

Fixing Your Eyes - Hebrews 12-1-2

by Anthony Mathenia

We need endurance to receive what was promised and are to fix our eyes on Jesus as we run the Christian life.

Duration: 44:33

Scripture: Hebrews 4:15, Hebrews 10:36, Hebrews 12:1-3, Hebrews 12:11

Topics: "Christian Perseverance", "Faith Endurance"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of persevering in the Christian race, highlighting the need for endurance, laying aside weights and sins, and fixing our eyes on Jesus as the ultimate example and finisher of our faith. The message stresses the necessity of making progress in Christ-likeness, running the course set by Christ, and persevering to the end with a regulated effort.

Transcript

Well, this was an issue even during the early days of Christianity, and one of the particular reasons that this letter was written was to deal with this issue. Now, it's been some weeks since we were at the end of chapter 10 with that great warning, but really, the end of chapter 10, all of 11, and opening up here in verse 12, is still responding to this warning that we find at the end of chapter 10. And there's not going to be anything else before next week, which is another warning next week, but we've just continued unfolding this through the big parenthetical statement there with the examples of faith in the Old Testament saints in chapter 11.

Chapter 10, verse 36, the writer says, you have need of endurance. Or in verse 39, we're not of those who shrink back, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. We need perseverance.

We need endurance for this race. And then chapter 11, as I mentioned, there's this plethora of examples of people who trusted God fully all the way to the point of their death, yet still, as we noted last week at the end of chapter 11, all of these Old Testament saints who had gone on before, they gained approval from God as a result of their faith, yet they did not receive what was promised. They didn't receive the promise.

They hoped and promised their whole life all the way to the end, but didn't receive the promise in the end. That has to affect us at least to the degree of asking the question, why not? Why didn't they? Verse 40 of chapter 11 tells us why, because God had provided something better for us. They had not been perfected at the time of their death.

They hadn't received the promise, and they still haven't. They've not yet been perfected because something better is promised for us. It's promised for them too, but the emphasis here in this text is that something better is promised for you and for me.

That's what the writer is attempting to stir in us. That's the emphasis. We need endurance, chapter 10, 36.

Remember, we need endurance in order to receive what was promised. The only other alternative to having endurance and finishing the race is shrinking back to destruction. That's the only other alternative that's offered here.

There's no middle ground. There's no just floating in limbo or plateauing. We're either making progress in the Christian faith all the way to the end and receiving what was promised, or we're tumbling down in the other direction marked out for destruction.

It's press on to completion in Christ or shrink back to perdition. And the writer's goal here is clear, that we would press on, that we would run in a way in which to win, not slowing down, not pulling up short, not looking to cut corners at every stage of the race. I mean, that's the whole thrust of the text this morning.

We're looking at chapter 12, verses 1 and 2, primarily this morning. Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also 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 before him, pardon, 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.

The thrust is this, let us run, and not just any way that we want, but with endurance, and not any course we want, but the race that has been set before us. Since we have this great cloud of witnesses, this huge motivation that the writer has heaped up here in what's recorded for us as chapter 11, gathered all of this together and thrown it at us and says, now here, this great cloud of witnesses, all of this motivation, take advantage of this incentive and run. It's so much more motivation and incentive than merely this.

Since you have a pair of running shoes, why don't you run? Or since there's a trail, why not take off on it and see? It's much more specific than that. It's this. Since ultimate and eternal perfection awaits you, and not only you, but every child of God for all time, because this is what's at stake, this is what's on the table, you should run.

When was the last time that you considered that your Christian life, your progress in the Christian life, how you respond to the things that come at you in life, are uniquely linked to the final perfection of Noah and Abraham? And have you ever thought about that as a child of God, Moses will not be made complete apart from you? That's what the writer is saying here. He's using this as great incentive for us. Now, it's true, we like to think about our salvation as an individual thing, and in some measure it is an individual thing, but it's so much more than that.

