



360 DISCUSSION 06.11.17

## FINISHING STRONG

HEBREWS 12:1-3



If you are an avid sports fan, you've probably seen the video of Jim Peters' agonizing finish to the marathon at the 1954 Commonwealth Games. Peters held the world record at the time and entered the stadium an incredible three miles ahead of his nearest competitor. He was well on his way to setting a new world mark. But from the moment he entered the stadium it was obvious something was wrong. He staggered into the stadium wobbling wildly from one side of the track to the other. He initially headed in the wrong direction and everyone in the stands rose to their feet to beckon him back on course. He fell over a dozen times. With a little more than 200 yards left he collapsed a final time and began to crawl on all fours. One by one his competitors entered the stadium, caught him, and passed him. While Jim Peters was arguably the best runner in the stadium that day, he never finished the race.

For the writer of Hebrews, nothing could be more tragic than to begin well yet stumble and fall at the end. The entire book is written to encourage believers not to give up on Jesus. His readers had started well but they were in danger of allowing hardship, persecution and even boredom to keep them from finishing the race.

In chapter 11, he calls them (and us) to deep and abiding faith, by reminding them that, "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)." As the chapter unfolds, he lays out a grand catalogue of those who trusted God against seemingly insurmountable odds.

In chapter 12, his focus turns from those who have run before us, to the one who not only runs before us but continues to run with us. He tells us, "fix your eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith."

## THOSE WHO HAVE RUN BEFORE US (v. 1a)

The writers of Hebrews makes the turn from chapter 11 to chapter twelve with the simple phrase, “Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...” Don’t confuse the word witness with spectator, because these men and women are everything but spectators. They are witnesses to the faithfulness of God, and the beauty of trusting him in spite of the discouragement and obstacles that we will inevitably face in our Christian experience. “Is it easy?” “No.” “Is it worth it?” “Absolutely.”

*VERSE 1a Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...*

1. What do you think would be the primary testimony or witness of those who have run the race before us?
2. How can we draw encouragement from them?

## THE RACE MARKED OUT FOR US (v. 1b)

The great cloud of witnesses have already run their race. They lived in a different time, a different place with a different set of challenges. Now it is our turn. The writer of Hebrews calls our attention to the “race marked out for us.”

*VERSE 1b ...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...*

1. How would you describe the “race marked out for us?”
2. What is the primary quality we will need if we are going to run a good race?
3. Why is “perseverance” so important in the Christian life?
4. “Everything that hinders” are the things that tend to weigh us down. They are not necessarily sinful in and of themselves, but they distract us from running the “race marked out for us.”
  - a. What are some of the good things that keep you from running a good race?
  - b. What are some steps you can take not to be distracted from the long list of seemingly good things that compete with our affection for Christ?

5. The writer of Hebrews describes those things that “so easily entangle...” as “sin.” Sin describes those things that we know are wrong, the Bible clearly tells us are wrong, yet we embrace them anyway because they bring us some sort of comfort, pleasure, or personal gratification.
  - a. What are some of the besetting sins that have become obstacles to your walk with Christ?
  - b. Is there any such thing as a “non-besetting” sin?
  - c. What is your strategy for dealing with besetting sin?

## THE ONE WHO RAN A FLAWLESS RACE (v. 2-3)

While we draw encouragement from those who have run before us, and we embrace the race that is marked out for us, our ultimate success is determined by where we set our gaze. The writer tells us to fix our eyes on Jesus, “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”

The words used to describe Jesus are far too rich for the English language to fully capture. They speak of Jesus as the beginning and the end. On the one hand, he is the supreme example of one who ran a great race from beginning to end. However, he is far more than just an example, he is the one who brought us to faith, is perfecting our faith, and ultimately will complete our faith. He not only ran before us, he is the one who empowers us to run our race.

*VERSES 2-3 ...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. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

1. What does the writer of Hebrews tell us we can learn from Jesus’ example?
2. While Jesus was neither weighted down by the worries of this world or entangled in sin, he did face opposition from sinful men. What are some subtle, and maybe not so subtle ways, we face opposition as we follow Christ?
3. What was Jesus’ ultimate motivation in the face of opposition?
4. What is our ultimate motivation?
5. How does Jesus bring us to faith?
6. How does Jesus perfect our faith?
7. What are some steps you can take in the coming week to “run with perseverance the race marked out for [you]?”