

With perseverance run the race (Hebrews 12:1–2)

The exhortation of these two verses brings into the focus all of the preceding chapters. The “witnesses” refer to chapter 11 and “looking to Jesus” requires an understanding of the first ten chapters. “Therefore” drives the reader to reach an important conclusion: “with perseverance let us be running the race that has been marked out for us.”

The recipients of this letter needed that exhortation (cf. 10:33–36). Believers today as well needed the encouragement to persevere in running the race, holding firmly to the faith, trusting fully in God. Four actions suggested here that can help you persevere as you are running the race.

1. ***Know that you have examples who testify, it can be done (12:1a).***

These “witnesses” are the heroes of faith enumerated in the previous chapter, not merely spectators, but ‘martyrs’, who have been witnessed to be God (11:2, 4–5, 39), and who testify to the value of living by faith. They help our understanding, encourage us in the race, and show that it can be done.

2. ***Throw off encumbrances and sin (12:1b).***

These two things can tire you and get you off track. Strip off those things that keep you from running well, even those things which are not in themselves sinful, and definitely throw off sins which entangle and hamper running. Scripture gives examples of “encumbrances” and “sin”, such as in the people displayed in chapter 11. Jesus, too, described such “encumbrances” and “entangling sins” in the parable of the soils (Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14) as weeds and thorns which choke the word so that it does not bear fruit: the worries of life, the deceit of wealth, the pleasures of life. The encumbrances are not probably sin in themselves, but may lead to sin and will impede our spiritual progress (e.g. 1 Tim 4:8; 6:17).

3. ***Recognize the sovereignty of God in life’s “race” (12:1c).***

The race is “marked out for us” (NIV), i.e., God has determined to course to be run. Whatever you encounter in life is part of God’s design. Nothing happens by accident. Be encouraged that God limits every temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13), shapes trials to build perseverance and prove character (Romans 5:3–4), knows what rest and help is needed (Matthew 11:28–30). God has marked a course out for you for the believer’s good.

4. ***Look to Jesus (12:2).***

“Looking to Jesus” (ESV) communicates the idea inherent in the phrase of looking to someone for support, inspiration, help, etc. “Fixing your eyes on Jesus” (NIV, NASB) picks up on the thought in the word of looking away from other things and looking only at Jesus.

- a. *Look to His role as Author/Trailblazer and Perfector of our faith.* Jesus has gone before us, opening the way into the presence of God. He is the first Person to reach the ultimate goal of our faith and has done all which is necessary for salvation by faith. He is the perfect model of faith.
- b. *His example of endurance is also there for us to follow.* The name “Jesus” stresses His humanity. Though He is incarnate God, He endured suffering as a man. He actively endured suffering on the cross, since it was within possibility for Him to have it stopped (cf. Matthew 26:53). Though crucifixion was shameful and done to the despised, Jesus despised the shame. He endured because of the joy set before Him, the completion of His work of redemption.
- c. *His reward was to be seated at the right hand of the throne of God.* This was part of the joy, but also indicated that His priestly work (redemption) was done, and it granted Him a position of honor and authority. Look to Jesus as one who can exercise His authority on your behalf, who is preparing a place for you to have you with Him, and who will judge every believer one day.

Everyone is on a journey and there are only two destinations: everlasting punishment or eternal life only through Jesus Christ by grace alone through faith alone (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8–9). Those on the journey with Jesus should with perseverance be running the race, a race with rewards.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- What encouraging Christian biographies would you recommend to others?
- What have been your encumbrances that you have “thrown off”? What might you need to throw off? Are there sins you must especially guard against?
- Review your last few weeks. When have you needed to recognize that your race has been “marked out for you” by God?
- Give three ways in which you can daily, consciously be looking to Jesus to help you be running the race with perseverance.