So much more, we might say, agreeing with the writer of Hebrews here, that salvation is of cosmic proportions, because final, ultimate salvation will not happen until Christ stands and comes and consummates his kingdom and we receive our glorified bodies. That's true for every saint that's ever lived. That's what the writer is attempting to do here, and successfully does.

He explains the magnitude of salvation by faith, saying simply this, it's not just about you. It's about every child of God who has ever lived or ever will live, being made complete and perfect in Christ at the

all-glorious consummation of his kingdom. This race, this Christian race, this life that you've been given to live is so important.

So important that what is offered here from the writer is nothing but motivation and incentive. All he's doing is trying to light a fire behind us and put a carrot in front of us, if you will. In any way possible, trying to encourage us to move on and not to sit still, and not to lose heart, and not to be distracted.

I mean, do you not think that the writer knows the tendencies in his own heart? He's experienced it. Day after day, probably. He knows what it's like to wake up with a cool heart.

He knows what it's like to fall into sin, but he's also wonderfully aware of the glorious promises that are ours in Christ. And that's what he's doing. Throughout the entire letter, that's all he's done, is put up one glorious picture of the Son of God after the next while giving these great signposts of warning so we don't get off the track, stirring us on with pictures of Jesus.

Now, because this is the writer's conviction and he feels so strongly about this race that we ought to run and run well, there are several encouragements listed here in just these two verses. Now, Hebrews 12, verses 1 and 2, is probably the most well-known, most popular, most famous, however you want to say it, verses in the book of Hebrews, and probably in the top 5 or 10 in the entire Scriptures. So preaching on a passage like this isn't the greatest fun only because it's so familiar.

I mean, has it not crossed your mind already this morning like it has mine? I've heard a dozen sermons on that text. That's one of those that preachers call sugar sticks that they just pull out at the last minute, and you can talk through it. It's just clearly laid out for us.

Okay, we have a cloud of witnesses to encourage us. We're supposed to lay aside weights and sins. We're supposed to fix our eyes on Jesus because he's already run the course.

He's our leader in this, not just our leader or our pioneer, but he's the perfecter and the finisher. And he's seated now at God's right hand, interceding to help us along the way. I mean, it just breaks down really easy, and we're all familiar with this text.

But I do want to preach it. I want to stand back and hope that we can benefit from it and look at the specifics that are here. I mean, this cloud of witnesses.

We mentioned this a little bit last week, but I think it's very important for us to understand that this cloud of witnesses is not some grand stand of dead folks that are sitting around cheering us on at every corner of our life. I've heard that many times, and I'm sure you have too. I mean, think about it from this angle.

Do you think that watching your life over this past week could be considered heaven for anybody? It wouldn't be true for me. If heaven were watching our lives, it would cease to be heaven. Now, I know that this rubs that sentimental spot in some of us the wrong way, but surely we can agree that it's a pretty poor prize at the end of this life to enter heaven only to be preoccupied with earth again.

I mean, this is what we're trying to escape. We want our preoccupation to be with Him, with Christ. So this cloud of witnesses, we might say, concerning them, they are not witnessing us.

They are witnesses for us. They are not looking at us. They are for us to look at.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not having some three-generation party in the lower level of the arena cheering us on at each turn, not saying, We did it. So can you. Come on, Susie.

Come on, Johnny. Keep going. That's not this cloud of witnesses, not in any major sense at all.

These Old Testament saints that are listed throughout chapter 11 and all the saints, really, throughout the Bible and throughout time serve as witnesses for us. We see them. We see their lives.

We see their feats in the midst of difficult situations. And we don't look up to find them sitting in the grand stand of heaven. That would do no good to see them there.

We don't look back to see them over our shoulders in the history of the past. They aren't there. That would do no good.

We look down, down to see the path that they have trod, and we see their footprints on the pages of the Scriptures. I mean, that's where we benefit. We see it in Hebrews 11.

We can go to the Old Testament and read each and every one of their stories. And we see their clear path laid before us. We see their lives.

And they serve, as a result, as witnesses to true faith. But we must be careful that when we look at them, that we see them as windows. When we gaze at them, we must see through them, if you will, to the one that they were looking at as they ran the race, as they were seeing Jesus.

