

sermon notes

Hebrews 12 sermon: Running the Race — Strengthening Weak Knees and Choosing the Better Future Hebrews 12:1–3, 12–24

Talk about the different Everests we each face—long distance running or just getting dressed every morning. Some here will have got here through gritted teeth!

Living the full Christian life entails keeping Jesus at the centre of our vision. The great Biblical scholar, A W Tozer, stated: 'For the true Christian, the one supreme test for the present soundness and ultimate worth of everything religious must be the place our Lord Jesus occupies in it.'

When you read through Paul's letters they confront where these young fellowships are beginning to sideline Him. With the Corinthian church it became all about charismatic power, dynamic personalities and sensual indulgences; the Galatians church became more concerned with efforts to justify itself before the Law and the Colossian church was more concerned with religious festivals and feasting, issues around food.

So, how do we live being in Christ? The writer to Hebrews has some guidelines, it is as if he provides a helpdesk for our challenges in walking with Christ each day. There is something powerful about the image of a race. Not a short sprint, but a long-distance race — one that demands endurance, determination, and courage. The writer to the Hebrews begins this chapter with one of the most memorable encouragements in the New Testament: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders... and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus..."

This is the great theme of the chapter — perseverance. Not simply starting well but continuing faithfully. Not giving up when life

becomes difficult. Not drifting when faith becomes costly. And the writer paints a vivid picture. Imagine runners in a stadium. Around them is a great cloud of witnesses — the faithful men and women of Hebrews 11: Abraham, Moses, Sarah, Rahab, and many others — those who trusted God through hardship. Imagine for us it may be Sunday school leaders, youth workers, Pastors, parents, friends. Their lives bear witness that perseverance is possible. But the key to running well is not simply looking at those who have gone before. It is fixing our eyes on Jesus

The writer tells us: “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross...” (Hebrews 12:2)

Here is the supreme example of perseverance. Jesus endured the cross — not because it was easy, but because He saw the joy beyond it. He endured suffering, shame, and rejection because He knew what lay ahead. He trusted the Father. He remained faithful. Then comes verse 3: “Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” That phrase speaks directly to the struggles of ordinary life. Weariness is real. Discouragement is real. There are seasons when faith feels heavy and perseverance feels exhausting. And so the writer urges us: **1. Look at Jesus. Remember His endurance. Let His faithfulness strengthen yours.** And Jesus is not just a model for the way we should live, but His Holy Spirit is within us giving us all that we need to live a Christ-like life.

2. Strengthening Weak Knees: Later in the chapter, the tone becomes deeply practical: “Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet...” (Hebrews 12:12–13) This is still the race image. The runners are tired. Their arms droop. Their knees tremble. But the call is not to sit down. It is to stand up again. Strengthen weak knees. Sometimes perseverance is not heroic or dramatic. It is quiet. It is steady. It is the decision to keep going when you feel like stopping. There are times when faith feels strong and confident. But there are also times when it feels fragile. When prayer is harder. When hope feels distant.

When discouragement presses in. This passage reminds us that weakness is not failure. Weakness is part of the race. And perseverance means continuing, even when strength feels low.

3. Guarding the Heart — The Warning of Esau. You may have seen the tests on children which challenge them not to take the first thing that is given to them but wait for the promised better thing which will arrive in a while. In this passage we see stated~ “See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God... See that no one is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.” Esau becomes a powerful example — not of endurance, but of failure to persevere. You remember the story. Esau came home hungry. Jacob had prepared stew. Esau wanted food immediately. Jacob asked for his birthright — the inheritance that belonged to Esau as the firstborn. And Esau agreed. One meal in exchange for a lifetime blessing. One moment of hunger traded for something sacred.

The tragedy is not simply that he was hungry. It is that he treated something precious as though it were worthless. The writer says that later, Esau sought the blessing with tears, but the opportunity had passed. That is the danger of living only for the moment — choosing immediate comfort over lasting promise. Perseverance requires patience. It requires valuing what God offers more than what feels urgent right now.

4. Pursuing Peace and Holiness

Before mentioning Esau, the writer gives another instruction: “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy...” Perseverance is not only about enduring hardship. It is also about shaping character. Living in peace. Pursuing holiness. Guarding against bitterness. Resentment and anger can quietly weaken perseverance. They drain strength and cloud vision. That is why the writer warns about a “bitter root” that can grow and cause trouble. Perseverance is strengthened when hearts remain soft, forgiving, and open to God’s grace.

5. Two Mountains — Sinai and Zion

Toward the end of the passage, the writer introduces one of the most striking contrasts in the letter — the contrast between two mountains. He says: “You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire...” This refers to Mount Sinai, where God gave the law to Moses. It was a place of thunder, fire, darkness, and fear. The people trembled. Even Moses said, “I am trembling with fear.” But then comes the great contrast: “But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...” What a remarkable shift. Not fear, but celebration. Not distance, but welcome. Not trembling, but joy. The writer describes angels in joyful assembly, the church of the firstborn, and God Himself — the Judge of all — surrounded by those made righteous. And at the centre of it all: “Jesus the mediator of a new covenant...” This is the destination of the race. Not Sinai, but Zion. Not fear, but grace. Not exclusion, but belonging.

6. Perseverance With a Destination in View

Why does the writer describe these two mountains? Because perseverance becomes possible when we remember where the race is leading. We are not running aimlessly. We are running toward something glorious: toward the heavenly city, toward the presence of God, toward the fulfilment of every promise. That is what Esau forgot. He traded the future for the present. He exchanged lasting blessing for immediate comfort. But the faithful runner keeps the future in view. Just as Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him, we persevere because of the joy set before us.

7. Living as Runners Today

So what does this passage mean for us today? It means we are still in the race. We are called to:

- **Throw off what hinders**
- **Fix our eyes on Jesus**
- **Strengthen weak knees**
- **Guard our hearts**
- **Value God’s promises**
- **Keep running toward the heavenly city**

There will be moments of weariness. Moments of doubt. Moments of struggle. But perseverance does not mean never feeling weak. It means refusing to give up. It means trusting that God is shaping us through hardship. It means choosing the better future rather than the easier moment.

8. A Final Encouragement

Picture again the race. You are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses — those who have run before you. Ahead of you is Jesus — the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Behind you lies the path you have already travelled. Before you lies Mount Zion — the city of the living God. So strengthen weak knees. Lift drooping hands. Fix your eyes on Jesus.

Do not trade what is eternal for what is temporary. And keep running — because the finish line is real, the destination is glorious, and the One who calls you to persevere walks beside you every step of the way.