the capacity to persevere? We build that capacity by walking through trials and difficulties—by doing what God leads us to do even when it’s hard and we’re tired and we’d rather do something else.

That’s the only way we can possibly make sense of what Paul says in Romans 5:3-5. After explaining that as Christians, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which we’re on board with even if we don’t know what it means, he goes on to say, “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” As we’re careful to throw off hindrances and sins, we can persevere in the race marked out for us. And that perseverance builds character and hope, which cannot be built in any other way.

Finally, the author of Hebrews helps us understand what it means, he goes on to say, “Fix your eyes on Jesus, who began the work of faith in us, and who will also bring it to completion in the end. You fix your eyes on Jesus, who is the source of our salvation, the object of our worship, and the focal point of the race God has called us to run. Just as we are called to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus fixed his eyes on the joy set before him—the joy of Heaven. Jesus knew the joy of heaven in a way that we simply can’t. Jesus knew that his earthly suffering could never compare to the wonder of being in the presence of God. Jesus kept his life in perspective by focusing on God, and his life with God in heaven, and the ultimate joy that life produced. Therefore, Jesus was able to run with perseverance the very difficult race marked out for him. Jesus is the joy set before us. As we focus on our love for Jesus, and our desire to please him, we will be far less likely become distracted and entangled, because we won’t want anything to keep us from the joy of our relationship with Him.”

Enduring Opposition (v 3)

The author of Hebrews finally says, “Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” As believers, we will face opposition in this life. Sometimes that opposition comes in the form of those who are hostile to our faith. But sometimes that opposition comes in the form of temptations and distractions. Sometimes that opposition comes in the form of sickness or disease. Living a life of faith, and growing in our life of faith, is not natural or easy. It’s much easier to run from this thing to that thing to the other thing. But if we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, we will find that it is possible to persevere in this race we have been called to run. TS: So how do we apply this passage to our lives?

Conclusion

So what do we conclude from these things? One, if we want to run with perseverance the race marked out for us, we must ask the Lord to help us identify the hindrances and sins that slow us down. We do that by simply coming to the Lord and asking him to search our hearts, minds, and lives, and to show us what needs to be thrown off. We earnestly pray with the Psalmist, “search me, O Lord, and know my heart.” And when he shows us the hindrances and sinful entanglements, then we confess them to him and ask him to help us throw them off. And then we keep running.

Two, if we want to run with perseverance the race marked out for us, we must fix our eyes on Jesus as we run. We can’t fix our eyes in this and then that and then the other way, but must stay steadfast in focusing on him so that we can run our race the way he ran his. It’s not good enough to fix our eyes on someone else while they’re looking at Jesus—that’s perilously close to idolatry. Fix your eyes on Jesus.

Three, if we want to run with perseverance the race marked out for us, we must allow God to lead us through situations that develop perseverance in us. You learn to persevere by learning to persevere. You get stronger by lifting more weights. God’s grace is not just there to shield us from difficulty, although it does at times, but is there to help us persevere under trial so that we grow in character. So when you go through trials, pray for God to intervene and to help, but let those trials grow your perseverance.

Fix Your Eyes on Jesus (v 2)

The second big focus of Hebrews 12:1-3 is fixing our eyes on Jesus, who began the work of faith in us, and who will also bring it to completion in the end. You’ll notice the text does not say, “glance at Jesus,” or “take a peek at Jesus from time to time,” but says, “fix your eyes upon Him.” To fix our eyes on Jesus is to focus on him without distraction.

As we are Christians, what else would we fix our eyes on? The funny but not funny answer is almost anything else, even Christian things.

Some Christians fix their eyes on sin—either their own or other people’s. They are consumed with identifying, describing, and cataloguing sin. Some fix their eyes on Satan and what he might be up to at any given time. They find evil behind every whisper.

SOME FIX THEIR EYES ON THE END OF THE WORLD—BIBLICAL PROPHECY AND HOW THAT PROPHECY MIGHT BE FILLED IN WHATEVER IS HAPPENING IN THE WORLD AT THE TIME, INCLUDING PANDEMICS LIKE THE ONE WE’RE LIVING THROUGH RIGHT NOW.

NOW PLEASE UNDERSTAND ME; THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH CONSIDERING THESE THINGS. CONSIDER YOUR LIFE, AND THE LIFE OF THOSE AROUND YOU. THINK ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF IT. BE AWARE OF WHAT’S HAPPENING IN THE WORLD AROUND YOU. ASK GOD TO HELP YOU SEE THE SCHEMES OF THE ENEMY. BUT IN ALL OF THESE THINGS, DON’T LOSE YOUR FOCUS ON JESUS, BECAUSE NOTHING ELSE, AND NO ONE ELSE, WILL HELP YOU RUN THE RACE GOD HAS MARKED OUT FOR YOU. DON’T LOOK AT ME WHEN YOU’RE RUNNING, LOOK AT JESUS. DON’T LOOK AT SOMEONE WHO ROCKS A PREACHER OR TEACHER OR WORSHIP LEADER—LOOK AT JESUS. JESUS IS THE SOURCE OF OUR SALVATION, THE OBJECT OF OR WORSHIP, AND THE FOCAL POINT OF THE RACE GOD HAS CALLED US TO RUN.