I mean, don't you feel that as you roll through chapter 11? Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Samson, Barak, Rahab, all of these Old Testament saints. And then it culminates with this at the beginning of chapter 12, looking unto Jesus. Yes, there's a great lot of witnesses for us to look at and learn from, but ultimately, the one to which we look is Christ Himself.

The way the writer says it is fixing our eyes on Him, considering Him so that we will not grow weary and lose heart. I mean, we could say that it's a bit odd that all of these examples, one after the next, and then at the end of it, the writer's saying, ha, don't look at any of them. You know, I just threw them out there for fun.

You ought to be looking at Jesus. And it's true that mainly we ought to be looking at Jesus, but these examples serve as great helps too. But Christ ultimately is the best example.

And the writer could have said, and left out this parenthetical statement of chapter 11, he could have just said, you need endurance. The way to get endurance is to look to Christ and run the race. He could have said that, and that would have been sufficient in and of itself.

But don't you find it helpful? I mean, if you take the time to notice this cloud of witnesses here, I mean, don't you find it wonderfully helpful in times of loneliness? I mean, have you ever battled loneliness, feeling like you're all alone in your family, or at your job, or in your class, among your classmates? I mean, in the midst of loneliness, can you not look at Noah, who for a hundred years was alone in a task that God had given him, for a hundred years was preaching a message that no one listened to, for a hundred years was ridiculed by the entire village, a hundred years of aloneness, no one understanding him, no one agreeing with him, yet by faith he ran the race that was set out for him. Or have you ever lost out in a business deal as a result of following Christ? Have you ever given up social status because of your willingness to follow

Christ? Have you ever lost security because of following Christ? Can you not look back then at Moses, who gave up all of the treasures of Egypt and the pleasures of being somebody, second in command, possibly to be the next Pharaoh, giving up the ease of life, having everything delivered on a silver platter, every comfort and security that the world had to offer in that day? Can you not look at Moses and see that by faith he left it all to follow God? Or have you ever had to leave behind family or a livelihood or been called to leave everything that was familiar to you? Can you not look back and look at Abraham, who left it all, gave it all up to follow Jesus and gained Christ? Or do you struggle with greed or lust? Can you not look at David and Rahab and see the path that they have trod? Is self-confidence continuing to rise up in you? You can look at New Testament saints and benefit from this. You remember Peter, bold Peter, sitting there, moments before the cross? Satan's asked me to sift you like wheat, Peter.

And Peter, in his boldness, I'll never leave you. I'll follow you all the way to death. Does self-confidence rise up in you like that sometimes? And you find yourself falling on your face again, unable to do it in your own sufficiency? Look at Peter.

God restored Peter. God restored David. God restored Rahab.

God rescued Abraham and Moses and Noah. In this race of the Christian life that all who belong to God have been called to run, the first help offered here is this. You are not alone.

You're surrounded by saints of old. And not only saints of old, but saints of today. It's as if the writer is saying here, pay extremely careful and close attention to the paths, those paths of other saints that lead to Jesus.

Now, about the race itself, we should point out a few things. First, this, that it's mentioned as a race, not a leisurely stroll or a Sunday afternoon walk. What do you do in races? You run.

I can see the runners saying, run. And those who don't run are saying, watch. If you belong to God, you're called to run this race.

There's nothing passive about it, nothing. And if you're a runner, you know that there's nothing passive about running in a race. Effort is required, real effort.

It's true, salvation is by grace, but that doesn't nullify the responsibility and the expectation to run. Because when grace and faith take hold of an individual, that individual does not remain passive. They don't.

The grace and faith work in and through them, and it produces action, not mere leisurely journeys. Races are run with intentionality, and the Christian life here is a race. There's all kinds of metaphors given to the Christian life throughout Scripture, but a race must be the most helpful.

It's a race. It's not theoretical, theological talk. It's not abstract religious ideas.

It's not past emotional experiences. It's more than these things. Those things can be good, but that's not the race that the writer of Hebrews is talking about.

