Hebrews 12 (Part 1):1-2 • Running the race with endurance

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So here we are in Hebrews chapter 12. We're going to be taking the first 2 verses of the chapter, and if you think, “Wow, Pastor Paul, that's not very much.” Just wait till you hear these and everything that's in them. So follow along with me as I read it says,

“1 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.”

You can see why there's a lot there, can't you? Let's pray.

Lord, as we dig into the Word this morning, we pray for the ministry of your Holy Spirit to just find a freedom among us, to bring light and revelation to each and every heart. I thank you, Father, for each and every person who is here today to hear the scriptures, both the people that are sitting in this auditorium and other parts of the building, watching on closed circuit TV, and the almost 200 people who are watching right now live. We just pray, Father God, for every single heart. Pray that you'd minister your truth today and fill them, Lord, with who you are. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, amen. Amen.

You guys who've been following along with our study here in Hebrews know that for the last few weeks, the author of this letter has been parading several Old Testament characters across our field of vision. As we've been looking into these Old Testament people, that he has cited, starting with Abel moving our way into Moses and upward and all these individuals who have…whose lives have been marked by faith. And that's why we call Hebrews chapter 11, the previous chapter, the Hall of Faith.

And it is those people, who he has focused on, to remind us that we are called to live by faith; and as we focus on those characters and their actions, we run into chapter 12 where he begins with the word therefore, and the word, therefore, is

that word that you run into in the Bible that always points you to what has been said before.

So he has been talking about these people, these faithful individuals, *"1 Therefore* (he says)*, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us…"* and then he goes on to exhort us to act on the faith of those individuals. But before we look at those various examples and kind of talk about them And so forth. I want to pause here for just a moment.

Regarding this name that he gives to those people from chapter 11, he calls them *"...a great cloud of witnesses..."* Isn't that a great title? I mean, I've always liked that *"...cloud of witnesses…"* It just sounds…someday, when we get to heaven, I'm going to seek out whoever wrote the book of Hebrews. A lot of people believe it was the Apostle Paul. I don't happen to believe it was Paul. I think it was Apollos, and I'll find out if I'm right or not when we get to heaven. But I'm going to…I'm going to go buttonhole that guy and say,

"Where did you get that term *"cloud of witnesses*?*"* Because that's great. I mean it really is."

And he'll say, "It was the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."

And I'll say, "Yeah, duh, of course, it was."

But you know what a great term, the *"cloud of witnesses"*. It doesn't mean that these people witness our lives. Some people have read this term, *"cloud of witnesses"* and they think it's referring to people who are witnessing our lives. That's the opposite of what it means. It is literally referring to their lives as a witness. We see their lives. That's what he has done in chapter 11, is talk about these various people and he says, "(**paraphrasing**) they now are witnesses to us of the life of faith." What it is to walk out their faith. They are literally offering testimony, as if they were sitting in a trial in a court of law and so forth, telling us how to live that life of faith. So I love it, *"a cloud of witnesses."*

And like the Apostle Paul, the writer of Hebrews, he's going to go on to talk about that life of faith using the metaphor of a race. And you'll notice that he does that, and Paul likes to use that same metaphor. In fact, we're going to look, in a little bit, at a scripture where Paul does that.

But this race that we call the Christian life, it's definitely not a sprint, is it? It's a marathon. I don't know, how many have ever run in a marathon? Let me see your hands. I figured as much. It's like nobody, and I'm not surprised. I haven't

ever run a marathon either, nor would I even really consider… marathons are hard.

I watched my son, my youngest son, run in a marathon about two years ago, and it was…I got tired watching those people come across the finish line, and he even admitted to me, and he's young and in shape, does a lot of running, but he admitted to me later on, he said, “Yeah, I got to the point...” In fact, they call it this place that you get in the marathon where you hit “The Wall.” They call it “The Wall”, and when you hit “The Wall,” you're like, spent. And he said, “I hit the wall and I had to actually stop and walk for a little bit.” And then he had his pockets full of food, and so he ate some stuff quick and then, got a little blood sugar and then kept going. But, oh, marathons, merciful heaven! I wouldn't even consider it.

