

Faith Under Pressure
Endurance
Hebrews 12:1-4
Pastor John Secrest
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TRANSCRIPT

Please open your Bibles to Hebrews 12. As I said last week, I'm very excited about the start of football season. Both college and professional football. I grew up in Kansas and I'm a KC Chiefs fan. It's a nice time to be a Chiefs fan, they have won the last two super bowls. The Chiefs play in one of the oldest stadiums in the NFL, anyone know what it's called?? Arrowhead Stadium. Opposing teams don't like to play there, not because its an old stadium, do you now why? The fans. Whose side are most of the fans on? The Chiefs. Which means they try to help the home team, and do everything they can to make it hard for the visiting team by making noise, lots of noise at the right times. It's called homefield advantage.

It's not about the field, it's about the fans. Fans actually change the game, the noise they make, the distractions they provide, if you are the home team you feel the energy and encouragement... if you are the visiting team you feel the opposition, the intimidation. Sports are simply not the same without a live audience. We saw this during COVID with teams playing in empty stadiums. Not the same! For athletes, knowing that people are watching you changes your performance. It's true for a lot of areas of life, not just sports.

At work, does it change how you do things when you know people are watching? Are people really as efficient working from home? Probably not! At School, do students behave differently when they know the class or the test is being monitored?

When you ring the doorbell at someone's house and realize they have a video doorbell - how does that change your behavior?? Better be careful what you say!

Usually when we know we are being watched it motivates us to a higher standard. It focuses our attention, it increases our energy. In Hebrews we have finished 11 chapters of how God has made a way through Jesus, how through faith we can approach the throne of God with confidence, how men and women of faith throughout history have paved the way and shown us the path, **and now...**, in Hebrews 12 we get this encouragement... **read v.1-3**

The stadium of life, where we are living by faith, playing our part in God's plan doing the work and labor of the Lord, running the race of faith... this stadium is not empty. Followers of Jesus who are running the race of faith have a home field advantage, **if** you can have eyes to see beyond. We are surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses, those who have gone before us and passed the baton of faith to us. // **They are cheering us on!** That should change the way we live, it motivates us to a higher standard, it focusses our attention, and it increases our energy.

Big Idea: Knowing we are watched changes how we run.

It's true in sports, it's true in life and faith. Those who have gone before you are watching you are cheering you on! **Pray**

Paul told the church in Corinth this... read it last week...

1 Corinthians 9:24 (NLT)

*“Don’t you realize that in a race everyone runs,
but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!”*

When you go see your team compete, what do you want to see your team do? Win! **Winning faith** doesn’t just happen, it has a cost, it has a plan, it requires training and effort. **We are not talking about salvation here.** Salvation and forgiveness and eternal life are guaranteed not based on your performance, but on faith alone in Jesus alone. **Winning faith is not about getting saved.** Getting saved is what gets you on God’s team, and God has given each of us a part to play in his plan. Do you get that? Do you see the difference?

We GET to run! Not so we can be saved, but because we are saved! And now we are part of a much bigger drama and mission, **helping people find their way back to God.** So, winning faith is not about getting saved, it’s about making progress in that mission, in playing our part. Being on the team is great but winning as a team is even better, that’s the point! So, in our text...knowing we are watched....

In order to win the race... three things I must do...

1. **I must deny what hinders.** 12:1

There are very real things that are getting in the way of my making progress and playing my part. The preacher lists two of them here. The strong encouragement is to lay them aside.

So lay aside... first

a. Every weight.

Other translations call these encumbrances, hindrances. We are to lay them aside or throw them off. It’s the picture of a runner or athlete stripping down to the bare essentials so they can run freely. **Weights or encumbrances** are not necessarily sinful things, but they are hampering our spiritual progress. If you want to win, if you want to help the team, you should lay them aside, throw them off. // The preacher doesn’t give us any examples, maybe that’s good, because what hinders you may not hinder me. I can think of a few that are common in our culture... An over-abundance of material possessions, debt, work responsibilities, volunteer or service opportunities, sports leagues, leisure habits (golf). A certain amount of any of these is OK, often necessary, but any of them can become a hindrance when they weigh you down so you cannot be effective in playing your part in God’s plan.

How do I know? If they are a hindrance?