He's talking about a race that is meant to be run and not half-hearted running, not fair weather running, not running when it's 65 and cool with a breeze out of the north, or not bad weather running. Some people run the Christian life only during bad weather. You know what I mean? When circumstances get tough, you follow those silly, dumb bumper stickers that say things like, when all else fails, read the instructions.

You know, that kind of ridiculous attitude. Have you not found yourself following that pattern in your life? Attempting to follow Christ at a much closer rate or a better pace when things get difficult? That's not the kind of race that we're called to run. Not fair weather running, not bad weather running, not easy course running, not running the courses that are only downhill or with great scenery.

It's day after day, lacing up your shoes and putting one foot in front of the other and following Jesus. That's the life that the believer's called to. Now, not only is it a race that requires effort, but it's a race that is intended to be run in a regulated fashion.

You can't just set out on your merry way going in any direction at any pace that you want. The Christian life, you've heard said before, is a lot less like a sprint and more like a marathon. Primarily, it has this distinction.

There is a clearly marked direction. Now, if we were going to all go out and run either a short 5K or a full marathon, we would all want to go in the right direction the entire time and not waste any time running in circles or going in the wrong direction or taking wrong turns. Why not be that serious about the Christian life? Why not make every step a step in the right direction towards Christlikeness? The race that has been laid before us is a clearly marked race.

You know, it's possible to do a lot of running and never, ever cross the starting line. I mean, I've run in some races where thousands of people were there, and when you line up for a very large race with lots of people like that, you line up according to your speed. That puts me not in the front, but in the back where the slow people are.

And sometimes 15, 20, I've been in races large enough that it was 45 minutes after the starting time before I ever got to the starting line. Now, you can cover a lot of ground. You're not running all that time.

You're walking until you get to the starting line, but that's a lot of effort, a lot of energy, a lot of steps in front of each other before you ever get there, and the timer hasn't even begun yet until you get to the starting line. It's possible for us to do this in the Christian life, or the presumed Christian life. Lots of people around in our culture, lots of busyness, running in circles, making no progress, no strides in the Christian faith.

Effort's not the only requirement in this race. It's essential, but the effort must be regulated or expended in the correct manner. You must spend your effort in the right way, running the right race.

It's possible for you to run with all your might, for you to run with all sincerity that you can muster up, to run with great sacrifice while ignoring the race or the course that Christ has laid. We cannot pick our own course in the Christian life like at the beginning of a video game. I think today I'll run the snowy course, or today I'll run along the beach.

It's not that way. We run the course that Christ has set before us, the writer of Hebrews says. He's determined the course.

He's determined how we live. He's determined how we raise our children. He's determined how we function in our workplace.

He's determined how we act in the classroom. He's determined how we order our church service, how we respond to Him in worship. We don't pick our own course, which ought to cause us to ask a simple question.

The race that you claim to have been running, are you running a custom-designed course? Or are you running the course that Christ has laid? Are you running a course that's fashioned after your own liking? That is an unacceptable alternative. Completely unacceptable. Ignorance of the course that God has designed for us is just as dangerous as outright and open rebellion against the one who designed the course.

Trying hard is not enough. Meaning well is insufficient. If you don't know what Christ expects regarding home life, thought life, and your desires and your relationships, if you don't know the course that God has laid out for you, you will not run it.

You're not just going to happen to show up on race day, at the right race, at the right time, in racing gear. It doesn't happen. Effort is required because it's a race.

Regulation is required because the course is determined by Christ in the Scriptures. We don't determine our own course or even the manner in which we run. But not only that, there's progress expected.

I mean, this is not a wanna-type running where everyone is a winner, where you don't keep score. This is serious and everyone is expected to finish. And everyone who finishes does get a prize.

So I guess we could say it's like upwards running or a wanna-running, however you want to say it. Everyone does get a prize. Progress is expected in the Christian race.

You have to make progress forward. It's true that running on a treadmill will burn just as many calories as running on the trail, but it gets you nowhere. When you end, you may be sweaty, you may have burned a couple thousand calories, but you're in the same place you started, just tired.