Now, you may not know it to look at me now, but in my younger years, I was actually considered fairly fleet of foot. That means fast. And I enjoyed running, but I had something in common with the cheetah. I couldn't run for very far. I don’t know if you know that about cheetahs. They're super-fast. I wasn't super-fast, but I had the one thing in common, I couldn't go for very long. Cheetahs can actually only hold their top speed for like 20 seconds, and then they run out of gas. So if they haven't caught the animal they're running after, we got to wait and do it again later.

I could go about 50 yards, which is about half the length of a football field, and I could do it pretty fast. I could beat just about my entire class, but then I was done. It's like real downhill from there. So clearly, I was not a long-distance runner, because being a long-distance runner requires perseverance. It requires endurance. And I didn't have those things from a physical standpoint.

And then I come to know Jesus Christ as my Savior when I'm in my twenties. And what do I find out as I'm reading my Bible? The life of Christ is an endurance race. And we're kind of like, “Oh good, because I've never been good at endurance races, and so I'm kind of wondering here.” There are a lot of similarities between a physical endurance race, like a marathon, and our race that we run as Christians. A lot of dissimilarities too, but enough similarities that the author talks about these various things, and we're going to call them…

KEYS TO STAYING IN THE RACE

So we're going to, for those of you taking notes, this is what we're going to title the first set of bullet points that we're going to be looking at because the writer

of Hebrews is giving us keys, in these verses, to staying in the race. Because that's what we want to do. We want to stay in the race.

You remember last week? We read that statement by the Apostle Paul when he wrote his final letter to Timothy, and he said to Timothy, (**2 Timothy 4:7 ESV**) *"...I've finished the race..."* and that's where we all want to get. We want to get to the place. It's one thing to say, I'm in the race. If you are in Christ today, you are in the race and it's a marathon. But the important thing is staying in the race and finishing. And we want to finish well, right?

"I want to finish well."

I want to get to the end of it and hear the Lord say, "Well done."

So we need these keys that are found in these verses. About what it takes to stay in the race. Let's read verse 1 again, and we'll get into these.

"[1]Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, (he begins here by giving us some of these keys. He says,) *let us also lay aside every weight,..."* and that's the first bullet point that we're going to put up on the screen for you.

KEYS TO STAYING IN THE RACE

- **Lay aside every weight**

We need to lay aside every weight, the NIV translates this phrase as, *"[1]...let us throw off everything that hinders..."* But actually I like the ESV a little bit better because the Greek word that is the key in this phrase refers to something heavy. Take whatever is heavy in your life or is weighing you down and get rid of it, lay it aside because obviously, that's not going to help you to stay in the race or to finish the race. It's only going to hinder you.

I remember that weights are something you use to get you ready for the race sometimes or for whatever you're doing in sports. I played a lot of different sports when I was a kid and I remember playing baseball. And we had this little thing that slipped over the end of the bat. Do you guys remember that? When you were waiting for your turn to bat. We had a little thing called a donut, and it was a weighted circle, and you'd slide it over the neck of the bat, and while you were waiting for your turn, while somebody else was there, you know you'd be swinging the bat with this weight on the end of it. To kind of…you want your arms to kind of get used to the weight so that when you take the donut off and

you're swinging your bat for real, when the pitch comes, supposedly, the theory is that you can increase your swing speed and be able to hit the ball.

I don't think it ever worked that way for me, but it looked cool And so I did it, you know. But no batter would dream of leaving the donut on the bat when he went up to hit the ball, you know. That just…that'd be dumb. You want to get rid of that. You want to take that donut off the bat and chuck it because you're going to go up there and you want to swing that thing as fast as you can.

You might have noticed some people when they're out running, they'll actually put weights on their legs. Some of you may have done that if you ran cross country or something like that. They have these Velcro things they put around their ankles and they'll go the whole day walking and running in these things; so that when they get to race time, they pull these things off and they feel like they're just light as a feather. And they…again the whole theory is you're building up your muscles and then by the time you get to that, race, you're ready to go. Again, no one would think to leave that on for the race. Can you imagine somebody getting up into the blocks and the coach sees they still got the weights on? No. Get rid of that. Get rid of that. That's going to hinder you in the race.

So this is what we're being told here to throw off everything that hinders. Now, when you think about things that hinder. What do you think of, don't speak out, but think in your mind, what do you think about things that might hinder you in the race?

Well, we all tend to kind of immediately think about negative things that might be going on or happening in our lives. This Greek phrase is interesting in that it doesn't necessarily refer to things that are negative. In fact, they could be harmless things. They could be things that in and of themselves are completely innocent. They just add weight.

