

ESSENTIAL 3: FIX YOUR EYES ON JESUS (v. 2)

... fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

1. The author of Hebrews describes Jesus as “the pioneer of faith.” Some older translations describe him as “the founder, originator or author of faith.” The word conveys the idea of “giving definition to our faith (author, founder and originator) and displaying the highest expression of the faith (pioneer—he blazed the trail for us).
 - a. How does Jesus bring definition to faith (or what it means to be faithful)?
 - b. How is he the fullest expression of faith (or what it means to be faithful)?
 - c. What does it mean to look to Jesus for both the definition and highest expression of faith?
2. Our author also tells us, Jesus is the “perfecter of our faith.” This is his favorite expression for the fullness we find in Christ. “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified (Hebrews 10:14 see also 7:11,19; 10:1; 11:40 and 12:23)
 - a. How has Christ perfected us?
 - b. How is he continuing to perfect us?
 - c. How will he ultimately perfect us?
 - d. What does it mean to look to Christ as the “perfecter of our faith?”
3. Christ found his ultimate joy by living in faithful obedience to the Father (see John 4:34 and 6:38).
 - a. How is the joy of knowing and doing the Father’s will qualitatively different from the joy this world has to offer?
 - b. How should the joy of knowing and doing the Father’s will motivate us?

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LOOK TO JESUS

RUN WITH PERSEVERANCE | HEBREWS 12:1-2

There are times when we can talk all day, without saying much of anything. No one is going to break out a moleskin journal and ask us to slow down so that they can capture every word. There are other times, however, when someone, a poet, a theologian, a philosopher, or more often than not, a small child, says something so profound, concise and beautiful that we could spend a lifetime unpacking its meaning.

We are certainly used to that in Scripture. I love the prayers of Paul. Our prayers are so impoverished and shallow in comparison. Paul does more theology in a simple prayer than even the greatest theological libraries contain in the thousands of dusty unread volumes that line their shelves.

The writer of Hebrews is no less profound. There are any number of passages in his brief work that we might commit to memory and carefully ponder as we follow Jesus. Chapter 11 is a case study in elegance. The author’s argument begins in chapter 10 where he encourages us to persevere in the faith. He opens chapter 11 by describing the nature of enduring faith. He tells us,

“Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (v.1).

A few lines later he reminds us,

“without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (v. 6).

The rest of the chapter offers example after example of those who displayed enduring faith in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges.

He concludes the chapter by reminding us that as great as their faith was, we have an advantage that they never imagined. The object of our faith has come in to far greater relief in the person of Christ.

HEBREWS 11:39-40 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Then he makes a beautiful turn in chapter 12. In one pregnant sentence, he summarizes the argument of the entire book. If you are looking for the message of Hebrews in a sentence here it is:

HEBREWS 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The heart of his encouragement is, “Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” Everything that proceeds and follows highlights three vital essentials for running and finishing our race well.

THE HEART OF THE PASSAGE (v. 1c)

...let us run with perseverance the race marks out for us...

The central command of our text is “let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” In this short command we learn that our race will have different challenges than the generations that have run before us, and in every generation the race will call for a healthy dose of perseverance or endurance.

1. What do we have in common with the generations that have run before us?
2. What are some of the unique challenges and obstacles they faced?
3. What are some of the unique challenges and obstacles we face?
4. Why is perseverance a vital quality for running and finishing well?

ESSENTIAL 1: DRAW ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THE BIBLICAL STORY (v. 1a)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...

1. When we hear the word witnesses, we are likely to envision a stadium full of spectators wildly cheering us on as we run our race. That is probably not what the writer of Hebrews has in mind. He has already used the word five times in chapter 11 (vv. 2, 4, 5, 39). It is most often translated “commended” or “spoken well of...” There is an interesting play on words here. These witnesses

have all been commended to us by God in the text of Scripture and through the text of Scripture they commend God to us. They are not so much witnesses of our race as they are witnesses to us of God’s faithfulness to his people and his promises as they endure hardship.

2. According to Hebrews 11, what is the unified testimony of the witnesses that have gone before us?
3. As we look to Biblical characters we need to remember that they are deeply flawed and are not the ultimate hero of the story. The real hero is the God who graciously moves in their hearts and lives in spite of their tragic flaws and imperfections.
 - a. What can we learn from their flaws and imperfections?
 - b. What can we learn about God’s grace in their lives in spite of their flaws and imperfections?
 - c. How should we continue to draw encouragement from the Biblical story?

ESSENTIAL 2: DEAL DECISIVELY WITH SIN (v. 1c)

...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles..

The writer of Hebrews is addressing two separate categories—anything that might hinder our ability to run an effective race, and sin that we tend to minimize or overlook.

1. Jesus addresses some of the distractions we will encounter when he describes the seed that took root among the briars. “Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful (Mark 4:18-19).”

How can “the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things” hinder us from running with perseverance the race marked out for us?
2. Why is a failure to deal with known sin particularly deadly to our walk with Christ?
3. What are some practical steps we can take to eliminate distractions and deal with known sin?