Hebrews 5:1-4

Fix Our Eyes On Jesus

April 19, 2020

Pastor Jared Stoner
Fix Our Eyes On Jesus
April 19, 2020
Pastor Jared Stoner

Hebrews 12:1-3

Introduction
Good morning. I trust all of you are doing well, staying safe, and finding ways to connect with people you haven’t seen in a while now. We appreciate you sending us pictures of what you’re doing these days and allowing us to share them with others in the congregation. One of the comments we hear on a regular basis is how much you enjoy seeing pictures of the church family, so keep them coming and we’ll get through this together. This morning I want to work our way through Hebrews 12:1-3 and talk about the importance of what we focus on.

Hebrews 12:1-3 says, “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.” Let’s fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfector of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. “Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

You might be surprised to learn that Hebrews 12 comes right after Hebrews 11. Let that sink in for a moment. Hebrews 11 teaches us about the importance of faith and how faith enabled a long list of God’s people to remain faithful to him while enduring sorrow, suffering, pain, uncertainty, and death. What God’s people have endured in order to be faithful to him is a remarkable testimony to the power of faith. Hebrews 12, then, turns to application. In other words, Hebrews 12 asks what God is saying and what we should do about it—how the faith of God’s people who have gone before should impact the way we live now. That’s why Hebrews 12:1 begins with the word, “therefore.”

The Cloud of Witnesses (v 1)
Before the author of Hebrews tells us to throw off hinderance and sinful entanglements, he tells us why we should do so and that because we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who have walked the path of faith before us. Our lives, and our journey of faith, are part of a much bigger story. We’re not only part of a community of saints here on earth, we’re part of a community of saints who have gone on to heaven before us. The men and women of God who have gone before us have set an example for us to follow. Not only are there heroes of the Bible in that group—people like Abraham and Moses and the prophets—but the people in our lives that have set us an example for us to follow. We, then, have been called to do what they have done—to finish the race they began.

If we stop to think about it for just a minute, we are in the process of becoming a part of that great cloud of witnesses. By the way we live, we are setting an example for others to come behind us. They’re looking at our lives. They’re watching to see how we live. Whether we know it or not, and whether they understand it or not, we are shaping their lives just like our lives have been shaped by those who have gone before us. Knowing that should give us a sense of sobriety and cause us to carefully consider how we walk out our faith.

Hinderances (v 1)
In light of the great cloud of witnesses, the author of Hebrews tells us that first, we should throw off everything that hinders our walk of faith, or everything that weighs us down. That provides us with our first question to consider: what things in my life hinder my relationship with God even though they may not be inherently sinful? Paul’s statement in 1Corinthians 6:12-13 comes to mind when I think about this question: Paul says, “Everything is permissible for me”—but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me”—but I will not be mastered by anything. Food for the stomach and the stomach for food”—but God will destroy them both.”

Among other things, Paul was quite comfortable eating meat sacrificed to idols because he knew idols were not real, but he chose not to eat on certain occasions because he knew it would hinder those with a weak conscience and as such, would prevent him from running the race marked out for him. The same was true for circumcision, which Paul argued made no difference whatsoever to someone’s faith (1Corinthians 7:19), but who circumcision is nothing without faith, it is not only should not be a hinderance to our faith (Matthew 13:20). Trials can be a hinderance to our faith (Matthew 13:21). They can take our eyes off the path in front of us and slow us down. In the same verse, Jesus also says that persecution for the sake of his name is a hinderance that should not have us turn from the path in front of us (Matthew 13:22).

The cares of this world can be a hinderance to our faith (Matthew 13:22). So also the deceitfulness of wealth and its pursuit. Not only that, but how we respond to poverty can be a hinderance to running our race, worrying, Jesus says, about what we’re going to eat or drink or where the next roll of toilet paper is going to come from (Matthew 6:25). Proverbs 29:25 says that the fear of men is a snare, and as such is something that will certainly hinder us from running our path. Anything that is overly heavy or turns our gaze away from the path in front of us is a hinderance and, Hebrews, says, should be thrown off.

Sin (v 1)
The author of Hebrews then tells us that second, we should throw off the sin that so easily entangles. That provides us with our second question to reflect on: what sins have I allowed to go unchecked in my life? What sinful thoughts or attitudes, which no one else may see, have I entertained or engaged in? That list could include any number of things such as lust, pride, hatred, unfor- giveness, jealousy, rage, selfish ambition (Galatians 5:19-21). It could be knowing that you’re supposed to do something but not doing it (James 4:19). It’s not just sinful thoughts or attitudes, but also sinful actions. That could be gossip, slander, or stealing, whether physical objects or intellectual property (1Corinthians 6:10). It could be lying (Ephesians 4:25). It can be anything we use our body to do, that although we might blow off with a chuckle, is actually sin and entangles us as such, makes it harder to run the race marked out for us.

Running With Perseverance (v 1)
Once we throw off our hinderances and the sins that entangle us, the author of Hebrews then tells us we should “run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” It’s amazing how much stuff humans collect. Unless you’re the exception to the rule, your house fills up with stuff no matter how large it is. Stuff just grows. And kid stuff grows at one and a half times the rate adult stuff grows at. It’s one thing to gradually collect furniture or paintings or trinkets or old pictures and put it in a forgotten room somewhere, but when you’re trying to run a race, everything you collect dramatically reduces your ability not only to run, but to run with perseverance. A pound doesn’t feel like much, but when you collect a few of them, it gets harder and harder to run. Once we get rid of those things, and this case is going to hinder us and our entanglements, we can then run the race marked out for us with perseverance. We can run the race not only for a day or two at a time, but month after month and year after year and season after season.

What is perseverance? Perseverance is the capacity to bear up under the weight of trial and difficulty, to endure and be steadfast over a long period of time. We might not like the answer, but here’s the question anyway: do you know how we build...