So I want you to be thinking about that. The exhortation, as a key to keep us in the race, is to jettison those things that might be slowing us down, adding weight to our lives, but may not be a bad thing in and of themselves. And I suppose I could come up with all kinds of examples for you, but I'm just going to let the Holy Spirit speak to you.

In fact, He probably already has. Maybe you've already been thinking of something in your life that isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it slows you down. It slows you down. So think about that, pray about that; see what the Lord has to say about it.

KEYS TO STAYING IN THE RACE

- **Lay aside every weight**
- **Lay aside….the sin which clings to closely**

The next thing he mentions getting rid of is the things…the sin which clings so closely, and this is where we do talk about negative things. The NIV calls it the sin that so easily entangles. The New King James calls it the sin, which so easily ensnares us. This is very similar to what the Apostle Paul talked about related to sin. In Ephesians chapter 4, up on the screen, he said,

Ephesians 4:22(ESV)
...put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,

And it's hard to put off your old self, isn't it? Because I lived in my old self for many years, before I came to Christ, and I got very familiar with my old self and the old way of living and reacting and talking. Those things fall away slowly sometimes, don't they? This might surprise you…I don't know if it'll surprise you at all, but when I came to Christ, I had a pretty filthy mouth and it took me quite a while…It, well, let me back up. It took the Lord a while to, kind of, remove that particular issue from my life.

And it was really troublesome. I mean, it grieved me deeply that as a believer when I would face a challenging situation out of my mouth would come these vile obscenities. And I remember feeling very defeated for a long time related to that. But those are the things that we're told to put off, to lay aside, right?

The things that are part of the old life, the old way of living, the old way of responding, the old way of treating people, the old way of thinking about life and people, and all those things. But I want you to notice something about that sin that he tells us here. Did you notice he describes the sin as something that clings so closely?

Did you catch that? That's a very descriptive phrase. It's not just sin that you might have in your life, it's sin that clings. And so he's warning you to set it aside, to lay it aside, or as he said in Ephesians, to put it off, because here's the warning, “It clings!” And if you're not careful, it'll cling to you and be very difficult to get rid of.

Do you know what? We don't say cling…that sin clings to us anymore. Do you know what we call those things? We call them addictions. That's the word of the

day. I'm dealing with addictions. I have addictions in my life. I might have this addiction or addiction to that or whatever. That's just another way of saying sin that has clung, I mean, that has grabbed hold, right?

And when sin grabs hold, and that's the warning that we're given here, put it off so that it doesn't grab hold. But somebody might be here saying, "Well, Pastor Paul, what about when it's too late and the sin has grabbed hold?" And how do you know when sin has grabbed hold of you? You know because it begins to control your life.

You were early on, at a time in your life, where you could control that thing. Now you can't. It now controls you. And there's just no two ways about it. And it's a very difficult sort of conclusion for people to come to. We'll go for years living in denial that this thing is controlling me. But then eventually, whether we have family members or friends who stage an intervention, or just we run up against a brick wall, or whatever the situation is. We come to the realization, I'm stuck. I am stuck in this area of sin. Now, what am I going to do?

Well, that's where you need the help of the body of Christ. That's what we're here for. You were never meant to go it alone. And the last thing you want to do, if you're dealing with a life-controlling area of sin, which again is another name for an addiction, the last thing you want to do is isolate yourself and that's what the enemy wants to get you to do, see. If he can get you to isolate yourself you will just sit there in a pool of frustration and hurt. Shame, oh he loves to keep you in shame. The enemy wants desperately to keep you in shame. "Shame on you. All these other people that come to church, they're all clean and you're filthy." You do know that's a lie, right?

You know that we are together under sin and we all…every one of us struggles in some area of our life. You do know that, right? I know that's a revelation to some people because they've been believing the enemy. You need the body of Christ. And for many years we've had a group that we've put together to support one another, who are recognizing or have recognized in their life that they are stuck. They need help. They need support. They need accountability. We call it "Broken Chains." I'll put…this is one of the slides that we run between services and before and after.



And Broken Chains is a group that we have that meets on Monday evenings at 6:30. And the reason I'm sharing this with you is just because if you've been sensing, or the Lord has been making you aware of, the fact that you are dealing with a life-controlling area of sin that has clung. You know exactly what he's talking about here. The sin that clings. And you want to walk in freedom, I want to tell you there is freedom. There is freedom in Jesus Christ, but sometimes they are nasty to get rid of and you need accountability. You need help. You need people praying for you.

