

## Running with Perseverance - Sunday, February 1, 2026

One of my favourite visuals that the bible gives for the Christian life is its comparison to a race. I have enjoyed the idea of a race ever since I was younger, and it paints the picture of the Christian life so well in my head. I remember so clearly the first time I tried an orienteering race back in 2012. I was so excited to participate, and I had so much adrenaline built up. I felt like I could take on the world. As time went by, however, that initial adrenaline and excitement and energy wore off with each hill I had to climb, and what was once an easy path felt a bit more laboured to travel. I would get a second wind when I reached a checkpoint, remembering the reasoning behind why I had started in the first place. But the deeper I got into that race, the quicker those bursts of energy would wear off, and what was supposed to only take 3 hours ended up being 4.5.

I remember in that last hour especially how much each step burned. It took everything in me to not give up and to keep moving forward towards the finish line. The pain made me question whether it was really worth it to keep going, or if giving up would be a better option. And such is the reality of the Christian walk. We can start out so strong, on fire for God, but somewhere along the way we are bound to grow weary. Weariness comes in all shapes and sizes: for some it stems from the chaotic and ever darkening world with which we live in (maybe you look at the situations in Nigeria, Iran, the US, or even Canada and feel a sense of hopelessness), for some it's unanswered prayer (you don't understand why God hasn't stepped in to your situation), for others it may be distraction (the things of this world look so promising from the outside), and for others it can even be caused by the church (whether the body as a whole or individuals within). Weariness catches up to us at times, and what was joyous worship at one point slips into quiet fatigue. In a church this size, I wouldn't be surprised if there were some feeling this way right now - tired and weary and wondering if it's really worth it to press on.

That's where Hebrews 12:1-3 have something to say:

Hebrews 12:1-3: "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, **2** 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. **3** Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." PRAY

There's a lot to unpack here so let's jump straight into it

**Point 1: The Bible is full of examples of people who have persevered in their faith.**

The first word of this passage, “therefore”, links us as readers back to what was previously said in chapter 11. Hebrews chapter 11 is an amazing account of people from the Old Testament who persevered in faith. It talks about the stories of Abel, Abraham, Enoch, Noah, Isaac, Moses, the Israelites, and Rahab, as well as name dropping Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Samuel. The writer of Hebrews here wants us to be reminded that we have so many examples in the bible of people who lived out their faith, even in times of intense risk and trial. They act as witnesses to the faithfulness of God, and the joy that can be found in serving Him. The writer says that we are “surrounded” by all of these witnesses to the faith - a term which tells us of the great number of people who have previously ran the race of faith.

That little word “therefore” tells us something so important about when we find ourselves in times of weariness. It tells us when we find ourselves running out of steam in our Christian walk, we need to come back to the word of God. We need to read about all of these examples of people who have been through it in their lives and who have witnessed the goodness that is found in continuing that walk. There’s the example of Noah, who was warned about the destruction of everything around him, the end of the world as he knew it, who faithfully put his head down and worked at building the ark for years. There was Abraham, who was tested by God to sacrifice his own son, who faithfully obeyed God and believed that God was still in control. There was Rahab who betrayed her own people in faith by hiding Israelite spies to keep them safe because of what she had heard about the God of the Israelites.

There is a strong need for the church today to ground itself in scripture - to take studying it seriously. We live in a crazy world, and as humans we are prone to getting off course if we don’t continually come back to God and His word. If you feel weary, let God speak to you through the stories he has inspired people to record in scripture.

**Point 2: The race cannot be run unless we shed the unnecessary weight.** Look at that first verse in chapter 12 again: “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....” The author draws on this imagery of a race to describe the way that we sometimes carry things with us that need to be let go of. In a race, runners try to travel with as little amount of weight as possible so that they can travel more efficiently.

