

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Have you ever gotten tired of being a Christian? It's okay to say that you have. I think we could all think of times in our lives when we might have said this.

- We might look at an unbeliever's fast track up the corporate ladder... and what it took him to get there... and wonder if following Christ is all it's cut out to be.
- Or what happens if you or someone in your family commits a grave sin. Years of Bible teaching, years of doing your hardest to be a faithful follower of Christ... or you taught your children to be... and then this serious moral lapse that just floors you. "How could I? How could they? Why do I even continue?"
- Or maybe you see someone pour their energy and focus into earthly wealth, and they get rich. Meanwhile, you struggle. You might doubt that it's worth it.
- Or if pretty much anything goes really wrong in your life: losing your job, losing your health, losing a loved one through death, someone you love hurts you or breaks off a relationship with you... whatever it is, you might feel tired of being a Christian.

Let's be honest, we've either experienced it or can imagine it: it's easy to grow weary and lose heart.

Today we look at a Bible passage that will give us much needed encouragement along the way. Hebrews 12:1-3.

CONTEXT: This letter was written to believers who have had a pretty rough time (just like we sometimes do). Opposition has been so fierce that it has driven some of them to turn away from the professed faith in Jesus and to go back to their Jewish faith... or some form of it. They returned to a religion without Christ... a religion of working out your own way. So the writer to the Hebrews was writing to encourage those who were growing weary, and to call back those who had drifted.

The main point of the book is this: 1) There are many arguments showing Jesus is superior to and the fulfillment of everything in the Old Testament. Everything you read in the first 2/3 of your Bible points forward to Jesus. 2) It is a dangerous thing not to believe in Jesus... or to believe in him and then turn away.

So at chapter 12, he now wants to encourage those who are persecuted and suffering and are just plain getting worn out.

Hebrews 12:1-3 Therefore, since we are surrounded [wearing something around you] by such a great cloud [large crowd] of witnesses [testifiers],

What a vivid image. This comes right after the chapter that talks about heroes of faith.

- 1) You're not alone.
- 2) They all testify that if you don't grow weary or lose heart, God grants what he promises.

Hang in there don't despair of his love.

So imagine this crowd of believers filling this room, all lending their testimony to the fact that God does what God promises. **Abel** says, "My brother Cain killed me because of my faith, but here I am alive and celebrating with Jesus." **Enoch** says, "I walked with God, and God chose to take me directly to heaven." And **Noah** says, "God told me to build an ark because he was going to destroy the wicked world. I saw no hint of an impending flood as I built the monstrous boat,

but didn't grow weary and lose heart. God did what he said, and he spared my life." **Abraham** stands here and testifies, "I was an old man married to an old woman. Yet God promised a son and through him countless descendants. Then he took 25 years to keep that promise! But God does not disappoint. He kept his promises. He gave me a son... and heirs... and the land... and the promised Savior too." Abraham's son **Isaac**, and his son **Jacob** would testify that although they didn't see the great nation or the inherited land, or the Savior, God *did* finally keep those promises! **Joseph** stands here and testifies: "One horrible thing after another kept happening in my life. Hated and almost murdered by my brothers, but then sold into slavery. I eventually landed in an Egyptian prison cell. But God was in control every step of the way. I became the second most powerful in Egypt and was able to feed my family and give them safe haven in Egypt. God keeps his promises!" **Moses** would tell you, "That our feeble, enslaved people could escape from our Egyptian superpower overlords was impossible. But when God tells you to do something and attaches a promise to it, the impossible happens." **Joshua** would stand here and tell you, "Looking at the thick, high impenetrable walls of Jericho, I could tell you that humanly speaking, there we did not have a chance. But God-speaking, the walls fell and we took the city."

And this is just a sampling of the witnesses! Gideon, Sampson, David, Samuel, Elijah and more... imagine them crowding in our church today testifying, "Don't grow weary and lose heart! God always does what God says he will do. His promises are sure. Stand with him and he will never let you down."

Therefore...

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.

The picture here is of a race. Some might call the race marked out for us a marathon, and in some ways it is. In other ways, it might be called a series of sprints... or interval training. A typical pattern for life is periods of intense stress and difficulty, followed by times of relative peace and ease. Overall, the race is long and very hard. So we are told to cast aside the sin that might entangle us or "tightly control" us (as the Greek says.)

We run the race of life so as to achieve eternal life with God in heaven. Can you imagine running a race with a ball and chain attached to each ankle? That's what sin is for us. What sins in your life are controlling you and hindering your race? Are there any habits that you need to break? What are your vices? Are there any relationships you need to fix? Are you enamored with and focused on the things of this world? What character flaws do you have? Laziness? Gossiping? Lack of compassion? Lack of sympathy? Pride? Understand the danger that these things are! Cast these things off! Do so by confessing them to God, and receiving Christ's forgiveness.

"and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." Whatever might get in your way, and no matter how tired we get, we keep pushing on. There are many obstacles along the way of life that would sidetrack us from our heavenly goal.