Running in place, it may get your heart rate up. It may be healthy, but it takes you nowhere. Progress is expected in the Christian life.

The Christian race is headed somewhere. Back at the end of chapter 10, verse 35 and 36, don't throw away your confidence. It has a great reward.

That's where it's headed, to the reward. Or verse 36, so that you may receive what is promised. That's the direction that we must be headed.

So let's ask ourselves, how about your life? How about the race that God has given you to run? Are you progressing? Are you making obvious progress in Christ-likeness compared with a year ago or even six months ago? I mean, there are some of you specifically that if we sat down, just the two of us, I think you would have to admit that you have not made a lot of progress over the past year or six months. Now notice the question is, are you progressing in Christ-likeness? Not do you know more stuff. Not can you dot the i's and cross the t's any better than you could last year concerning theological things, but are you being conformed to Him? Are you being made like Him? Are you growing in love to Christ? Are you growing in knowledge Him, not merely facts about Him, but knowing who He really is, producing obedience in your life, hoping only in Him in all things? Are you steadily moving forward, living on the realities that are revealed concerning Christ Jesus, believing what God has said at every point in His Word and making room in your life to live on the truth as it is revealed in Jesus? Now this regulated, progressive effort is one that must persevere all the way to the end.

Perseverance is a must. If you set out to run, let's say a 5K, not even a marathon, and you run 4.9, you don't get the prize. They don't give out the medals at the starting line.

It's at the finish line. You must finish. Perseverance.

We've lost any type of seriousness concerning perseverance in the Christian life in our day. We've lost it to unhelpful phrases like this, once saved, always saved. Now, do we believe this? Yes, but as I've said before, it's an absolutely terrible way to state it.

The issue is perseverance. Yes, once God has worked in someone, they will run all the way to the end. It's guaranteed.

The temptation to slow down or even stop grows as we continue to exert more and more energy moving forward along this regulated course. And the writer's aware of this. He's aware of the dangers.

That's why he writes saying, you need endurance. And here, he's finally, after all of the great examples in chapter 11 and explaining the need that we have, he gets to the how or the how to run this race. This is how you run it, with endurance.

And then he lays out some specifics here that are very clear. First, he lays some out in the negative, and then he lays a few out in the positive. And these are the more familiar parts of this passage.

Lay aside weights or encumbrances, and lay aside sin. Now, the imagery here is so easy for us to understand. I mean, that's why I find that the race metaphor is so helpful for the Christian life, because we can understand this wonderfully.

I mean, not everyone in here runs, but I would guess that everyone in here who understands the English that I'm speaking has seen runners, at least wannabe runners. Now, let's imagine two runners. We can imagine them on the bridge out here.

Traffic is stopped, there's going to be a race, and there are two runners that are equal in their ability to run, in their speed, in their fitness. And one of them's dressed in what we would call traditional running gear, shorts, t-shirt, running shoes. And there's one in overalls, and mud boots, and a big cowboy hat.

Okay? Who's your money on? Common sense plays a role here, doesn't it? I mean, if fitness is equal, obviously, there's less to impede the progress in the one who's wearing running gear. But when it comes to this being spiritually applied, this spiritual baggage that we're all so guilty of carrying all too often, it's not as easy to notice. I mean, when we see these two individuals in our mind, it's clear.

Oh, the one that's carrying less baggage, the one without the weight, the one that isn't being encumbered. I mean, we would never consider seriously competing in a race without first taking into account what we would wear, what we would carry with us, or not carry. You know, in the large marathons, you may have seen it on TV, people come dressed up as all kinds of things, as large costumes.

Those people aren't there to win, okay? They're there to be seen. They would never consider wearing that if they wanted to win. Weight in a real race is so crucial that running shoes, even for amateurs like us, assuming you're an amateur, are sold by the ounce.

I mean, you can look at running shoes in the stores and it tells exactly how much they weigh. Why? Because for serious runners, this matters. For someone who's going over 26 miles carrying ounces,

matters.

