

We are in part 4 of our series entitled, “**Lies women believe.**” And just by way of review, here is what we have looked at so far:

The first lie: “my unbelief is justified because of how difficult my life is.”

Then secondly, “I need God to change *this* about my life in order to be satisfied, in order to be content.”

Then last time we met we looked at **lie number three:** “If the leadership in my life is weak, imperfect, ungodly, or I simply disagree with it, it’s ok to seek control.”

Tonight, we come to **lie number four**, which is another modification from my original outline, just like I took the liberty to do last week:

Here’s the lie we’re going to talk about tonight: **A lack of spiritual urgency today will not erode my convictions tomorrow.**

Other related ideas or other ways this lie might sound:

Life is too busy, too hectic to devote the energy and care I’m supposed to, to my spiritual life.

I’ll get serious about the things of God just as soon as this season passes.

Or, I’ll keep persevering, I’ll keep enduring by faith, even though I’m neglecting my spiritual life.

If you’re in a season where you are prone to believing this lie, you might find that the following descriptions are true of you.

Do you ever feel like this? My days are spent just trying to endure God’s arbitrary or even unjust providence as it continues to hold me captive from the things I need to be doing, that I would be doing if I didn’t have to deal with these other things in my life.

Or, my experience as a Christian feels more like perpetual *survival* mode than any kind of spiritual thriving or spiritual victory.

Or, it feels like I’m in a holding pattern, I don’t think I’m going backwards, but I also don’t think I’m necessarily going forward either.

What is the common denominator or theme in these ideas? It is the lack of endurance.

Merely trying to *cope* with circumstances, get through another day, make it to bedtime, all while keeping God and His Word at a comfortable distance.

Let’s turn to the book of Hebrews. We will eventually be in chapter 12. But to begin, I want to draw your attention to Hebrews 3:12-14:

“Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.”

Notice the command, “take care.” Beware, direct your attention carefully. This is necessary to avoid an evil, unbelieving heart.

And then, once your spiritual alertness is heightened, what is the antidote to an unbelieving heart?

Verse 13, **“But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”**

What is “today” there in the context? Well, if you glance back up at verse 7, **“⁷ Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, ⁸ DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME,**

“Today” is every time you are exposed to the Word of God. You are to encourage and be encouraged every time you are exposed to the Word of God.

These are the means God uses to keep your heart from being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. As it says there at the end of verse 13.

Notice the connection between sin and lies. The *deceitfulness* of sin.

Same word used in Ephesians 4:22, **“that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old ^lself, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,”**

ESV: **Deceitful desires.**

Desires that come prepackaged with lies. Lies that promise pleasure but deliver only pain.

Lies that promise relief, deliverance, happiness, in things that can’t deliver. Lies that promise what only God can do, but offer them in cheap substitutes.

We will be vulnerable to deception, vulnerable to believing lies about self, about sin, about God, about the world, about our circumstances.

But notice now in our text the direction it goes in verse 14, **“For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.”**

Notice what that is saying? We currently are believers, if we hold fast, if we endure. In other words, we know our faith is real today, we know we’ve truly believed, if we go on persevering in our faith.

But back up in the text to verse 13 – we will not persevere in our faith if we are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

We are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin by not having a spiritual urgency in our lives today. Not responding the way we ought every time we are exposed to the Word of God.

This then begs the question: What can I do to make sure I am among those who endure, that I make it to the end and do not fall away, proving I never belonged to people of God in the first place?

What does an *enduring* life, a *persevering* faith look like? What can I do in my Christian life to ensure my growth?

What can I do so that my life is no longer summarized by frustration, lack of victory, by merely surviving, but rather thriving in the Christian life?

How do I battle this lie, that I can just coast my way to the finish line?

Well, in chapter 3, the author teaches on this theme by way of firm warning.

But we're going to look at Hebrews 12 where the author teaches on the same thing, but by way of exhortation.

So, look at Hebrews 12:1-2: **“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”**

Drawing your attention to the end of verse 1, **“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”** That is the main idea, the main verb in this section. Everything else in this text is contributing to this main idea.

So this is a passage teaching us about how to endure, how to run the race with endurance.

It's speaking directly to the lie we are talking about tonight: **A lack of spiritual urgency today will not erode my convictions tomorrow.**

Life is too busy, too hectic to devote the energy and care I'm supposed to, to my spiritual life.

I'll get serious about the things of God just as soon as this season passes.

Or, I'll keep persevering, I'll keep enduring by faith, even though I'm neglecting my spiritual life.

No, that is the pathway of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. You are believing lies.

Life is never too busy, too hectic to crowd out what God has called you to. He would never providentially put you in a set of circumstances where your only option is to sin.

You won't get serious about the things of God just as soon as this season passes.

You won't keep persevering, you won't keep enduring by faith, if you neglect your spiritual life.

And so what we're going to look at in this text are 3 keys to an enduring faith:

The first one comes to us at the beginning of verse 1, listen to the saints. As in, the lives and testimony of the saints of old.

Notice verse 1 again, **"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses..."**

With the use of the word **"therefore"** at the beginning of verse 1, we know that the author is connecting us back to the previous thought in chapter 11.

And if you're familiar with the book of Hebrews, Chapter 11 is commonly referred to as the great hall of faith, as it provides a summary of faithful saints in redemptive history who endured to the end and finished the race.

And what's going to unite the audience of the book of Hebrews to these saints in chapter 11 is not necessarily their Jewish heritage, but more importantly their faith in the midst of extremely difficult circumstances.

All of chapter 11 is an exposition on Hebrews 11:1, **"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the men of old gained approval."**

Now, notice all of the references or examples of this idea coming out in the rest of the chapter.

