

RUNNING THE RACE SET BEFORE US



**THE TESTIMONY OF THE GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES
AND WHAT WE MUST LEARN FROM THEM TO KEEP RUNNING**

1. We need to understand that the main purpose of these witnesses is that we learn endurance from their testimony, 12:1a.

A. The foundation of their lives was based on what they hoped for and so their lives gave evidence that they lived in view of the eternal—the things not seen.

- (Hebrews 11:1 NKJV) Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

B. They did not shrink back.

- (Hebrews 10:39 ESV) But we are **not of those who shrink back** and are destroyed, **but of those who have faith** and preserve their souls.

C. By faith they were approved by God.

- (Hebrews 11:2 LSB) For by it the men of old gained approval.

D. By faith they understood that God created the universe by speaking it into existence.

- (Hebrews 11:3 LSB) By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

E. By faith they pleased God, drew near to him, believed he existed and was a rewarder of those who seek him.

- (Hebrews 11:6 LSB) And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who draws near to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

F. They held God in such reverence as to obey him in view of impossible challenges.

Challenges such as building an ark while waiting for a world wide flood, leaving your home not knowing where you were going, having a baby when you are ninety years old, etc.

G. They believed God in victory or defeat, life or death.

- (Hebrews 11:34 LSB) Quenched the power of fire, **escaped the edge of the sword**, were made strong from weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.
- (Hebrews 11:37a LSB) They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, **they were put to death with the sword**.

2. We need to understand that our main focus in regard to the race set before us is that we run with endurance—we keep running, 12:1.

- (Hebrews 12:1 LSB) Therefore, **since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us**, laying aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, **let us run with endurance the race that is set before us**.

A. Surround ourselves with the testimony of those who ran to the end.

The main emphasis is **not** that these people are cheering for us, although we can be assured that they are, but that we are to look at the testimony of their lives ... the good, the bad and the very ugly. **They ran, they sometimes stumbled greatly, but they kept running.**

God has specifically and intentionally listed people who stand out not for their testimony of right choices and personal victories but who stand out for the witness that through victory and defeat they kept believing God and kept running. No matter what, even when, especially when, their great flaws of character and sinful behavior were exposed, they knew to look past themselves and their failures to the grace of God.

B. Those who run to the end keep believing God over anyone else (including themselves) and the circumstances and challenges of their lives.

C. During our race we will be surrounded by influences that encourage us to keep running or influences that keep us from running.

D. To keep running we must lay aside every distraction and sin that may surround us and stop us from running.

E. We must make a commitment to identify and lay aside the distractions of this world and the sin that has the potential to surround us and choke out the words of God.

i. **Do not be surrounded and so conformed to the things of this world.**

This is Romans 12: 2 stated differently. Present ourselves to God, **surround ourselves with the testimony of faith, and do not be surrounded by the things of this world** and so be conformed to this world.

- (Romans 12:1–2 LSB) Therefore I exhort you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a

sacrifice—living, holy, and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 **And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may approve what the will of God is, that which is good and pleasing and perfect.

ii. Good seed planted in soil in which thorns will surround it will be unfruitful—the person will stop running.

- (Matthew 13:22 ESV) **As for what was sown among thorns**, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches **choke the word**, and it proves unfruitful.

F. We must keep running the race with deliberate, steadfast purpose.

Endurance ... steadfastness, constancy, endurance; the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose; patiently, and steadfastly; a patient enduring, sustaining, perseverance.

G. We must keep running the race that is set before us.

God is sovereign, infinitely wise and purposeful in setting before us our particular race—our lot in life.

i. To keep running we must be led by the Spirit.

We will discuss later in our Hebrews study the person who misses out on grace and succumbs to the root of bitterness.

- (Hebrews 12:15 ESV) **See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble**, and by it many become defiled.

The person who is led by the Spirit is at the opposite end of the spectrum, the polar opposite of the person who has been taken by the root of bitterness.

- (Galatians 5:22–23 LSB) **But the fruit of the Spirit is** love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law.

ii. To keep running we must be led by God on the way everlasting.

- (Psalm 139:23–24 LSB) Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; 24 And see if there be any hurtful way in me, **And lead me in the everlasting way.**

iii. To keep running we must be led by the Spirit of God through the word of God.

3. We are instructed to run our race looking to Jesus which means looking away from everything else so that we may keep running, 12:2.

- (Hebrews 12:2 LSB) **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.

A. We are to look to Jesus—fixing our eyes on him—and away from everything else.

Sincerely, wholeheartedly looking to Jesus means we look to him so fully and completely that we turn away from all other influences.

We look to the testimony of Jesus who for the joy set before him endured the cross. He despised the shame meaning he looked down with contempt on the shame as he looked to the glory of the fulfillment of his work on the cross. And Jesus won. He finished his work and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Isn't that interesting in view of the following text in Ephesians.

- (Ephesians 2:4–6 ESV) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

B. So we look ahead to the joy set before us.

- (1 Peter 1:6–8 ESV) **In this you rejoice**, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 **so that the tested genuineness of your faith**—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—**may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.** 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, **you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.**

C. We turn our interests and expectations to the glory to come and away from the glory of this world.

- (2 Corinthians 4:17–18 ESV) For **this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal**

weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but **the things that are unseen are eternal.**

To look to – to turn one’s interests or expectations towards something and respond accordingly.

D. We set our hope fully on the grace to come.

- (1 Peter 1:13 ESV) Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

4. Another necessary step of obedience to help us to keep running is that we are to consider Jesus who has endured such intense hostility by sinners against himself, 12:3.

- (Hebrews 12:3 LSB) For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary, fainting in heart.

A. We consider what Jesus went through.

B. He endured much greater hostility than we will ever experience and came through victoriously.

C. VERY IMPORTANT QUESTION: Who were the sinners that had such hostility against Jesus?

Think about it. The intense, murderous hostility that Jesus endured—horrible lies, accusations, death. Where did these things originate? Who did this?

What group of people were at the forefront of the hatred directed to our Lord?

Who demanded his death and led the crowds to demand his crucifixion?

Now ask ourselves ... is that relevant today ... and, if so, how is it relevant?

D. We consider Jesus in this way so that we will not grow weary and fainting in heart and stop running.