I was surprised by the way that the author worded this sentence when I read it - he says “let us also lay aside every weight, AND sin which clings so closely.” The author is clearly mentioning two different things here, and although they are related in the sense

that both make the race more difficult to run, they aren't the same thing. There's the obvious one, which is sin, and then he talks about these other weights that can hold us back. Let's start with the sin and then we can come back to these other weights.

The author here uses this very impactful image when talking about sin, saying that it clings so closely. I get the image of a child who just won't let go of your leg as you walk around - you'd love to shake them off but they just wrap their arms around you and cling so closely. You could view this like a leech that just attaches itself to you. There are some sins that feel that way, where you know what you're doing is wrong, and you've given it to God a hundred times, but for whatever reason it just seems to cling so tightly onto you. The nature of the sin that the author is referring to is not expressed here, and I think that's because each of us can be found battling with different types of sin at any given point.

As Christians, we need to take sin seriously. All sin. We can't expect to freely run this race with ease while holding on to sin. It can be the cause of weariness, and it has the opposite effect of the life giving presence of God that we desire. The longer we allow sin in our lives, the more it sucks the life out of your walk with Jesus, like that leech sucking the blood out of your leg. It must be dealt with quickly and dramatically. Not to get too graphic, but I get the picture of having to rip the leech off. It might be painful and messy and difficult, but it's better for us in the long term. I remember Pastor Don saying that when it comes to sin, to make a small decision is to make no decision at all.

It's easy to justify a "small sin." We have our rankings of sin from murdering someone all the way down to telling a little lie to the negative thoughts we allow ourselves to think about others. James has something to say about this in James 2:10. Here he is discussing the sin of showing partiality, or favoritism, and he says this: "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it." All sin makes us equally guilty before the Lord, and so all sin must be dealt with in the same, serious manner. Church, we need to fight the cultural trend of individualism. We need to remember that the Christian walk is meant to be done **in community** with others. Find a group of people that can keep you accountable, who can pray over you when you're struggling, who can give you advice and help on how to deal with whatever sin you face. God has gifted us community.

James 5:16 says "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." Don't give sin a foothold in your life. Confess it to someone, have them pray for you, have them check in on you. Your walk should involve other people pouring into you, and you should be doing the same for other people.

Let's talk about these other weights. Because the author separates these other weights from sin, this means that there are other things that, although not sinful, need to be set aside. There are things that are not wrong in of themselves, but hinder us from a deeper spiritual walk. The author again doesn't specify exactly what these weights are, so we are left to contextualize this for ourselves. What in your life might be weighing you down from growing in your relationship with the Lord? I would imagine that for many, distraction plays a big part: busy schedules, the news, sports, our phones - the list could go on forever. For some maybe it's the things you strive towards - a career, the next promotion, the idolatry of comfort. It's important that we examine our lives often for things that, although not inherently wrong by themselves, may be causing extra strain in our race.

**Point 3: Eyes fixed on Jesus.** Hebrews 12:1-2: "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, **2 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." If we are going to run this race with perseverance and endurance at all, it will only be accomplished by keeping our focus in the correct place. When I was running that race back in 2012, I seriously wanted to quit. I had never felt bodily fatigue and exhaustion and pain and hunger like that before, but there was one thing keeping me going. I knew that when I finished the race, there was a glorious food voucher waiting for me, and I would be able to enjoy a nice big hamburger. And as ridiculous as it sounds, that reward of the burger was what partially kept me going.

In the same way, we need to keep our eyes on a goal. Our focus cannot waiver from where we are heading. It's like driving - I hope when you are driving home tonight that you aren't looking all to the side or behind you or 1 foot in front of your car. When we drive, we look straight ahead (or at least we should), focusing on the road we are heading towards. Keeping our eyes on Jesus is a must. If we get distracted by the chaos of the world around us, or by the present circumstances that come our way, we are going to grow weary much quicker. Instead, our eyes need to be fixed on Jesus. It's impossible to look two directions at once, so we must be firm in making Jesus our objective.