And I have got to tell you something, I love the people that come to our Broken Chains group because they're very brave folks. They're the folks who have come to terms with the issue of sin in their lives and what it has produced in them, and they want to be free, and they come because they believe Jesus is the answer to that freedom.

And so they come to encourage one another, pray for one another, and support one another. I know it just says it's, it says it's a Bible Study for those dealing with life-controlling sins, but it's way more than just a Bible Study, okay? I mean, they get into the Word, they study God's Word because it is through that Word that we draw closer to the Lord. We learn about His power and we're encouraged in our faith.

But these are people who are getting down and dirty with each other and saying, “How'd your week go? Are you okay? Are you doing all right? And what do we need to pray about this week?” And you know what I mean, this is real life going on, and it’s real life that has to go on. It has to happen because when you

get stuck, you need help, right? And well, the first thing you got to do is admit it and then you need help.

All right, let's get into the third key that we're looking at here to staying in the race, and that is to run with endurance.

KEYS TO STAYING IN THE RACE

- **Lay aside every weight**
- **Lay aside….the sin which clings to closely**
- **Run with endurance**

In fact, what he said in that verse was, *"[1]…let us run with endurance the race that is set before us…"* And like, when I read this in the Bible, I immediately kind of thought, "Oh man, I don't know about this." Because I keep thinking back about my days as a physical runner and I know that I lacked endurance there. And so I was kind of wondering, well maybe this is just a character flaw in me. It's not just a physical deficiency. It's a spiritual deficiency. Maybe I just lack endurance as a person. You know what I'm saying?

And then I remembered what the Apostle Paul said about the race, running the race. When he wrote to the church in Corinth, let me put this one up.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27(ESV)
Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

He wrote, *"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So* (he said,) *run that you may obtain it* (and that is the prize). (He says,) *Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath* (which is what in the Olympics they got back then, was a wreath that they wore on their head), (he says,) *but we* (we are competing, we are in the race for an imperishable crown, right?) *an imperishable. So* (he says,) *I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself* (correction "I myself") *should be disqualified."*

Now, I read a passage like this again, coming from my own background of not having perseverance, and I look at some of the keywords in there like, "Oh, the words I hate passionately, like self-control, discipline." Don't you hate those words? Self-control and discipline. Listen, those did not characterize my life before Christ. Self-control and discipline were not realities.

Just ask my parents. I was the last of four kids and I think my parents were really kind of exhausted. And they just, and I just kind of, whatever. I mean, they loved me. They still do, bless their hearts. My mother's 90, and I'm still her baby, but I just never really had a lot of self-control and discipline…no…no. So I look at these things and I'm kind of thinking, man, I'm just…I'm sunk. But then I remember something, I remember that things like self-control, oh, that's a fruit of the Holy Spirit. I forgot that. See, that actually just comes with the package. When you get saved, you receive the Holy Spirit of God. He comes to live in you, literally to indwell you, and He brings all those wonderful fruits and gifts and so forth. And one of them is self-control.

And so I realize, wait a minute, all the power that I need to run the race is in me now, through Him. And that is the point. And so this is that perfect reminder to all of us that as we're putting off self, putting off the old life, laying aside sin, exercising self-control. Even if we've never had a past that's ever been good at those things. We now have a present where the Holy Spirit is working in our lives and able to enable us, strengthen us, to work according to His will because it is His will that we run the race and finish the race. And where He gives us a will, He gives us the power to complete that will.

Okay, this is an incredibly important thing for us to understand, and I believe this is why the author goes on to say what he does at the beginning of verse 2. Look with me in your Bible, the first 3 words are, and these should be underlined maybe in your Bible, *"[2] looking to Jesus,..."* And this is such a clear reminder that you can't look to yourself. And so that's why we're going to put this up as point number four on our keys to staying in the race, looking to Jesus.

KEYS TO STAYING IN THE RACE

- **Lay aside every weight**
- **Lay aside….the sin which clings to closely**
- **Run with endurance**
- **Look to Jesus (and not to "self")**

And so I went ahead and put parenthetically, and "not to self," because you can't look to self to get the job done and look to Jesus at the same time. In fact, you

have to come to the place where you actually see self as bankrupt, and really nothing to offer, because you see, if I try to inject self into the process of God's power working in my life, I'm actually going to squeeze out the ability of that power to flow in my life.