Here are a few things we know the Bible says are an important part of being on the team...

Is anything in your life hindering...

- Listening/paying attention to God’s Word,
- Being in intentional community with other followers of Jesus - church services, serving, small group, discipleship. “We”
- Obeying God, his word, his commands- doing.
- being a witness, sharing the gospel...
- giving generously. Grace...
- Loving one another, loving your neighbor. (enemy) You can add some more...

All of us are in process, none of us do those things perfectly, these don’t save you, this is the labor, the work...

But are there some things in my life that are hindering my full participation in any of these? *e.g. Question: Why don't I read God's word more?... if my Answer is: I'm too busy. Then, something in my schedule or life rhythms is a weight, a hindrance. I need to lay it aside, throw it off.*

These weights can be outside of us, but they could be **inside** of us. Burdens of **guilt** or **shame** or hindrances of **insecurity** or lack of confidence. Sometimes it's easier to blame external factors, but often the greatest encumbrance or weight that hinders our running the race is within. By embracing the gospel and the truth of **who we are in Christ** and the empowering of the Holy Spirit- the gifts we have because we are saved! We can cast off these internal hindrances.

You have to identify what those hindrances are for **you**, but wise people in your life may be able to help you if you can be humble enough to ask them and teachable enough to listen, and courageous enough to do something about it.

Sometimes we can be our own worst hindrance. And that is especially true with #2, also in order to win the race lay aside...

b. ***Every sin.***

Sin which clings so closely, sin which so easily entangles. **Nothing will hinder you more in running the race to win than sin.** Maybe not today, maybe tomorrow, but for sure eventually... sin will catch up with you. Again he doesn't tell us what the sin is, perhaps it is any sin, or as one translation calls it, the sin that so easily besets us. All of us struggle with different things, but here's the reality, **all of us struggle.** So here is what we do... when that sin pops up in our lives - lay it aside, throw it off, reject it. If you stumble and fall, don't quit. Get up and throw it off again. This process is what we call confession and here is a key verse for this laying aside sin...

1 John 1:9

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

To confess includes these elements: 6 A's

- Acknowledge the sin. Call it sin. Name it, specifics. Not, *"I'm sorry if I did something..."*
- Apologize. To those who I have offended, God and others.
- Accept the consequences, restitution...
- Assess the reasons for my behavior. Why did I do it?
- Alter my behavior, repentance, turn around! Call on God to help you by the power of his Spirit. Not just sorry I got caught
- Ask forgiveness, Call it forgiven, thank him.

There is freedom in this!

If we want to run in such a way as to win, we have to deny these weights and sins in our lives. Don't let them be a hindrance. So, if you know there is something in your life that is hindering you, this Easter..., take steps to throw it off.

But sometimes we don't see what we don't see, this is where it really helps to be on a team, to have others in your life who will lovingly point out what is hindering you. We easily deceive ourselves, *"that's no big deal. I can fix it later..."* But you are wrong. You won't fix it later, and

it is a big deal. Why am I spending so much time on this?? b/c laying aside hindrances is what gets God's attention! It shows Hunger! Desire.

Do you have people in your life who love you enough to help you lay aside hindrances? Have you given them permission to lovingly point out the weights and sins in your life, will you let them help you throw them off? WE already studied...

Hebrews 10:24-25

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

We do this as a community, not as individual runners. Remember it's a relay race. And knowing that those who have run the legs of the race before ours are watching makes a difference in how we run. **Their** victory in the race is dependent on how **we** run... **read** 11:39-40. So lay aside what hinders. And then...

This might sound pretty basic, but necessary

In order to win the race...

2. I must run the right race. 12:1-2, **read**.

The race that is set before us. Paul said in 1 Cor 9:25, I do not run like a man running aimlessly... You have to run the race within the parameters that have been set. Marathon runners have to stay on the course, relay runners have to stay in their lanes. In most races the runner is looking to the finish line, and here's good news... we have a finish line, it is a person who is cheering us on and calling us home, Jesus. So #1...

a. Jesus is our goal.

It says, looking to Jesus, fixing our eyes on Jesus. There's a reason why they tell you, don't text and drive. When you take your eyes off the road, you lose direction, you drift, you veer left or right. Same thing in life. Your circumstances are always pulling your eyes down, like a text message. Keep your eyes on the finish line. So, he is our goal but also...

b. Jesus is our example.