Don't you think it should be the same for serious-minded Christians? That we should give more attention to the ounce-size weights that are weighing us down throughout life? Even the seemingly small ounce-size weights must be laid aside. The ounce-size sins must be laid aside if we're going to make any real strides in Christlikeness. Now, there's two different things that the author says here that we ought to lay aside.

Encumbrances, or your translation may say weights, and sin. Now, these weights are not sin, but they oftentimes lead to sin. They may not be sins in and of themselves, but they produce an indifference in us.

They may not be sin, but they often become sinful. They can be good things, gifts even from God that end up becoming weights. Things like relationships, or activities, hobbies, leisures, really any good thing done to such an excess that it prevents us from seeking Christ.

They become an excess and they take the wrong place in our heart, and the writer here says lay them down. Or we might say hold them with an open hand, not holding too tightly to them. But not only the encumbrances and the weights, but the sin, this sin that easily entangles us.

It's not just the good things that need to be laid aside for the running of this race, but sin too, according to the writer, must be done away with. This sin that entangles us. You remember the two runners? The one in overall mud boots and a cowboy hat? Okay, now let's put a trench coat on him.

Is that going to help him at all? No, it's going to entangle him up, impede the progress. His knees are going to be hitted, his feet even may get caught up in it. He's weighed down already with cumbersome clothing and clunky shoes, but this long flowing coat is going to get tangled up and impede his progress to an even larger degree.

Now, these sins that easily entangle, the wording there makes clear, these aren't massive sins. They're not the big, easily noticeable sins in our lives. Those aren't the ones that easily trip us up.

It's the small ones. Seemingly small, or small in quotes. The ones that you're quickly prone to.

The besetting sins. Maybe because of your temperament, or because of your environment at work or at home, or in the classroom. It's important for us to take great care in order that we're not under some sort of illusion here concerning this race that we think that it's a small thing.

I mean, this isn't one day and going out and running for a couple of hours. This is our entire lives being given to laying us out everything that may trip us up and keep us from finishing. And not just finishing, but finishing well.

That's why the writer says, consider all of these who have gone on before you. Look at the path. They're waiting for you.

Why would you dream of coming to the starting line or stopping at a water break and grabbing extra baggage? Why? Lay aside the weights and the sins. That's the first thing that the writer says that we must do. And then the second thing, the positive.

Simply look to Jesus. 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.

Looking at Jesus.

Now, not just looking at Him in some vague, obscure way, but let's consider, we're talking about a race, we're talking about a path that these Old Testament saints have run and the one that we're expected to run. Let's consider the path of Christ. Look at the race He ran.

Look at where it started. In eternity past. In great worship within the triune God.

He left that. He left heaven in His path to come to earth. He left limitless power in order to be limited in His humanity or by His humanity.

He left knowing all things to the point of having to learn wisdom and obedience. He left sinlessness to become sin for us. From being worshipped by everyone and everything around Him to being ridiculed and deserted even by His closest friends.

All of fallen humanity against Him. The opposition of the Jews. The indifference of the Romans.

The devil and all his hosts against Him. Yet He ran the course. He ran the course even through the wrath of an almighty God.

He ran the course. He trekked on. This Jesus, the writer of Hebrews says, look to Him, He's the captain of your salvation.

He's the pioneer of your faith. He's the perfecter of your faith. He's the object of your faith.

The finisher of your faith. This Jesus endeared the cross with no complaining. No murmuring.

Peter tells us He didn't revile in return. Despising the shame along the way or thinking lightly of it. He didn't even regard it really.

Why not? Because of the joy that was set before Him. Because of the reward. Because of the promise.

Because He knew of the consummate glory that would come as a result of Him finishing the race. And He sat down. This is the fourth time throughout this letter that the writer has referred to this.

Initially in the opening statements, two other times and then now. He sat down having finished the race course that the Father chartered for Him. He sat down to rule from on high.

To reign from there. But He didn't sit to remain seated forever. He is the pioneer.

He is the captain. He is the author. Yes, but He's also, as the writer says here, the finisher or the perfecter.