Think of it like what you do to a garden hose. You know what happens when your garden…don't you hate it when your garden hose gets crinked? We've never bought nice garden hoses, like ever. Sue and I, in our 43 years almost of marriage, we always get the ones that crink. And you have to not only turn on the water, you got to go through 50 feet of hose and un-crink the hose so you can get some water out of the dumb thing. I feel like my life sometimes is kind of like that crimped hose, but here's what crimps it, it's when Paul gets in the way and stops the flow of God's power in my life.

But when I come to the place of saying, "I can't do this, I don't have the power to do this." That takes that hose, un-crimps it, and allows that flow of God's power. And that's when the Lord speaks to you and me and He says, "I'm glad you finally came to this conclusion because here's the deal. My power is made perfect in your weakness, not in your strength, in your weakness. That's when my power begins to flow."

When you get out of His way and let Him do what He is best at, which is empowering you to run the race. Get out of His way, let Him do His work, yield to Him so that He can do His work. The words of the writer of Hebrews is, *"² looking to Jesus,..*" (repeats looking to Jesus.) And this, by the way, is an ongoing attitude. It's not a one-time thing. We don't look to Jesus when we get saved and now we're good to go for the rest of our days. We look to Jesus every single day for the power, the ability.

You know, I got to tell you something. Sue and I just got back yesterday from a ministry conference up in the Tri-Cities, up in like Richland, Washington. The Calvary Chapel up there, which is a good-sized fellowship, was hosting a Regional Ministry Retreat for all of eastern Washington, all of Idaho, and all of Montana. We're kind of considered an Idaho church because about half our population actually lives in Idaho, half lives in Oregon so we're kind of, you know, dancing on the border here.

But there were like 40 churches that were represented, Calvary Chapels that were represented, at this retreat or conference, I should say. And on Friday evening there was an invitation given, after the teaching, for people to come down if they need to be refreshed in the power of the Holy Spirit to run the race. And these are ministry leaders, not just pastors. These are elders, deacons,

ushers, Sunday school teachers, people who run food banks, anything within the church, and any area of ministry. And they…we all need God's power to run the race, right? So there was an invitation.

So because I actually serve on a team of Calvary Chapel pastors who oversee this part of this region, my area is mostly southern Idaho, but the guy who was speaking invited myself and a couple of other pastors to come down and pray for people. I got to tell you something, I sat and prayed for, I don't know, probably an hour or so just with people coming up who needed to be refreshed and needed to walk in a fresh work of God's power for their ministry and for their life.

I came away jazzed because I'm sitting here praying for person after person after person, laying hands on them, praying for the power of the Holy Spirit, and saying things like, "You can't do it, but He can." I mean, you say that over and over and it starts to get in your heart. You know what I mean? I walked away empowered. I walked away going, "I can't do it, He can, praise the Lord!" I mean, I was levitating when I got done praying for these people. It was incredible. I'm joking, of course, but it was just really something.

Do you remember how the Apostle Paul describes the Christian life in his letter to the Philippians? Let me put this up on the screen.

Philippians 3:3 (ESV)
For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—

He says, *"For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus* (look at this last part) *and put no confidence in the flesh —"*

I have zero confidence. The older I'm getting in my relationship and walk with the Lord, the less confidence I'm putting in me and the more I'm learning to put it into Him. Because I don't have the goods. I don't have the power. I don't have the ability. I don't have the strength. I don't have the stamina. I don't have the endurance. I don't possess the endurance to run the race, apart from Him. You with me? So what does Paul say? "We put no confidence in self. We put no confidence in the flesh. We don't look to ourselves."

I get inundated every single week with emails from people who are frustrated, discouraged, and even sometimes despondent because they realize they have no power to live the Christian life, but they have yet to turn to the Lord for that power. And they write to me, and they say,

“Pastor Paul, what am I going to do? I am a big fat failure.”

It's like, “You think I didn't know that? So am I. I'm a big fat failure.”

The only difference between all of us failures is that some of us have come to that realization and turned to the Lord and said, “I can't, but you can. And now I'm going to run this race in the power of the Spirit. I'm going to trust you to give me the ability.”

