

# Hebrews 12:1-2

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[0:00] I never thought I would be the one actually preaching in this pulpit but by the grace of God I am here so I am very thankful for that. A couple weeks ago Billy Joe had reached out to me.

He asked me to preach this morning and initially I thought maybe he's got the wrong number. Maybe he's got the wrong guy so I texted him back just making sure you got the right guy and he did. Praise the Lord for that.

So I am very thankful for that. What an honor it is to preach. I do want to thank Pastor Billy Joe for giving me this opportunity. God has truly blessed me in so many ways in my life.

But one of the things I feel especially blessed by is being born in the South. I'm so glad that I was born in the South. Though I'm not a Tennessee fan, I'm proud to be a Tennessean.

And with that becomes a great love and a deep passion for sports. All of us have teams that we affiliate ourselves with. You can't find virtually anybody that isn't affiliated in some sort of way with a sports team.

[1:06] Whether that be the Tennessee Titans or the University of Tennessee for football or the more superior Alabama Crimson Tide. Right? We all have teams that we root for. And I understand I might not be invited back after a statement like that.

But my favorite sport is baseball. I love baseball. I love the Atlanta Braves. And for as long as I can remember, I've always rooted for the Braves. The good, the bad, the ugly.

They're my team. I love the Braves. And as a kid, my dream was to play baseball for the Braves.

Unfortunately, I'm not doing that. I'm 5'9", and that's not a possibility.

But that was always my goal was to play baseball for the Braves. I love the game, the sound of the crack of the bat, the smell of the fresh cut grass.

There's so many things that go into the game. The strategy, the history of the game. I love baseball. And even when I played, of course, I loved the actual game day.

[2:07] I loved the games that we used to play. But I used to love practice. I loved going out on the field and practicing. There's something therapeutic about taking ground balls and practicing the game that you love.

But there's one part of practice that I absolutely hated. That's running. I hated running. And that's just in general. I just don't like to run.

And I know some people have some friends that are cross country. They run cross country for a team in college. And they love to go, as they say, on a casual jog.

I don't quite understand what that means when they say I'm going on a casual jog. They wake up in the morning. They go for a run. It's hard for me to really comprehend the minds of the people that just love to run.

I don't know how they do it. No end goal. No prize. No finish line. They just enjoy. They find pleasure in running. But in the 12th chapter in the book of Hebrews, we are called, as Christians, to run a race.

[3:17] And the Bible is full of metaphors, full of figures of speeches that kind of describe the Christian life. In Ephesians 6, we see the Christian life described as a battle. And we're the soldiers in the Lord's army.

We're called to go to battle. And we're called to put on the entire armor of God. Or Paul in 2 Timothy chapter 2, he describes Christians as soldiers in the Lord's army.

And our goal is to please the commander. That is, Jesus. In other places, we get descriptions of fights or wrestling matches. Again, in 2 Timothy, this time in chapter 4, Paul explains how he's fought the good fight.

Or quite possibly my favorite metaphor for the Christian life is 1 Corinthians 9, where Paul says he doesn't run aimlessly. He doesn't box as one beating the air.

The apostle Paul is explaining how as Christians, we don't run without purpose. We don't go on light jogs or run on the treadmill where there's no finish line. No, as Christians, as believers in the Lord Jesus, the race set before us is not a passive race, but one that we're active in.

[ 4 : 29 ] With a prize, a treasure, a goal at hand. And nowhere in this passage of scripture or anywhere in the scriptures, we're told that the race is easy.

That's not what the Bible describes. We're not even told the route in which the race calls us to go on. We're not even told how long the race is. So how are we as Christians supposed to stay motivated?

What keeps us moving forward? I think the author tells us in the passage this morning. So that kind of brings me to the main idea of the passage. The main thing that the author of Hebrews was trying to say to the Christians then, but he's also saying to us today to stay motivated in this marathon called the Christian life.

Here's the main idea. By faith, let us run the race with endurance, looking to Jesus who endured the cross. Let me say that again. By faith, let us run the race with endurance, looking to Jesus who endured the cross.

So let's read Hebrews chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. If you're able to stand this morning, would you do so as we read the very word of God. Hebrews chapter 12, verses 1 and 2.

[ 5 : 46 ] 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.

Would you pray with me? Father, we thank you for this morning, this time that we get to gather together. Lord, I'm thankful for, again, the opportunity to preach, but Lord, I pray that I would get out of the way, and Lord, people would see you.

They would gaze upon your glory, and God, we would see what you would have for us this morning. I pray that there's someone here that doesn't know you, God, that they would hear the gospel very clearly, and I pray that today would be the day of salvation.

Lord, we love you, we thank you, and we praise you. It's in the name of Christ I pray. Amen. You can be seated. The book of Hebrews is one of the most interesting books in the New Testament. We don't know exactly who wrote it, though some say it might be Paul or Barnabas. We don't exactly know who the letter was written to. We know it was Christians, but we don't exactly know the people group that it was written to, and we really don't know the reason why the book was written.

[ 7 : 20 ] But as you read, as you begin to read the book, you start seeing some of the struggles that these Christians are dealing with. They've been persecuted for their faith, and to some extent they were returning to their old ways.

They were returning back to the bad habits that they had. In chapter 5, verse 12, the author says, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles and oracles of God.

You need milk, not solid food. So in some parts of their life, they were living as Christians. But when things got hard and things got difficult, they began to drift back again to those old bad habits, rather than staying strong in their faith and running the race that was set before them.

They began to lag behind or stop, or maybe even contemplated on quitting the race altogether, to walk away from the faith. But as you read the book of Hebrews, the author is addressing the issue that these people are going through, being weak and elementary in their faith.

And he calls them to run with endurance. Endurance. The way he lays this out is not through a self-improvement program. It's not through a do these ten steps and everything will be okay.

[ 8 : 37 ] Your problems will go away. No, instead, the author of Hebrews, he lays out an apologetic or a rich theology of the person and divinity and the work of Christ.

As one commentator says, the author of Hebrews knows that if these Christians are going to endure, they will endure because they believe the truths about Jesus, not because they've risen to the occasion through personal fortitude.

And maybe you're here this morning, and you're at a point in your walk with Christ. You're at a point in the race set before you where things are hard, and you just want to quit.

Let me offer you two truths this morning. I think that we can see in the text in verses 1 and 2 that allow us to run with endurance the race set before us.

And there's really this dichotomy in unity that you can see. I don't even know if that's really a, that's kind of contradictory, but there's this leaving behind of some things and looking forward to something else.

[ 9 : 41 ] Here's two practical ways that we can see in the text. Number one, remove the hindrances in your life. Remove the hindrances in your life. Verse 1 starts with the word therefore, and anytime you see the word therefore, you need to, just a good rule of thumb is to know what therefore is therefore.

And in this context, therefore is looking back to chapter 11 where we see the famous hall of faith. These, of course, are men and women, the saints that have come before us who have run the race by faith.

He says, look in verse 1, he says, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses. These are men like Abraham who was tested by God to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, the son whom God had promised to Abraham that he would give him.

Yet Abraham had faith in God that even if Isaac was killed, and you can read this, even if Isaac was killed, Abraham had faith that God would even raise Isaac from his death.

These are men like Moses who had faith that went to Pharaoh. He commanded Pharaoh to let God's people go. Then who by faith led the Israelites out of the wilderness who were later led into the promised land.

[ 11 : 03 ] These are women like Rahab who, when the Israelites had made it to the promised land, they sent the spies to scout out the land, and Rahab actually hid the spies in her roof and exhibited her great faith in Yahweh.

These are men like David and Samuel who conquered kingdoms and shut the mouths of lions, or who, as the Bible says about David, was a man after God's own heart.

And the common denominator that we see here is that all these people had great faith. They lived their lives. They ran the race by faith.

And there's been millions of others throughout the course of history who encourage us today that have completed their race and encourage us to be steadfast. And while this cloud of witnesses that we see in verse 1 is not, they're not bodily standing in the stands waving around a foam finger or ringing a cowbell or anything like that.

They're enjoying the presence and glory of the Lord Jesus, but their legacy in Hebrews chapter 11 motivates us believers to run this marathon by faith with endurance.

[ 12 : 15 ] So let that be an encouragement to you during this race, during the race that we're called to run, to read and study God's word, to study the perfect, infallible, inerrant word of God, to read of the saints that have come before us, who completed the race, who crossed the finish line, their testimonies of God's faithfulness, that God kept them and strengthened them every step of the way.

And so he does with his people today. So may we run by faith. But he doesn't stop there with a description of those who have come before us, but he continues with a prescription of how we are to run the race, the marathon with endurance.

Look at the middle of verse 1. He says, Let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely. The author of Hebrews was telling believers at that time and us today to remove those hindrances, to remove the barriers, the obstructions in our lives that slow us down or keep us from running the race with endurance.

If you watch the Olympics, one of the things that you'll notice about the sprinters, they have the tight shirt and the tight pants on that doesn't allow the wind to catch hold of their clothes and slow them down.

And as Christians, there's things in our lives that act as that wind that catch hold of our clothes. They hold us back. They cause us to lag behind or be weighted down.

[ 13 : 48 ] And as I think about that idea of being weighed down, my mind goes to probably my favorite book of all time, outside the Bible, of course, my favorite book of all time, and that's Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan.

You might have read that book before, but the book starts with a main character, Christian, that's very original, right? The main character, Christian, and he has this massive burden on his back. And this is, of course, the picture of the weight of his sin. And he tries to remove this burden as he listens to a man named Worldly Wisdom. And this man tries to show him the things of this world that will relieve his burden that's on his back.

And this weight is weighing him down for about six chapters until he meets a man that redirects his path to a place called the cross. And that's where he gets the relief from his back.

But after this, Christian is still faced with various temptations and new weights along the way that slow him down or tempt him to stray away from the goal of reaching the celestial kingdom.

[14:57] And this is such a great picture of our Christian lives. Verse 1 tells us to lay aside the weights in sin. Remove those things that distract you from the goal of running the race.

with endurance. Living a life worthy of the calling you have received. And as we're in this race, we don't need any excess baggage.

We don't need any excess weight. Again, if you watch any kind of sports, especially those with a lot of running like soccer or track and field, you'll notice that these athletes have virtually no body fat like at all.

And for them to succeed in their sport, for them to make it to the end, to cross the finish line, they cut out any unnecessary weight. And sometimes these weights in our lives are not necessarily inerrantly bad things.

Weights can be good things. But hear me when I say this. Sometimes good things turn into bad things when they distract us from the most important things.

[16:00] Sports are great. I love sports. I've already talked about sports. But sports become a distraction when they become a hindrance to my walk with Christ.

They take my eyes off of the Lord. Your job is important. Providing for your family is important. The Bible tells us that if anyone doesn't provide for his family, he's denied the faith and he's worse than an unbeliever.

In God's providence, in God's loving care, he gives us opportunities. He gives us ways to provide for our families. But that gift becomes more important, or when that gift becomes more important than the gift giver, it becomes baggage.

That gift now becomes a hindrance. It becomes a weight in our lives. Marriage is a gift from God. The union between a man and a woman is a good thing.

But that good thing turns into a bad thing when it becomes more important than God. That good thing takes the place of God.

[17:07] And when that happens, it becomes a hindrance and it weighs you down. So we must recognize the hindrances in our lives. And what may be a hindrance to you may not be a hindrance to someone else.

And that's why it's crucial for us to understand the things that weigh us down, that distract us from running the race that is set before us. So yes, Christ has removed the ultimate burden from sin in our lives.

But while we're still in the flesh, while we're still in this world, there's going to be things that creep in and we're called to remove those distractions, those misplaced priorities, those things that tempt us from taking our eyes off the goal.

So let us be cautious about the sin and be on guard for that sin that creeps in. We must prepare ourselves because the Christian life is a race.

It's not a sprint. It's not a 40-yard dash where the fastest man wins. It's a marathon. And I can remember a few years ago, I was working one of the checkpoint stations at the strolling gym marathon and I got to talking to one of the runners.

[18:17] I think it was his first time ever running a marathon. It's better than me. I don't think I'm ever going to run a marathon. But he was telling me about all the preparation that goes into running a marathon, specifically the strolling gym.

He was telling me about the things that he did weeks, even months beforehand. He got to talking about his diet and how he was hydrating well and he was stretching and doing all these things.

And then as the race got closer, he bought some new shoes and he made sure he had all the right clothes. Then the night before the race, he talked about how he packed a bag and it had his water and his electrolytes and protein bars.

He had all these things packed, ready to go for the next day. The runner did everything he possibly could to put himself in the best position to run, to make it to the end, to cross the finish line.

And the word that comes to mind, the word that's used in our passage this morning is endurance. He prepared to run with endurance. And as Christians, may we prepare, may we do everything we can to run the race with endurance, throwing off the things that cause us to be weighed down, just like an athlete that disciplines himself however he needs to gain the prize.

[ 19 : 38 ] So the first imperative, the first command that we see in the passage this morning is to run with endurance, to leave behind the things that are hindrances, to remove the barriers, the obstructions in our life.

Let's look at the second point, number two. Remember the finished work of Christ. Remember the finished work of Christ. As we look at the text, starting in verse two, we're met with our second imperative of the text.

First, the author of Hebrews says we run the race by endurance, laying aside though every weight and sin. But the second way we run is by looking to Jesus. During this marathon, our strength, the key to our strength is not electrolytes or Gatorade or protein bars.

No, our strength is Christ and Christ alone. We're kept in this race not because we're good enough, not because we trained hard enough or we worked our way to be able to get into the race.

No, before the race, we were standing still. Actually, not even standing still, we were dead.

Ephesians chapter two says, we were dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all once walked in the passions of our flesh.

[ 21 : 02 ] And by nature, we were children of wrath like the rest of mankind. We were wicked. Not just kind of bad, not just a little bit out of shape. I need to do a little bit of tweaking and stretch a little bit more.

Then I can be a little bit better. Our diets were just a little wrong. No, we were dead in our sin. But the beautiful part about Ephesians chapter two verses one and three is verse four.

But God, being rich in mercy, he lavished his love on us and he raised us up from our death.

We're saved by grace through faith. So when we repent of our sins and we believe on Christ for salvation, at that moment, at the moment of our conversion, we enter this race that we see in Hebrews chapter 12.

And the author gives us an incredible command as we run. And it's very, very simple. Look to Jesus. Put the blinders on. Set your gaze on Jesus.

[ 22 : 07 ] I just finished studying the book of Deuteronomy again. And as Israelites would fall into sin, they would recommit themselves to the Lord and God would say to them, do not turn to the left or to the right, but do as I have commanded you.

Likewise, we as the people of God are not to look to the left or look to the right or look to our surroundings or look at our circumstances or situation. We're to gaze upon the glory of Christ Jesus, the one who ran the race, the one who paved the way, who lived a sinless life.

But notice the two words describing Jesus. First, he says, the founder, the founder of our faith. In some translations say, author or pioneer or source of our faith.

This carries with it the idea that Jesus is the one on which our faith stands. Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross has been the plan all along.

Even before the creation of the world, Jesus Christ was the plan for redeeming us, redeeming God's people, even before creation. So Jesus is the founder of our faith.

[ 23 : 23 ] But secondly, look what it says also. It says the author of Hebrews says that he's the perfecter of our faith. In other words, Jesus is the completer or the finisher of our faith.

Jesus being fully man ran the race by faith. Even better than Hebrews chapter 11 where those people lived by faith, their life was marked by faith.

Jesus ran the race with perfect faith. But yet at the finish line was a cross where he gave his life as a ransom for his sheep, where he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. And upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And by his wounds we are healed. This is the place where he offered up his spirit and said, it is finished.

And what he meant by that is that everything that is necessary for us to have a restored relationship with God is completed. Death has been defeated and our sin has been paid for.

[ 24 : 33 ] So as we run our race, we look ahead. We look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. But look what else the author of Hebrews tells us.

Look at the next part. It says, who for the joy set before him endured the cross. No matter what we go through in our lives, nothing compares to what Jesus experienced on the cross.

He bore the full weight and penalty and wrath of God yet endured in love. And that should motivate us. We're hell worthy sinners yet Christ endured the cross for us.

And I'm not in any way downplaying or saying that the things that we go through are not real and valid or unimportant or not difficult. They are difficult.

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 4, though, and this should be a help for us all today, it is light and momentary affliction preparing us for the glory to come which is beyond comprehension.

[ 25 : 42 ] So while we are running this race, look to Jesus. Don't stop running. Don't veer off to the left or to the right. Don't walk or jog.

Remember the finished work of Christ. Jesus not only endured the cross, but he rejoiced in it. Jesus found joy in dying on the cross for you and for me.

You may say, you know, how could Jesus have found joy in such a gruesome and agonizing and shameful and painful death? Well, first it was the will of his Father.

The Lord Jesus was delighted in obeying his Father's will. This joy also included a reunion in heaven where he would be rightfully crowned with glory and honor and splendor.

He's seated at the right hand of the Father. But also he found joy in dying on the cross because he loved you. We run with endurance knowing that Christ endured the cross for the joy set before us to save us from our sin.

[ 26 : 57 ] Because of this joy, his joy will be our joy. So not only should we gaze upon him now, but part of our joy that is set before us is that we gaze upon his glory forever, for eternity.

So run the race with endurance as you put on the blinders, not looking to the left or looking to the right, but look upon Christ, the founder and perfecter of our faith who joyfully endured the cross that we deserve.

So how do we run the race with endurance? The writer of Hebrews gives us two very, very clear commands. Number one, remove the excess baggage that weighs us down.

Number two, to fix our eyes on Christ Jesus. We cannot afford to be distracted. We can't afford to, again, glance to the left or glance to the right because the moment that we take our eyes off of Christ, the race becomes impossible.

But with our gaze set firmly on him, the founder and perfecter of our faith, we have everything that we need to endure. I recently just finished a book, a pretty lengthy book, but at the end it asks a question that I think that we should all ask ourselves.

[ 28 : 16 ] We should all contemplate this question. How do you know you will wake up a Christian tomorrow morning? How do you know you're going to wake up a Christian tomorrow morning?

And that question really resonates with me because if we're honest, if the Christian life depended on our own strength, our own determination, our own ability to stay on the course, none of us would make it.

But here's the answer to the question. Here's what the Bible unequivocally teaches. You will wake up a Christian tomorrow because God will keep you.

God keeps His people. Brothers and sisters, that is our hope. Our endurance doesn't rest on us. It rests on Christ's faithfulness to keep His promises.

He's pledged to keep His people. I'm reminded of the passage in Jude verses 24 and 25. It says, Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy.

[ 29 : 29 ] Don't miss that part. With great joy. The Christian life is not about gritting your teeth and grinding our way to the finish line.

Yes, the race is hard. Yes, endurance is required. But God keeps us. And the promise before us, the finish line that awaits us is that we will stand blameless in His presence with great joy.

Not with exhaustion. Not barely making it across the finish line. But with overflowing joy. because Christ has finished the race for us.

So take heart in this. The same God who called you to the starting line will bring you to the finish line. The same Christ who endured the cross for you will present you blameless before the throne of God.

He'll do it with great joy. So here's what I want to leave you with. Here's the application this morning. Run. Not in your own strength but in His.

[ 30 : 42 ] Run. Not for your glory but for His glory. Run. With the assurance that the one who began a good work in you will bring it to the day of completion at the day of Christ Jesus.

And that's exactly what Paul says in Philippians 3. He says, Not that I've already obtained this or I'm already perfect but listen to this. I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me His own.

Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul knew he hadn't reached the finish line yet but he pressed on with endurance. Eyes fixed on the prize Christ Jesus.

Then he says, Our citizenship is found in heaven where we will await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. that's the promise before us.

[ 31 : 47 ] That's the finish line. That's why we run with endurance because Christ has already secured our place and God Himself will bring us home with great joy.

So we joyfully run with purpose and endurance strengthened by the Lord pressing on with expectant hearts for the glory to come.

Would you pray with me this morning? Father, we thank you for this morning that you've given us and Lord, we've heard the challenge this morning to run the race.

God, and it's not up to us to muster up enough good things or good works so that we can run. God, help us to find our strength in you.

God, that you give us everything we need to run with endurance. But Lord, I also pray that this wouldn't make us passive, Lord, but we would see this as a command and a challenge to run with endurance the race that's set before us.

[ 33 : 03 ] God, we love you so much because you loved us. You proved it by sending your son Jesus to die on the cross to live a life that we couldn't and to die the death that we deserve.

God, we thank you for that. I pray this morning, God, if there's anybody here that hasn't accepted you, Lord, I pray that today would be the day of salvation. Lord, that they would make the decision to follow you, to trust you fully.

God, we will give you the glory for it. we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Would you please stand and turn to hymn number 230, 230, The Old Word.