It's almost so obvious that we could just skip past it, and I did when I read it, but I think it's worth noting that, as one commentary noted, the target here is Jesus. In order for something to be a true goal, it must be knowable. If you don't know where the finish line is at a race, how in the world are you going to know that the steps you are taking are

actually heading in that direction. We have direct access to our finish line. He is fully God, but has also made himself knowable. We have access through prayer to Him. We can study his characteristics and his heart through the bible. In fact, in these few verses we learn some important things about Jesus.

### **A. The founder**

Jesus is the founder of our faith. Some translations use the word “author” or “pioneer”. It’s interesting that the author chooses this word here considering he just finished reminding us of all the people in the Old Testament who lived out their faith - people who were alive on earth long before Jesus came as a baby. The author here points out something that is woven through the whole bible - that Jesus is the fulfilment of the whole old covenant, and with his story begins the new covenant that we now partake in. Jesus, the one who we are to keep our eyes on, is the main character, the main focus, of the path that we walk.

### **B. The perfecter**

Jesus is the perfecter of our faith. Other translations use the word “finisher”. Not only did the life of Jesus initiate the new covenant, but his perfect life, his death and then his resurrection perfected the faith. At the end of the second verse in our text it says that Jesus “**is** seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” The author of Hebrews reminds us here that the work of Jesus’ ministry here on earth is a finished work. And not only that, but as Paul says in Philippians 1:6 “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Not only did Jesus complete his own work here on earth, but the work in our lives will come to completion when he returns again.

### **C. The one who has already endured**

Verse 2 says “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.” Although victorious, Jesus’ life here on earth was by no means an easy one. He was tempted, rejected, doubted, beaten, mocked, put on trial, and eventually killed. It can be easy to assume that just because Jesus is God that he didn’t really have it all that hard, like he was able to bypass the difficulty of this life. But no, he was also fully human. He felt the trials and difficulties and pressures of this world just as we feel it today.

In Hebrews 4:14-16 we are reminded “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet

he did not sin. **16** Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" Jesus is able to sympathize with the difficulty of life in a very personal way, and because of that we are able to approach Him, knowing that he cares and loves us. How do we know that he loves and cares? Verse 2 says that Jesus endured the cross with joy - this is opposite to what we would expect. Jesus was able to look past the agony of the cross to the joy that He has in bringing salvation to the people he loves. Jesus saw past the shameful death he had to die, past the mistreatment, past the torture - all because He loves us so much, and He was joyful that we would be able to have a relationship with Him. How deep is our saviour's love for us. That brings me to the last point:

**Point 4: Run with perseverance** Now that we have these first three things in place, we are equipped to run the race with endurance and perseverance. Verse 3 helps us to sum it all up: "Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." The call of verse 1 to run the race of endurance is met with the reminder of one who has already gone before us and endured himself. The author again calls for our attention to return to Jesus. That word "consider" in the Greek carries with it a mathematical type of calculation. It implies a careful assessment and examination. When we consider each individual instance of Jesus enduring life here on earth, we are able to see the whole sum of what he has endured for us.

Weariness in our Christian walk is expected in our lives. It's not something that's shameful, it's part of the journey. Some of you may have walked in tonight carrying more than you have let on. Maybe you've been carrying on in your walk, but it's been heavy, or more difficult than it once was. Maybe you still believe, but you feel worn down. Hebrews 12 reminds us that when we feel weary, we don't need to try to fix everything on our own. What we need to do is to fix our eyes back on Jesus. When we look at ourselves, we see our limitations. When we look at our circumstances, we see obstacles. But when we look at Jesus, we see the One who endured the cross, who carried the weight of sin that we never could, and who is now victorious, seated at the right hand of God.

Some here may need to lay something down, to get connected with brothers and sisters in the battle with sin. Others need to dig into the scriptures and read about the stories that God has placed there for us. And we all need to continuously fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.