

Follow the Leader

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[0 : 00] Starting at verse number 39 and going down through chapter 12 and verse 3. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

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, 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.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted. Thanks, Emily. Father, thank you for your great kindness to us.

Thank you most of all, supremely, chiefly of all, preeminently of all. Thank you for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank you for sending your Son for sinners like us, so that we could be redeemed from our sin, so that we could be reconciled to you, so that we could be adopted into your family, welcomed, welcomed, delighted in, chosen.

[1 : 29] Father, thank you for giving us the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, thank you for being in us and with us. Thank you for testifying to us of the beauty and the greatness, the grandeur and the glory of God.

Thank you for showing us through the preaching of the gospel, the beauty of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and our desperate need for him.

Thank you for granting us life and faith, so that we could believe and repent. Father, we are so grateful for all that you have done for us.

Lord Jesus, thank you for being our Savior. Holy Spirit, thank you for being with us and in us. Holy Spirit, would you please help us now as we take time to continue in our worship gathering by listening to your word preached.

We want to see Jesus. We want to see Jesus. So please help us to consider him again. We ask this in the name of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, confident that you hear us, and that you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are able to do far more abundantly than anything that we ask or think.

[2 : 52] We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. If you watch a sporting event, and then you stick around after the sporting event on TV or whatever for the post-game interview, you may hear an athlete say something like this.

I was just feeding off of the energy in the crowd. You ever heard somebody, an athlete, say something like that, make a comment about the crowd and their excitement and their energy for the game and the events and the action and how that motivated that athlete in a particular way?

Having an audience matters. Think about this. It doesn't matter if you are running cross-country or playing t-ball or baseball or volleyball or basketball.

No matter what you're doing, doesn't it mean the world to know that you have people there watching you, people cheering you on, people who care about you saying you can do it, you're doing a great job?

How about when you're leading a meeting at work? Don't you want all the attendees in the meeting to kind of be leaning in, well-engaged, listening to the things that you're saying and responding to those things with nods and affirmation?

[4 : 22] Why do we want that? Because having an audience matters. It matters. Telling a joke will always only be fun if there is someone listening to the joke, right?

And seriously, I would not be here, standing here right now, if none of you were here. It just would make no sense, right? It matters. Having an audience matters.

When the curtain opens and your eyes adjust to the lights, you want to see a bunch of people in the crowd, not a bunch of rows of empty seats.

This is why during the COVID Super Bowl in 2021, the NFL filled 30,000 seats with cutout fans. You may remember this. It looks something like this. So silly, right? But the NFL knew something. Having an audience matters.

[5 : 29] The author of Hebrews also knows that having an audience matters. Look at Hebrews chapter 12 and verse number one.

Who is this crowd of witnesses?

Well, this audience is those who have gone before us in the faith. Certainly the heroes of Hebrews chapter 11 are represented.

Enoch and Noah and Abraham and Sarah. And it also includes those that the author has not had time to mention. Ruth and Isaiah and Daniel and Esther and Ezra and so many others.

It is, after all, a great cloud of witnesses. And note this, that this great cloud of witnesses is a growing cloud of witnesses.

[6 : 32] Those who die in faith, believing in Jesus, trusting in Jesus alone for their salvation, take their place in this great cloud of witnesses.

You become part of it. Look at verse 39. All of these, all of these, all of these in the heroes of the faith chapter, all of these that I haven't had time to mention yet because there are just too many of them.

All of these, verse 39, were approved through their faith. But they did not receive what was promised.

Now that is an intriguing statement, isn't it? That should catch your attention a little bit. If you're reading through this a little too quickly, it should make you slow down and pause. Wait a minute. They did not receive what was promised. Just last week, we noticed in verse 33 that these heroes of the faith conquered kingdoms and enforced justice and obtained promises.

[7 : 48] Verse 33. What is happening here? How is it that they have obtained promises? And yet, the author can say they did not receive what was promised.

Well, we do know that they did receive some promises. Abraham and Sarah were promised a son. God promised them a son in their old age.