And one glorious day He will rise again from that seat and He will come and He will roll it all up and finish the work that He came to do. Consummating the kingdom that He inaugurated saying, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.

And not just fixing our eyes on Him, but verse 3, considering Him, who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself so that you will grow weary, will not grow weary, pardon, nor lose heart. Now, the points this morning have been all scattered and they weren't alliterated, nor did they rhyme, but I have connected them into one statement so that you might remember them. This is the expectation for the Christian, a persevering, regulated effort that is progressing.

We must persevere in this regulated, effort-exerting race that makes progress in Christlikeness. That's the expectation before us. Laying aside every encumbrance and every entangling sin, that's how not to run.

Don't run with all the extra weights of life. Don't run with the little sins that weigh you down and keep you from making any real progress. And fix your eyes on Jesus.

This is how to do it. Not being consumed with all the temporal circumstances around you, but lifting your head up and putting your eyes on Him who's already run the race. To open the service today, we looked at Hebrews 4. We have a great high priest, one that can sympathize with us.

How? Because he ran the course. He was tempted in every way. He's walked these dirty roads of earth.

In every way, he was tempted. Yet, he did it without sin. He can sympathize with our weaknesses.

Now, in closing, I want to point out a few spiritual impossibilities in talking about this race, especially in light of the culture that we live in, or the Christianity in the culture that we live in. It is an absolute spiritual impossibility to be a Christian and not to run. It's an impossibility.

If you are not running, you are not a Christian. It is a spiritual impossibility to be a Christian and not to finish. If you don't finish, you never started.

You're running an imaginary course, not the one that Christ has set out for you. It's a spiritual impossibility to be a Christian and to finish clinging to weights and sins. If you're hanging on to weights, if you're hanging on to sin, drop them or you prove yourself an unfit runner, again, running a race of your own imagination.

It's a spiritual impossibility to be a Christian and not to continuously look to the person and work of Jesus Christ as your all in all. You cannot look to anything else, to anyone else. No doctrine, no church, no person, no hero, no day, no experience, nothing, no understanding, no wisdom, nothing but Him and His work on your behalf.

So let's ask a few questions in closing. The obvious question is this. How are you running? Which leads to another obvious question.

Are you running? Have you crossed the starting line yet? Are you still doing jumping jacks over in the corner, waiting to cross? Really busy? You've got your heart rate up. You're tired, assuming that you're serving the Lord. You haven't really begun the race of looking unto Him and laying aside everything that you're clinging to in this life.

If you assume that you are running, are you progressing? Are you making real progress? Not in knowing facts about God, not in learning new things or new doctrines or truths, but are you progressing in Christ-likeness, growing in love to Him, being conformed to the image of Jesus? Have you found some easy downhill path just to fit in that has great scenery to enjoy the things of life? Have you found a treadmill in the corner of an air-conditioned room, running in a controlled environment, controlling the lot that God gives you, if you will, with everything in you, manipulating your circumstances? Or are you running the course that Christ has set for you? The expectation is clear from the writer of Hebrews. As believers, as children of God, we must be exerting great effort and making real progress, persevering in the Christian life. It's the only hope for us, and the only way we'll do it is by responding to these simple encouragements, dropping the weights, being done with the sin, and keeping our eyes on Jesus.

May God help us to do so. As we close today, we want to sing, and really it can be a prayer that God would help us to do this very thing. May the mind of Christ, my Savior.

Let's pray together before we sing. God, we thank you for the Scriptures. We pray that you would give us grace to know them and to do them.

God, we pray for unction and help from on high to allow your Word to sink deep into our hearts, so deep actually that it produces effects in our lives. We are so needy, God. We need you to help us, especially with familiar passages like this, God.

We can think about the race, and we can imagine ourselves running a race. But God, to get up in the morning and lace up our shoes, or to open up the Scriptures, and to attempt to walk with you, and to know you, and to commune with you in all that we do and say. God, we need help.

We pray that you would grant us all that we need in the person of Christ, by the work of your Spirit in and through us. Glorify yourself, we pray. Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/yxNnXB2eg4Y.mp4>

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