If you're going through a difficult season in life right now. If you're facing a difficult circumstance right now, you need to hear this message. And you need to come to the end of yourself and you need to confess to God, and I think it's important to even say the words, say to Him, “I can't do this. This thing that I'm facing, I can't do it. Okay? Just want to make it very clear, can't do it, but You can. So Lord, I'm going to put no confidence in the flesh.”

And you know what? You're going to hear the Holy Spirit say, “Bingo! My power is made perfect in your weakness.”

The Lord's just waiting, you guys, for us to realize just how weak we really are so that we'll come to Him, humble ourselves, and say, “I can't, but you can and with your power, I can not only run the race, I will finish it. I will finish the race. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, because I realize just how weak I am.”

And so when these people write me their notes, I always just say the same thing “Get your eyes off yourself” because that's why they're so discouraged. They see…all they see is their lack. They see their insufficiency, and rather than seeing God's power and sufficiency. Get your eyes off your failures and get them on to the One who will give you the power and strengthen you to walk in this life, according to His will, because only He can accomplish that.

There are 3 reasons that he gives us to look to Jesus. Look at verse 2 with me again. We're going to read this. We're going to run through these fairly quickly. He says in verse 2, *“[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.”*

Do you know that it was a very shameful thing to be on the cross and the Romans made sure of it? The Romans made sure that if you were going to be executed on the cross, that it was going to be the most shameful experience that they could possibly provide. And so even though you may see pictures,

renderings, drawings of Jesus hanging on a cross with a modicum of some clothing, that wasn't there.

The Jews stripped people naked and hung them, nailed them on a cross, and they did it to increase their shame. It was a very shameful thing to hang on a cross. You were exposed to mocking and ridicule and the worst kind of shame that you can imagine in this life. But the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus despised the shame for the joy that was set before Him.

There was nothing joyful about the cross. That was not the joy. The joy was you. The joy was you. Because He knew that because of His sacrifice, He'd get you, and you would be a child of God, and you would have eternal life, and you would live together with Him for eternity, and that was the joy that was set before Him.

But the reason that we see here, the first reason that we are looking, and this is where you can see where reasons to look to Jesus. The first one is that

Reasons to look to Jesus:

- **He is the Founder and Perfecter of our Faith**

And your Bible may say author and finisher. I kind of like the word finisher. That's gotten to be a popular word.

Like in sales, somebody may start the sale and then somebody comes in and they're the finisher. They've got all the, “Well, let me go get my manager.” I always hate it when they do that, by the way. But they, you know he's going to come and he's going to finish.

Well, Jesus is the finisher of our faith. He started it. He will complete it. Did you catch that? HE will complete it. Did you catch that? HE will complete it. HE will complete it. Do you remember Paul talked about this too? We go back to the book of Philippians.

Phillipians 1:6 (ESV)
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.

"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you (HE who began a good work, will do what? HE) *will bring it to completion* (right?) *at the day of Jesus Christ."*

Of course, when He is revealed, that's when the rewards all happen, And so on And so on. And that's the…and that's the final completion. And He's the one who's going to do it. He's the one, He's the finisher. So you can start calling Jesus that, and you can start telling Him,

"Lord, I know you're the finisher. You started this work of faith in me, and you'll finish it. You're going to finish it, and that means you're going to give me the strength to take every step along the way, and you're going to bring me to the finish line."

And I really hope this message is getting through, especially for those of you who are constantly upset and worried about your faith, and you wonder if you measure up as a Christian. Let me just tell you right now, "You don't, and you never will." There, isn't that fun?

Anything that causes us to be victorious in our walk with Jesus Christ is Jesus Christ. It is Him working in us and through us. So you know your job is just to trust Him to do that work. Trust Him. Put your faith…Remember, the whole chapter, the last chapter was all about faith. Why is he talking about these things now here in chapter 12? Because they're all connected to faith, put your faith in God. "I don't think I'm going to be able to finish." Put your faith in HIM, not in yourself. No confidence in the flesh. Put it in Him.

Reasons to look to Jesus:

- **He is the Founder and Perfecter of our Faith**
- **He endured the cross**

Reason number 2, looking to Jesus, because He endured the cross. Earlier I told you I didn't I just, I didn't, as a runner, I didn't possess endurance. I was worried that maybe that was a character flaw in my life. And I found out it was, and the good news here though, is I'm not limited to my resources, and neither are you. Whew! What a relief it is to hear that. We're not limited to our own resources because you see, Jesus lives in me, and Jesus lives in you, and He endured the cross and far more than just dying on a cross. You got to understand that people.