And they did have a child, a boy named Isaac. God made good on that promise. But they did not receive the complete fulfillment of God's promises.

Remember, Abraham died a happy camper in the promised land. But only a happy camper. He never possessed the land.

He died still looking forward to a city that has foundations. A city whose designer and builder is God. The author of chapters 11 told us earlier.

[8 : 58] Verse 13. We confirm that this is true. These all died in faith. Although they had not received the things that were promised.

Remember this? But they saw them from a distance and greeted them and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth.

They looked into the future. They saw God's promise. And they grabbed hold of God's promise for their future. Pulled it into the present. And then lived as though God's promise was already true.

But they did not receive the fulfillment of that promise. Why not?

Why didn't they receive the fulfillment of God's promise? The full promise. Well, the answer is in verse number 40. They did not receive what was promised since God had provided something better for us so that they would not be made perfect without us.

[10 : 14] Remember just a minute ago when I mentioned that this great cloud of witnesses is still growing? That's why they have not yet fully received the promise.

Because God is still gathering his people. God is still calling by the preaching of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit sinners to repent and believe in Jesus.

This cloud of witnesses is still growing. Follower of Jesus, your seat is reserved, but it is still empty. Why is it still empty? Because you're still here, learning to walk by faith. And if you are not yet a follower of Jesus, God is pleased to reserve a seat for you there as well.

And unlike the NFL, God will not fill those seats with cardboard cutouts. So since we have this large cloud of witnesses, a crowd that won't be complete without us in it, what a thought.

[11:27] Since we have this cloud of witnesses that won't be complete without us in it, then how should we live? Right in the middle of verse 12.

Let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us.

Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us. Now note this. First, right in the middle there, let us lay aside.

I don't know about you, but when I think about laying aside, that sounds like folding laundry. You know, you have taken a t-shirt that needs to be folded, you have folded that t-shirt, and now you are laying that t-shirt aside.

That does not helpfully capture the nuance here. But the New International Version gives us this. Throw off. That's good.

[12:43] That captures the essence of what's going on here. On occasion, I will see a CrossFit athlete running in our neighborhood.

And sometimes you will see these CrossFit athletes wearing weighted vests. This is just mind-numbing to me why you would ever do this to yourself. But I was looking at these weighted vests yesterday because I was thinking about this illustration.

You get these vests, and then you can purchase weights to put in your vest, up to 20 pounds in the front and in the back. Can you imagine running around with an extra 40 pounds of weight?

I do not want to do that. If you put one of those weighted vests on me, I will run about 25 feet away from you, and then I will take it, and I will throw it as far as I can.

Now, granted, that probably won't be very far, but you will get the idea. I am getting rid of that weight with urgency. I'm not laying it aside like when I fold a sweatshirt.

[13:57] Sin. Sin. If I can take this metaphor. Sin is like a pair of winter boots when you are preparing to run a 100-meter dash.

Can you imagine someone during the Olympics getting themselves in the starting blocks and wearing a pair of winter boots like we wear around here when we go to play in the snow?

You wouldn't even get yourself out of those starting blocks. They would ensnare you. You would trip. Sin is like that.

It needs to be thrown off like a weighted vest. running with endurance means throwing off any sin that ensnares you.

Now, some things that are in our lives are not sinful. They are just unhelpful. The author of Hebrews calls them hindrances.

[15:06] Hindrances. Time wasters. Energy drainers. Emotion suckers. Distractions. Hindrances. Hindrances. Hindrances.

This would be like running a 100-meter dash in a stocking cap with a beanie up on top that's bouncing around and maybe a scarf across your face.

You might be able to run. You might even finish the race. But you are not going to be running efficiently. Not running well.

Not running with endurance. Whatever those hindrances are, they are holding you back. So what is sinful in your life?

And what is a hindrance that is unhelpful in your life? Your list will be different from mine. We all have our own sins.

[16:04] We all have our own hindrances. And so I ask you when the Holy Spirit brings that sin or that hindrance to mind, will you repent and throw it off so that you can run with endurance?