V2 says he is the founder and perfecter of our faith. He ran the race before us and showed us how to live on mission and how to finish well. He was tempted like we are, he experienced hardships and suffering, and right here it tells us how he endured. He endured by looking beyond the hardships and seeing the joy. It says, “For the joy set before him” he endured the cross despising the shame - It's the same strategy the Apostle Paul used in Romans 8 saying these light and momentary afflictions are nothing compared to the glory that is coming. I find it amazing in the gospels when it says that Jesus often prayed, he got away alone to be with his heavenly father, often spending the whole night in prayer. Angels would meet him to encourage him. Moses and Elijah appeared to him to encourage him. If Jesus needed prayer and encouragement and time with God to keep his eyes focused on the joy, on the glory ahead, and to not get overwhelmed by the circumstances. How much more do we need to lift our eyes? To encourage one another. The hope is not in our circumstances finally going our way in this life - that's not the right race, our hope is higher than that...

c. Jesus is our hope.

End of v 2... He ran the right race and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Jesus is already at where we will be soon enough, home. Putting our hope in him and in that future is the only way we can get through this race. It's how the great men and women of faith

in Hebrews 11 ran the race... Looking forward to the city whose designer and builder is God... they were seeking a homeland... they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one... and it says... 11:16, God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared a city for them.

The resurrection changed everything for Jesus' disciples. When Jesus was crucified they hid in fear, but after he rose from the dead they realized... Jesus had won, death had been defeated, Jesus had passed the baton of the mission on to the disciples and they needed to run the race. Within days of the resurrection they were completely changed. Boldly preaching the good news that Jesus had won, he is risen, and through faith in him, we can all find our way back to God, we can find our way home, with him.

It does the same for us. The gospel reminds us that Jesus has won. The baton has been passed to us, and knowing that we are watched changes how we run. This cloud of witnesses is cheering us on, and they are cheering us on to do the last thing.

This last one is obvious but necessary as well..

In order to win the race...

3. I must finish the race. 12:3-4 **read**.

This requires...

a. **Pace**.

V2 calls it running with endurance. I appreciate the full disclosure. Jesus tells us, in this world you will have trouble, but take heart I have overcome the world. The crucible of faith can be hard, God allows challenges in our lives because they refine our faith. Running the race takes endurance and patience and it requires the next thing...

b. **Perseverance**.

V3... *"Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary and fainthearted."* You have to pace yourself, but when the going gets tough you can't quit. Weary or fainthearted is a picture of a runner who is out of gas and ready to quit. Have you ever felt like that? Remember who this letter was written to, these were former Jews who now believed in Jesus, they lived in Rome and Emperor Nero was about to begin his brutal persecution of Christians. But it hadn't begun yet, but it was coming. Marathon runners know they are going to hit a wall when they will want to quit. It happens to everybody. But others have gone before them and they persevered and pushed through it and made it to the finish line.

And Jesus is our example in this, so consider him who endured, consider the cloud of witnesses who endured. Don't quit, keep going... knowing we are watched and being cheered on changes how we run! And then this... to finish the race, it requires

c. **Perspective**. Read v4.

Other people have paid a high price so we can live how we live today. People have died for our political and national freedom, people have died so we can have the faith we have and worship freely. When you get the perspective of history, it helps us to have the courage to face the challenges of today.//

We can focus on all the things that cause fear and anxiety, or we can focus on all the things we have to be grateful for.

I know these are extraordinary times we live in... **for us**. But those who have gone before us and are cheering us on went through extraordinary times too, tough times, even harder... most of them.

So, to help us finish the race strong, let's try to be grateful. Lift our eyes off the circumstances and run with endurance, fixing our eyes on Jesus, let's run with pace, with patience, with perseverance and with perspective.

This is our moment, how will history view us, how will our children remember these times and how we chose to live by faith in whatever challenges we are facing?

We are on the field right now and the stadium is full, we are being watched and cheered on because they want to see us win. And the great news of the gospel is that Jesus has won and he has defeated death, and **he** is cheering you on.

Let that sink in, it will change how you run the race!

Pray