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Message Series: Hebrews: Greater Than**Message Title: Run With Eyes on Jesus****Scripture: Hebrews 12:1-4**

The life of faith isn't a sprint. It's a long, demanding race that calls for endurance and focus. Most of us do not enjoy the action or even the thought of running, but the metaphor of choice is running.

Having just finished a long list of past examples of people who lived by faith, in Hebrews 12, the preacher turns to his listeners with an encouragement to live by faith in the present. Hebrews 12:1-4 flows naturally from Hebrews 11. The preacher transitions from the past with "therefore," essentially saying, "In light of the faith described in chapter 11, this is how we should live."

Hebrews 12:1-2 is a long, complex sentence in Greek. However, in our English translations, this sentence is broken into several different sentences. The main verb that the preacher invites his hearers to do is an invitation to "run with endurance." This main verb is surrounded by three supporting phrases in Hebrews 12:1-2.

Let's Run: *And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us (12:1).*

- The fundamental metaphor of this complex sentence is athletic: *let us keep running*.
- An encouragement and invitation is not so much about speed, but about discipline.
- The word "race" generally means "struggle," as the term refers to an athletic contest or game (see also 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7). The verb running implies a race, but the emphasis is on the difficulty of the struggle. The preacher appeals to this athletic metaphor not to encourage us to train our physical bodies, but to provide us with imagery to envision the struggle.
- The invitation is to the continuation of faith, not the impossibility of the task. Instead, running the life of faith requires endurance through concentrated, continual effort.

The Faithful from the Past Cheer Us On: *since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith (12:1).*

- This is an encouraging reminder that the people before us loved and sought to follow God. They displayed their faithfulness through perseverance, even through uncertainty and suffering.
- The author may envision the faithful from Hebrews 11 (and others) as spectators in the stands enthusiastically cheering on the present followers of Jesus who are struggling in the arena, presently running the race of faith.
- Their stories witness and cry out, "God kept his promises to us. He'll keep them to you. Keep going. Endure. It's worth it."

Free From What Slow Us Down: *let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up (12:1).*

- The image is clear: a runner can only succeed in the race if they rid themselves of the excess baggage that might get in the way of their running.
- The preacher lists two things to strip off or get rid of:
 1. "The weight that slows us down" could be translated as "burden."
 - Runners often train with weights to improve their running, but the preacher urges us to shed the extra weight that doesn't disqualify us from the race, but slows us down.
 - Yet many of us run the race of faith burdened with unnecessary weight: distractions, habits, overcommitments, bitterness, misplaced priorities, past shame, guilt, comparison, fear, anger, unforgiveness, or the pursuit of comfort and convenience.
 2. "The sin that so easily trips us up."
 - Sin, which goes against God's standards, is a serious obstacle in our spiritual journey. When we miss the mark, sin subtly enters our lives and convinces us of its lie.
 - Sin clings tightly, like vines around your ankles. It doesn't just hinder you; it entangles you. Sin trips us up and halts our progress in the race.
 - What is the sin in your life that causes you to stumble easily? Maybe it's alcohol, pornography, lust, gossip, slander, addiction, self-reliance, jealousy, envy, idolatry (placing other things or people in the place of God and worshiping them), or not doing what God has asked you to do.

Keeping Our Eyes on Jesus: *We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith (12:2).*

- When you run, you cannot look around you or at your feet. You look straight ahead. As we run the race of faith, we run with the focus straight ahead, on Jesus, the perfect example of faith through endurance.
- Jesus is the initiator of our faith. He is the founder and starting point of our salvation (See Heb 2:10).
- Jesus is the perfecter of our faith. He is the one who brings our faith to completion (See Heb 10:14; 11:40; 12:23). Jesus completes those who follow him, perfecting their faith.
- Jesus endured the cross. The cross was not just physical pain; it was public humiliation. Yet Jesus looked beyond the shame to the joy of his victory, to the joy of being with the Father, to the joy of providing a way for all of humanity to return to the Father.
- We consider, think about Jesus, so that we do not grow weary or give up. Jesus endured the unimaginable. We can endure in the race of faith, whatever comes our way, even death.

Eric Liddell was a Scottish Olympic gold medalist sprinter and devout Christian, best known for refusing to run on Sunday during the 1924 Paris Games, a conviction dramatized in *Chariots of Fire*. After his athletic career, he served as a missionary in China, where he lived out his faith with quiet courage until he died in a Japanese internment camp during World War II. He commented on his experience in the Olympics, alluding to a greater race that required endurance, "It has been a wonderful experience to compete in the Olympic Games and to bring home a gold medal. But since I have been a young lad, I have had my eyes on a different prize. You see, each one of us is in a greater race than any I have run in Paris, and this race ends when God gives out the medals."

Faith isn't about how fast you start. it's about staying faithful until the end. Run your race. Endure the course. Fix your eyes on Jesus.