Another word for perseverance is endurance

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,

[Keep your eyes focused on where you want to end up... not right in front of you. Plowing: aim for a point on the horizon. Success gurus will tell you to keep your goal in view at all times and envision yourself reaching it, and you will. I don't know if that's true, but I know this is: keep your eyes focused on Jesus. Why on him? He is the **author and perfecter** of our faith... or you could translate it the "beginner and completer" of our faith. If you have faith in Christ, you will

not grow weary, you will not lose heart. So if having faith in Christ is your goal, then focusing on the beginner and completer of such faith is what you need to do.

Keep your eyes focused on him **without distraction**. Did you ever have a teacher that somehow seemed to know the moment you weren't paying attention? I had a professor in Seminary that I was sure could read my mind. The moment my mind started drifting from the class, he would call on me with a question. How did he do that? How did he know? Now that I'm an experienced teacher, I know how he could tell. All he had to do was look at my eyes. Were my eyes on him, or were my eyes drifting? When a student's eyes are not fixed on the teacher, you can be pretty sure you no longer have their full attention. Keeping your eyes on Jesus simply means thinking about Jesus without distraction.

Is that possible? How can you think about Jesus 24/7? It looks like this: Wake up. "Lord Jesus thank you for **another day** of your grace: I live it for your glory." "Lord, thank you for this breakfast **cereal** which gives strength to my body." "Lord, give me a safe trip as I **drive to work** today." "Lord, there's my **co-worker Bob**. I know he's going through a tough time. Bless him, and show me opportunities to share your love and your truth." "Lord, thank you for this **lunch** given from your bountiful goodness." "Lord, this **project** after lunch is a challenge, but I know if I do it well, many people will be helped. Bless this effort." "Lord, as I go **visit my mother** in the nursing home, give me words of comfort that will help her." "Lord, thank you for **my children**. When I see them when I get home, give me patience and help me show loving care, even though I'm tired." "Lord, as I **clean this kitchen**, I thank you for the shelter you have given. I joyfully work to give my family a clean environment for their enjoyment and for your glory." "Lord, I made **mistakes** along the way today. I did somethings that both disappoint and offend you. Forgive me for Jesus sake, and renew me tomorrow for another day of service to you."

Does that sound overly religious? Give it a try. The rest of today and tomorrow, see what it's like to live an entire day with your attention focused on Jesus. Then e-mail me or call me and tell me if you grew weary and lost heart as you did this.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter 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.

As your attention is on Jesus, notice carefully what he had his attention focused on. The cross... for you... for your forgiveness and salvation. We read today what happened when Jesus entered Jerusalem. He entered to shouts of praise and adoration. Crowds surrounded him. Everyone was pumped and overjoyed. We're told this praise was because of the miracles they had seen. The most recent miracle was the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead. So Jesus enters into Jerusalem as a rock star. Wouldn't you find that distracting? Would you want to keep pumping up that attention and acclamation? If you were able to do miracles, wouldn't you keep doing just enough to keep the crowds cheering and the attention coming?

But Jesus attention was focused on something different. As Jesus entered into Jerusalem, his eyes were focused on the cross. What a contrast to Palm Sunday! From the rock star to execution in 5 days. Jesus could have avoided it, but instead he pursued it.

Jesus thought of the pure joy that would be his... not to have the shouts of praises from the crowds... but the praise of his Father when your sins would be completely paid for. He imagined in his mind the "not guilty" verdict the heavenly Father would pronounce over you because Christ took your guilty verdict. He knew the authority and honor he would soon receive

at the right hand of the Father for completing God's grand and daring rescue plan for lost sinners. And so he endured the cross, scorning its shame. With that love of Jesus in mind, keep your eyes focused on him. Keep your attention on him.

Friends, don't grow weary and lose heart. Are you tired of being a Christian? Around you is this huge crowd of witnesses saying, "Trust God! He really does keep his promises, even if you don't see it yet!" And if you don't see that cloud of witnesses, can I suggest that you spend more time in your Bible? That's where you find reassurance that you are not alone.

The race is long, and it does get hard. So get rid of whatever might slow you down and get you off track, namely, your sins. Today is the day to start making the life changes you know you need to make, and you can believe that your God is there to motivate you and guide you as you do so.

Be patient and persistent along the way. The race is long and hard, but keep going. Even if it's longer than you think, keep going. God will deliver!

Most importantly, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Keep your attention on Jesus at all times. He accomplished your salvation. He is the beginning of faith, and the goal of your faith. Keep your eyes on him, and you'll get through whatever challenges you face in this life.

Are you tired of being a Christian? Through a strong and growing faith in Christ, you will not grow weary. With Christ in your heart, you will not lose heart. God will keep his promises. He will preserve you in this world of difficulties and he will bring you to himself in heaven. Run with perseverance! Amen.

Hebrews 12:1-3

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by [encloded in] **such a great cloud of witnesses,** **let us throw off** [lay aside arms or clothes] **everything that hinders** [obstacle] **and the sin** [missing the mark] **that so easily entangles** [being in control of; controlling tightly], **and let us run with perseverance** [endurance; continue despite difficulty or suffering] **the race** [contest; fight] **marked out for us.** **2 Let us fix** [fix attention on; keep thinking about without being distracted] **our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter** [beginner and completer] **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.** **3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**