Do you understand that it wasn't just dying on a cross that had Him so upset in the Garden of Gethsemane? (referring to **Matthew 26:38 ESV**) It wasn't…there were lots of people who died on crosses. It was what came with that sacrifice. It was that separation, from God the Father, which He had never experienced in all of eternity. The Son of God had never once experienced separation from the Father, and it scared Him to death (referring to **Matthew 26:38 ESV** *"[38] Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me."*)

and He prayed in the garden, "Lord, if there's any other way," but there obviously wasn't any other way because that cup didn't pass, did it? That's what He prayed. "Let this cup pass. If there's any other way," there was no other way. (referring to **Matthew 26:39 ESV** *"[39] And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.")*

But it was that comment, that cry on the cross, that expressed the depth of that fear. (**Matthew 27:46 ESV)** "**[46]…***"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

Guys, do you understand what happened for the first time in eternity? The second person of the Trinity was forsaken by God the Father. That blows our minds. We can't even really go there except to know that He bore it for you. He endured it. He endured the cross, and because of His endurance, that endurance now lives in you. His endurance lives in you…and me. Whew! Good thing.

Reasons to look to Jesus:

- **He is the Founder and Perfecter of our Faith**
- **He endured the cross**
- **He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God**

Reason number 3, to look to Jesus, because He's seated at the right hand of the throne of God. We've made many times through our study…made the point many times in our study through the Bible that the right hand is always a picture in the Bible of honor and strength. The firstborn son would be called the son of my right hand, the son of my strength. This was an honored position. Jesus is sitting at the honored position, which speaks of strength and power.

In fact, in some creeds, we say…we believe that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the power of God and the majesty of God. So what does this all mean to you

and to me? Well, what it means is that power is now ours. The very power that He has seated at the right hand of the throne of God is ours. And I understand how this can be a little hard to take in, especially when we, again, when we look at our lives, we see our failures and we know that we are so weak to say, “Yeah, that power is mine.”

Most of us would just say, “Well, I haven't seen it.” And because of that, we end up experiencing doubt instead of faith. So here's the question, are you going to believe your experience, or are you going to believe God's Word? Because you see, God's Word is paramount, and it trumps every other expression of truth. What you see with your eyes, what you hear with your ears, what you feel. God's Word wins the day you guys.

So if He says that you can put your faith and trust in Him and He has given you the power to overcome, then He's given you the power to overcome and we, collectively, need to start walking in the reality of that faith. Again, faith is the theme here.

“But Pastor, I don’t…”, you see, that's doubt. And that's where the enemy wants to keep you, he wants to keep you in that place of doubt because if he can keep you there, you're a sitting duck. But we need to walk in faith and remember that all this power, to run the race, to finish the race is given to us. The Bible says, (**paraphrasing 2 Peter 1:3**) “He has given us everything we need for life and godliness.” Everything we need.

If you don't see everything you need, it's not His fault. It's because we get in the way and we have yet to really, truly become weak. So what we need to be praying for is surrender in our own lives.

“Lord, help me to surrender my life to you. Help me to truly surrender so that your power can flow through me, amen.”

Let's stand together.

Isn't God good to remind us what weaklings we are and how strong He is? How strong He is, and He says to each and every one of us, “My power is here for you. Just take hold of it. Set aside, lay aside, these things that hinder, hamper you, and weigh you down. Take hold of Me. Keep your eyes on Me. Look to Me. Look to Me. I'll see you through.”

We'll have some people down front here to pray for you, with you, if you need prayer.

Father, thank you so much. We love you so much. We love your Word. We love the encouragement that we get from your Word. We need your Word every single day of our lives. Help us, Lord, to not just partake on the weekends or periodically during the week. But help us Father we pray, to lay hold of your Word, regularly, to be encouraged and built up.

And, Lord, help us to remember that this is a work of faith, to trust in the Lord with all of our hearts, to lean not on our own understanding, but in all our ways, acknowledge and trust You. We're going to finish the race, Lord, in the power of the Spirit. For we pray it in the name of Jesus Christ and all God's people said together, amen.