there were some hills. Some of you live on those roads there were some hills and we would always pick out a fence post and I would say, I will push the stroller to that fence post and if I get to that post then it's your turn and then when we get there we'd hand it off and she'd say, okay, now I'll push it to that post and then we'd get there and we'd hand off.

There was always a point and I could always say, if I can just get to that point that I'm fixed upon, then maybe I could go the rest of the way because it's really, we live where it was uphill both ways.

[21:27] I don't know how it worked that way but it was literally uphill both ways so we'd always have somewhere where we'd have a point of fixation and the race of faith is just the same way because look at what it says in verse 2, fixing our eyes not on the cloud of witnesses around us, not on this great company that shows us it can be done.

We don't look at David. We don't look at Abraham. We don't look at Enoch. We don't look at any of these people, right? We don't look at Moses. We look at them to tell us it can be done but they're not the place that we fix our focus.

Fixing our eyes on Jesus. We fix our eyes on Jesus. Why? Because he's the author and the perfecter of faith.

The author means he is the forerunner. It means he came up with the idea. Jesus is the originator of faith. You say, well, all those examples we read in Hebrews chapter 11, they're from the Old Testament.

They're before Jesus Christ. No, they're not because he is before all things. It says that they were looking unto him whom they did not know, right? They were looking to Jesus. Jesus came up with the whole thing.

[ 22 : 30 ] Jesus is the author of faith because he is the creator of all things. And in Jesus, faith is made perfect. He has completed it.

So we fix our eyes not on people. This is what gets so many of us in trouble is the walk of faith and the run of faith that we are on. And of course, we're too busy looking around and seeing how everybody else is doing it.

We're too busy looking around and seeing how the saints in the Old Testament and the New Testament do it. But the author says we are to fix our eyes on Jesus and see how he did it. And that's why Paul would say that one day I will be like him. I'm looking to him and pushing to him and someday I will be like him. He says, we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and the perfecter of the faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross.

Look at this, who for the joy set before him endured the cross despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Why is it that we want to look to Jesus and fix our eyes upon Jesus?

[ 23 : 38 ] Because he alone has done it perfectly. And he alone has completed the course. And he alone is sitting in the victor seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

We want to set our pace according to the one who won the race, not just those who are running it with us. Now sure, we ought to let that be a motivation to pull others along, but the greatest place that we have to be fixed upon is he who has already won it.

He won it going through the cross. Fourth and finally, we see this motivation. How do we press on? How do we keep on? And your pastor's preaching to himself here. What great motivation do we have for those times that need endurance?

What great motivation do we have for those times when it is painful? What great motivation is there for the times when it doesn't feel that good? And we understand that we are in a marathon, not in a short sprint. When we're called to live a life of soul-preserving faith and it gets difficult and it's hard, where is the motivation for consider him?

Consider means to stop and to turn your mind off of other things and to start thinking about him. That's what the word consider means. To stop, turn your mind from those things and start thinking about him.

[ 24 : 48 ] Consider him who has endured such hostility by sinners against himself. By the way, while we were yet sinners, he died for us. So, much of the hostility that was against himself came from me.

Came from me. And when I consider him who has endured such hostility by sinners against himself so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. you know the portions of scripture that always get me, cause me to pump my brakes and stop.

So when I read those portions of the sufferings of Christ, whether it be in the book of Isaiah, the prophecies of the Old Testament, or when I come to the gospel accounts and I see Jesus being beat, mocked, ridiculed, crucified, the side being pierced, the body being removed, and when I really consider him, nothing that I endure even compares.

Nothing. No pain, no suffering, no inconveniences, nothing compares.

Now, I consider myself or even I consider the testimony of others. I can always find reason to be down.

[ 26 : 21 ] I can always find reason to stop. But when I consider Jesus, there is the motivation to press on.

There is a motivation not just to respond to the call to enter the race of faith, but to actually run that race with endurance. Let's pray.

We thank you so much for this day. God, I thank you for all that you say to us in your word. I thank you for the truth it contains.

Lord, as each one of us look at our own lives and we realize there are times where we're high and there are times where we're low, but Lord, we want to continue to press on and to run with endurance. So Lord, may our hearts and minds be fixed upon you.

May we look to you in every struggle and may we run towards you through this life with soul-preserving, enduring faith. May you be glorified through it all.

[ 27 : 22 ] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen.