

Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, ² keeping our eyes on Jesus,^[a] the pioneer and perfecter^[b] of our faith. For the joy that lay before him,^[c] he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Fatherly Discipline

³ For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you won't grow weary and give up. ⁴ In struggling against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons:

My son, do not take the Lord's discipline lightly or lose heart when you are reproved by him,

⁶ for the Lord disciplines the one he loves and punishes every son he receives.^[d]

⁷ Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? ⁸ But if you are without discipline—which all receive^[e]—then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we had human fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn't we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time based on what seemed good to them, but he does it for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

¹² Therefore, strengthen your tired hands and weakened knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated^[f] but healed instead.

Consider Jesus

Run. I don't know about you but that's getting harder to do. I used to be a runner and in some ways still am. I'm thankful our theme isn't Run rather, "Consider Jesus." Many see running as an exercise in futility. Others see it as a fun activity. And so, some run out of necessity or even fear being chased and others for fun. My goal is to at least be faster than the slowest person.

Although the author of Hebrews uses the imagery of a track and field event to illustrate the race of life, he does not intend for us to run. But yes, metaphorically we are all running in a race. This race starts at conception and it ends with death. For some it's a marathon and for others it is a sprint. For some there are hurdles and the race lives up to the Greek AGWN – which is where we get our English word: agony. No matter the race, the time, the position, the results are the same: that is if you run.

But the Hebrews were stopping, dropping out of the race. They were going back home. The encouragement for them and us is to: consider Jesus. Last week we went bird watching and gardening. This week we see Jesus' run. And we see Jesus as more than just example to follow, which he is, but more important is that he is our savior. The writer urges us to see him and his endurance as well as the great cloud of witnesses which still point us to him.

Let's consider the author and perfecter of faith. He made this race. He is the author, the trailblazer. He is the one who set the trail before us. He led the way and we follow. But not everyone takes the same path through life. Chapter 11 has a list of impressive runners. They are the heroes of faith and the path they followed by faith but none of them followed the same course. Noah built an ark in the middle of an unbelieving world. Abraham was called to go to a country not his own. Sarah gave birth in her old age. It's written of her, she *received power to conceive offspring, even though she was past the age, since she considered that the one who had promised was faithful*. This may not have been the path they chose but it is the path set before them. And they ran.

That's where our lesson picks up. *Therefore*, and this is not the normal word for therefore. This is a combination of three other words. It's emphatic. "*Since we are surrounded by such a large cloud of witnesses... let's run!*" He speaks of a cloud of witnesses. A cloud was the way God manifested himself among his people but here it sounds more like a great crowd of friends cheering us on. The race is about to start and the runners are to, "*Lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us*. This sin isn't anything in specific but all sin that impedes progress in the race. Instead

they are to strip off anything that gets in the way. This is what runners in the Roman world would do before the race. “*Let us run win endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus.*”

That’s where the Hebrews were at. The race was long. The very nature of this race requires endurance and patience. It was not an easy run for them. The the devil whispered in their ear, “There’s an easier way. Just go back to the OT rites and rituals, fall under the safety of a legal religion. Go back to Judaism.” There is a way that seems right to man but that way ends in death. But that way leads to So they were encouraged, “*Have you forgotten the encouragement that addresses you as sons?*” we see him encouraging them with the fact that they are sons. The writer to the Hebrews points them to the cloud, to Jesus, as well as to their status before God. They had a habit of not gathering together. They had not been encouraging one another. They were running for themselves. They were not acting as sons, rather they were losing heart, hope because of the hard times that were coming.

The temptation is the same for us. In our individualistic culture we don’t need anyone. But your brothers and sisters in Christ aren’t just anyone. They’re the ones God placed alongside you in your race. And yes, running is easier when you have someone to suffer with. It’s easier to run fast and push yourself when a crowd is cheering you on. We have such a great cloud of witnesses who still speak to us. Chapter 11 says, “*The Abel still speaks through his faith.*” Many others still call out warning, encouraging, and comforting. We have a great cloud of witnesses, something the Old Testament prophets and apostles did not (we have them). Think of your teachers, mothers, fathers, pastors, or friends that you have walked with through this world. They’re still here in some cases.

But we have the same voice tempting us to take a short cut, to run alone; you’re faster on your own anyhow. But you’ll be disqualified for calling an Uber to the finish line. You can’t cut through the infield. You can’t choose your own course. There is a chance that you will get lost. You may be faster than others but you still shouldn’t go alone because exhaustion and injury can bring you down. It’s dangerous to go alone. Moreover God has called us together as the body of Christ. He has placed us together in this race. Chapter 12 turns to the third person plural. “*Since we. Let us.*” The author places himself in the race right next to them. But when a member is missing, an ankle is turned you limp along. When one part suffers the whole body suffers.

Why do we limp? Many people have dropped out of the race. We don’t like what scripture says. We often place my culture, my thoughts, above God. We think our race is different and therefore can lay aside certain commands such as roles of men and women, marriage and sex only within the confines of marriage, and even one that is common to us all: we neglect the cool refreshing waters of Christ’s body and blood. We neglect the assembly of the saints and their encouragement. In doing so we focus not on Jesus but my own race. That’s where we go off track. It’s not our race. It’s not our effort. It’s not our work that wins us anything. To pretend it does means we are children, just not God’s children. We are illegitimate and do not deserve to be called his child.

But God has done something about our sin. He has called us by his gospel. And there in Proverbs as well as repeated in Hebrews *he accepts us*. We are sinners who are forgiven and connected to that great cloud. They had their moments. They conquered giants, built an ark, rescued spies but they also had moments when they were described as drunkards and liars, murderers and adulterers. These Old Testament saints aren’t perfect examples to be imitated. They aren’t pointing to themselves they’re pointing us urging us on to Consider Jesus.

Consider Jesus. Fix your eyes on Jesus. This isn’t the same word as last week. This one has more to do with using logic and it means to reason with careful deliberation. Look at the race Jesus ran for you. Jesus’ race went through a river, where he was baptized and proclaimed the Son of God, there he took on the sins of the world. His race took a turn through the wilderness where it got hot. There was no friendly crowd cheering him on. They’re hostile. It must have felt like a wrong turn as he left the garden sweating profusely to enter a kangaroo court, take

up a cross, and enter a tomb. But his race didn't end there. He sat down at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

And now he rules the world for the good of his church, for the good of you. Why did he endure all of this opposition? Why did he endure the shame of the cross? It was for *the joy set before him*. It was for his church. It was for you. Out of love for you he endured the cross despising its shame. That means he didn't care what other people thought of him. He didn't care that it was the most shameful way of death. He endured it for you, for the joy set before him. He then takes up his rule and reigns, disciplining us for our good. Yeah it hurts. it hurts to run laps. It hurts to train one's body and make it mine. But we discipline our emotions. We hear his word.

There in his Word, Jesus points us to his people. If we consider Jesus, then consider his church. There is Stephen the guy who preached his first, best, and last sermon all at once before he was killed. There is Polycarp who was captured and called on to curse Christ and so save your life, to which he responded, "I have served him eighty-six years and he has never done me any injury." (Polycarp 9:1-3). He was then burned at the stake and pierced through the heart. St. Nicolaus before he was commercialized into Santa Claus was a defender of the faith. There is Martin Luther who would have died for the truth that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, as revealed in scripture alone. There is Corrie ten Boom who helped many escape the Holocaust. Dietrich Bonhoeffer who returned to Germany during the war to preach Christ crucified... as well as to make an assassination attempt on an unpopular leader. Today Hatun Tash continues to defend the faith by openly and publicly criticizing Islam. There are so many saints both triumphant and still striving That is the first great encouragement is that we are not alone.

Together they point to Jesus This is the second great encouragement. Why the name Jesus? It reminds us of his humanity. Christ was his position as the Messiah. But here we see the one who humbled himself to be born of a virgin. He took up a poor impoverished life, he suffered in every way we do and more, but he was without sin so that we might have a perfect substitute. *He is the author and perfecter of our faith*.

He has not left us alone. But he disciplines us as sons. "*My son, do not take the Lord's discipline lightly or lose heart when you are reprovved by him.*" Don't lose courage when the race is agonizing. God loves you. *Endure suffering. For if you were not disciplined by him, you would be illegitimate sons.* I have no right to discipline other people's children, but my own children are a different story. If I try to do what is best for them, and I'm sinful, how much more won't the sinless son of God do what is best for us. It's not enjoyable. It's not fun being chased by the coach another lap, but it bears fruit: perseverance, character, hope (Romans 5:4). This hope will not disappoint us. It is the sure and certain hope of eternal life. Peace with God.

It strengthens hands and weak knees. It straightens paths for your feet as well as for *the lame so that they will not be turned away but healed instead*. Consider Jesus. Don't look inside for inspiration. Don't look at others. Don't even look to your circumstances of life. Hear his call in baptism, "You are my son, my daughter." There you entered this great cloud. Hear his words through his called servant, "I forgive you all your sins." Take and eat his body and his blood for the forgiveness of sins. Then having been trained, disciplined, it produces a harvest of righteousness. Where there is faith, works follow.

Maybe you'll run. Maybe you won't. But you don't want to miss this race that ends in Jesus' return or death. Either way we know how Jesus will greet us, "Well done, good and faithful." Amen.