



Sermon-Based Study Guide
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Good Shepherd Church - February 5, 2012

Sermon Title: Run, Look, Consider

Sermon Text: Hebrews 12.1-3

Related Texts: Isaiah 53.3-10; Isaiah 40.28-31

I. Start It – Connecting With One Another

What does it take to be a successful marathon runner? Have you had any experience with running marathons or 10ks or other similar races?

II. Introduction

The Hebrews author, with a true pastoral heart, encourages the weary, despondent Hebrew Christians to live by faith in Jesus Christ, God's Messiah. To live by faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. It means being confident in the faithfulness and trustworthiness of God. It means looking ahead to the "better country" to come in the fulfillment of God's promises. It means to trust and obey Jesus Christ and to accept the consequences. It means to follow the example of faithful people who endured severe hardship and entered the "Hall of Fame" of faith. We turn now to chapter 12 where the encouragement and exhortation is to run, to look, and to consider.

III. Study the Text – Hebrews 12.1-3

- 1) Verse 1 begins with the phrase, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses..."
 - a. In addition to the people mentioned by name in chapter 11 and the nameless multitude of faithful referred to in that chapter, who else is in this great cloud of witnesses?
 - b. The Greek word "martyroi" is used here and translated "witnesses." It also translates "martyr." What does this suggest about the faithfulness of those in this "great cloud?"
 - c. What two things does the author call the Hebrew Christians to "throw off" (this can also be translated "lay aside" or "put away")?
 - d. What things hinder you in your journey of faith? What do you think the author means by "the sin that so easily entangles?" What sin was entangling the Hebrew Christians?

Note: The Greek terms used in the middle of verse 1 paint a very vivid image of being prevented from translated "hinders" and "entangles" can also be translated as "excessively weighs down" and "clings so tightly." The imagery suggests two things that would prevent a person from moving freely. Carrying excessive weight and wearing tight, restrictive clothing would make running a marathon very difficult, if not impossible.

e. The author encourages the Hebrews to "run with perseverance the race marked out for us." Did you notice the shift in the personal pronoun from "you" to "us"? What does this suggest about the author? What does it suggest about our need for others to support and encourage and hold us accountable in our journey of faith? Do you have these kinds of "partners on the journey?" (If not, consider becoming part of a small group or begin a partnership. You can contact Pastor Paul White (paul@gspc.org) or myself (jim@gspc.org) to do so.)

- 2) Now let's look at verse 2. The author urges the Hebrew Christians to be focused, Like a runner in a race. The term "fix" can also suggest "fixing one's attention on."
 - a. What would the runner's focus be fixed upon? What are the followers of Jesus to be focused upon?
 - b. How is Jesus described in relation to the faith of the Hebrews? How is he the "author" (or "initiator" "leader" "pioneer") and the "perfecter" (or "completer") of our faith?
 - c. What was Jesus willing and able to do "for the joy that was set before him?"
 - d. Read Isaiah 53.3-10. How does this paint a picture of what Jesus experienced as he "endured the cross, scorning its shame?"

Note: The Hebrews author reiterates the pattern of Jesus' coming from heaven, taking on human flesh, suffering and enduring the cross, then begin raised and exalted - "at the right hand of the throne of God." This is the One upon whom you and i are urged to "fix our eyes" as we live as Jesus' disciples.

- 3) Verse 3 begins with the call to "consider him (or to "think through thoroughly") the One who endured such opposition..." How does focusing on, thinking through thoroughly and/or considering Jesus' suffering relate to not growing weary or losing heart (wanting to give up)?

IV. Apply It – Reflect and Respond

- 1) (For personal reflection) What hindrances and/or sins do you recognize in your life that need to be put away? Can you be honest with God and confess those so that, by God's grace, they will be laid aside?
- 2) Can you envision the "cloud of witnesses" that is cheering you on in your journey of faith in Jesus? What things do you imagine them saying to you?
- 3) Reflect on Isaiah 40.28-31. How can this become a promise upon which you run with perseverance the race marked out for you?

The Hebrews must keep going and remind themselves continually of the One who blazed this trail in the first place... and think how much worse it was for him. That way they will be kept from becoming worn out completely. So often in the Christian life, reminding yourself of truth, not trying to conjure up feelings... is the way to keep going in faith and patience.

N. T. Wright