May God give us so much wisdom to evaluate and eject behaviors and attitudes and activities and habits and relationships that hinder us from running with endurance.

I don't know about you, but this exhortation to run with endurance that we have here at the end of verse 1, this feels overwhelming.

not all day, every day, and not always to the same extent every day, but it does feel overwhelming to think of running with endurance, this race that is set before us.

Some days, following Jesus feels very hard. Some days, you may look down the track and you may see that there are hurdles in front of you that you are going to have to navigate.

[17:38] Maybe multiple hurdles all lined up in a row. And following Jesus feels hard. Some days, I think following Jesus just feels really long.

You know? Maybe it's not even so much a hurdle. It's just a long race. And you're tired. You kind of feel like quitting, phoning it in, allowing some hindrances and some distractions just to consume

you.

Get it. I get it. Some days, I think following Jesus is like a steeplechase. You know that one? That's the race where about three quarters of the way around the track, they have one big hurdle and if you clear it, on the other side, there's a pool of water.

So even if you get over the hurdle, now your shoes are wet. That's gross. Sometimes following Jesus is like that. You get over this steeplechase barrier only to find that, well, now my shoes are wet.

Now I feel even worse than I did. I wish I had never had to jump over that at all. The Spirit of God and the author of Hebrews seems to anticipate this feeling of being overwhelmed and the answer to the question, how do I run this race with endurance, is found by noticing something else about this cloud of witnesses.

[19 : 21] witnesses. These are not cardboard cutouts. They are not spectators at a sporting event.

They are not just watching. They are talking. They are cheering us on. They are witnessing, testifying to us.

What are they saying? What is the cloud of witnesses saying? I asked myself this week that question. What is this cloud of witnesses saying?

Because it doesn't tell us here. I kind of wish it just explicitly said this is what they are saying. What would a person who has gone to be with Jesus say?

If you're watching other followers of Jesus running the race and you see us getting exhausted, wondering if jumping that steeplechase is worth it, wondering if we're ever going to get to the end or if the race is going to exhaust us before we get there.

[20 : 43] What would you say? I think you would say keep going, but I don't think you would say give it the old college try.

You know? I don't think you would say you just need to keep doing your best and let God do the rest. I don't think that you would say you need to do more and try harder and be better, not if you're with Jesus already.

I don't think even if you were the most faithful follower of Jesus mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11, you would even say, just be like me.

What would these faithful followers of Jesus say? If you could hear the cloud of witnesses right now, this is what I think they are saying.

Verse 2. Verse 1, right at the end. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus.

[22 : 03] Jesus. I think every follower of God, every believer in Jesus, who is part of this cloud of witnesses, is testifying to those who are still running the race.

Keep your eyes on Jesus. Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

for the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus is the pioneer of our faith. He is the preeminent one. He is the leader of our faith. He is the one that we follow.

Not only is he the leader, the pioneer, the first, the preeminent one, he is the perfecter of our faith. He is our perfect example.

[23 : 09] Rejecting all of the devil's temptation, submitting to the Father's will, obedient even to the point of death, and being raised from the dead, Jesus sat down at God's right hand.

God's God's He is the victor over sin and death and hell. He is the perfecter, if I could give you this word, the vindicator of our faith.

The vindicator. In other words, Jesus in His glory now testifies to us that following God, having faith in God, is worth it.

Why? Because Jesus entered into glory and received the reward of His faith. He is the perfecter of our faith, the vindicator, the one who proves to us that it's worth it to run this race with endurance. Jesus proves that God delivers on His promise, that those who overcome by faith will receive their reward. What enabled Jesus to endure the cross and the shame?

[24 : 32] What enabled Jesus to endure the cross and the shame? Jesus reached into the future, grabbed hold of this promise of joy that was to come, and drug that promise of joy to come into the present, and then lived as though it were already true.

What is that? That's faith. He is our pioneer and perfecter of faith.

For the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the cross. Does that mean hours of physical pain at the very limit of what a human body can tolerate?

What does it mean to endure the cross? Emotional trauma, grief, on the bleeding edge of what a human can endure? Spiritual agony.

when God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us. Faith that finishes focuses on Jesus.

[25 : 58] Look at verse 3. 4. Consider Him. Consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself so that you won't grow weary and give up.

Do you remember implications from last week? What are the implications here in this text? Look at the very end. He says, I don't want you to grow weary.

What is the implication? Running this race will be weary-ing. But I don't want you to grow weary.

There's a second implication.

It's right at the end of the verse. You might give up. But I don't want you to give up. I want you to run the race with endurance.

How is it that we are not going to grow weary? How is it that we are not going to give up? We're going to consider Him. Keep our eyes on Him.

[27 : 19] going to Him. Sometimes we will be tempted to quit, to stop running, even to deconstruct our faith from top to bottom and just sit ourselves down on the side of the track and say, I'm out.

But listen, faith that finishes focuses on Jesus. keeping your eyes on Jesus means looking away from everything else.

If you look at those who seem to have stronger faith than you, you should expect to be discouraged. So keep your eyes on Jesus.

If you focus on those who pointed you to faith in some meaningful way, a parent or a grandparent or a friend or perhaps a Bible teacher or preacher and that person has since let you down, if you focus on that person you are going to be discouraged, you are going to want to quit.

So keep your eyes on Jesus. If your life is consumed with culture or politics or righting wrongs on social media, you may lose the supreme importance of the gospel.

[28 : 49] So keep your eyes on Jesus. The big C church can be a big L letdown sometimes, can't it?

So keep your eyes on Jesus. When your life stinks and your perspective shrinks and your work feels pointless and parenting feels impossible and being a child growing up in a Christian home feels impossible and you want to quit and you want to bail out, keep your eyes on Jesus.

Jesus. If you dwell on your sin and weakness and failure, you're going to throw in the towel and quit every single day.

So keep your eyes on Jesus. We're going to disappoint and discourage one another along the way. Count on it. Count on it. Show grace. Be patient with one another. Be long suffering and kind and gentle with one another.

[30 : 06] But keep your eyes on Jesus. You will have doubts and questions and fears as you run this race with endurance.

So keep your eyes on Jesus. Having an audience matters. Abel is in this great cloud of witnesses and so is his mother Eve waiting watching witnessing keep keep your eyes on Jesus.

Moses is there and his mother is there too. David is there and his ancestors Boaz and Ruth and Rahab Peter and James and John and the other apostles less Judas Iscariot.

They are there. They are part of this great cloud of witnesses. Paul is there and his partners in gospel ministry Yodia and Syntyche and they are in one accord now.

They are all in now on this. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Lydia is there and Dorcas and Phoebe is there.

[31 : 32] They are there and they are testifying to us. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Stephen is there and one day by God's grace you and I will fill our seat in that great cloud of witnesses and we will join the faithful who have gone before us and we will witness to those who are still running follow the leader keep your eyes on Jesus friends faith that finishes focuses on Jesus let's not be shrink backers let's not settle for a participation award by God's grace let's finish the race leaving no doubt that we are seeking a homeland a better country a city that has foundations whose designer and builder is

God a kingdom that cannot be shaken! should we pray about that together let's do that!!

Jesus we lift our eyes to you you are our glory and our prize help us day by day help us today to say with more bigger and more faith and more truthfulness help us to say today all I have is Christ Lord Jesus it is in your name and by your name and your power and your grace alone that we will overcome and join the ranks this innumerable host of the faithful who have finished their race by your name we overcome father would you please help us to deal honestly with our sins and our hindrances holy spirit would you make it clear to us where those sins and hindrances are that need to be thrown off and would you help us encourage us to keep our eyes on Jesus help us to encourage one another to keep our eyes on Jesus and to stay in this race and to run with endurance until we receive our prize and Lord Jesus we confess that prize is you we ask all of this giving thanks in Jesus name amen