11:3, "By faith we understand that the [e]worlds were prepared by the word of God

11:4, "⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain,"

11:5, "⁵ By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death"

11:7, "⁷ By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, ^[h]in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household,"

11:8, "⁸ By faith Abraham

11:11, "By faith even Sarah herself"

11:17, "¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac,"

11:20, "²⁰ By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau,

11:21, "By faith Jacob"

11:22, “²² By faith Joseph,
 11:23, “²³ By faith Moses,
 11:24, “²⁴ By faith Moses,
 11:28, “²⁸ By faith he ^[1]kept the Passover”
 11:29, “²⁹ By faith they passed through the Red Sea”
 11:30, “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down”
 11:31, “By faith Rahab

Back to 12:1, “**Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...**”

What witnesses? All the individuals he just highlighted in chapter 11. The powerful testimony of all these individuals who trusted the Lord against their feelings, against their own wisdom, in the midst of great difficulty, persecution, suffering.

Verse 1 is bringing us into the biblical world and helping us see that when we are discouraged, doubting, tempted with trusting in our own sense and wisdom, fearful and anxious...

Let us be reminded of all those throughout redemptive who found the Lord to be completely reliable and trustworthy.

Now, the word “cloud” there in verse 1 needs some explanation because we really don’t use this word the way the author is using it here.

In ancient literature a “cloud” was a metaphor symbolizing a great throng of people, a great host, a great multitude.

So this is drawing attention to the *number and magnificence* of the assembly.

And notice in verse 1, this great, massive host of saints, “is surrounding us.” Surrounding us in the sense we can’t escape the vast amount of testimony.

This isn’t just one or two individuals who lived like this, but rather, redemptive history is filled with an host of people who are now with the Lord who testify by their lives on earth to keep believing and trusting the Lord through these difficulties.

Some think they are referred to as witnesses here in the sense that they are *witnessing from heaven what we are doing here on earth*.

Sort of surrounding us like a crowd at a football game surrounds the field, cheering us on from the galleries of heaven as they watch our lives.

But there are significant problems with this view. For one, I’m not sure how that would encourage me when I am battling fierce temptation, when I’m going through significant difficulty, to comfort myself by knowing, “Abraham and everyone else is cheering you on right now from heaven.”

That really doesn't help me battle temptation. Second of all, that's not exactly a blessing for them either.

That's not what this is talking about. The word "witnesses" there means "a testifier, one who gives testimony."

This word (*martus*) is never used in the New Testament as a *passive observer* but always as an *active testifier*.

So, these people here in verse 1 are not witnesses *of us*, but rather witnesses *to us*. In other words, the point here is not what these witnesses see in Christians, but rather what Christians see in these witnesses.

Specifically, their lives testifying of the faithfulness of God to come through on his promises as they believed.

If you glance back at Hebrews 11:4 we see the idea: "**...Abel, though dead, he still speaks, he still testifies.**"

His actions and life still bear witness to the importance of obedience and faith especially when it costs you something.

We had Pastor Todd Murray in the TES chapel yesterday and he was speaking of the value of reading biographies of individuals in church history.

And how on the one hand these biographies can help to normalize what challenges and temptations we are facing today.

Even though many of them the Lord used to accomplish extraordinary things, they faced the same temptations and struggles you and I do.

While at the same time, another value of biographies is that they can be a great challenge and rebuke as we see what others before us have endured, *in comparison to what we are facing*.

And what's true of individuals in church history is even more true of those in inspired redemptive history, that we have in the Scriptures. Kind of like Hebrews 11.

It normalizes our temptations and fears. But it also is a great challenge to us to see how those of old trusted the Lord, often in much harder circumstances, and yet with less promises, less revelation.

Think about the difference between them and us? They had a few promises, their faith was based on mere promises.

Our faith is also based on mere promises, but also on historical fact. The death, burial and resurrection of Christ Jesus.

They had less to look to, fewer promises, less evidence, and yet persevered through *much greater odds* than we are facing and with much *fewer promises* and examples than we have.

They believed all of the Word of God that they had. And this is the **first key to an enduring faith - listen to the saints.**

Think of their testimony, their faith, their trust in the Word of God. Listen to them as to normalize your temptations, but also to challenge and admonish you to trust the Lord all the more.

The second key to an enduring faith - lay aside sin

Look at the second part of verse 1, “**let us also, lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us...**”

So you can see how the passage is building momentum for the main command, the main idea coming next: “**run the race with endurance**” which we will see next.

We’ve got a great cloud of testifiers to listen to who have gone before us.

Now, as we are running and enduring, we have to get rid of anything slowing us down.

In fact, this is a participle, “**laying aside.**” The idea is, *as you are laying aside these things*, you can run the race with endurance.

This is a figurative way of referring to the removal of things in your life that will inhibit your endurance.

Now, an encumbrance is not something that is sinful in and of itself. Sin is mentioned next, but this is simply a weight, an encumbrance, that might be benign in and of itself, but it’s not *good or wise* in your particular race.

Just for the sake of illustration, let’s shift the analogy from running to swimming. Let’s take a competitive swimmer for example.

If you’ve ever watched competitive swimming, like in the Olympics, you know that it is often a matter of tenths of a second as to who gets the medal.

There is really no margin for mistakes or error. Therefore, each swimmer exercises extreme care to make sure that anything and everything that could possibly slow them down is removed to ensure the most efficient race possible.

Their swimsuit, their goggles, their muscles, their body hair, all meticulously designed to *minimize* the resistance.

That's the imagery used here. This is a call on our lives to minimize resistance by removing hindrances.

One of the ways you can guarantee to have all kinds of hindrances in your life is if you have the habit of asking the wrong question when it comes to Christian liberties.

The "what's wrong with this?" question.

Assuming that there is no danger about any particular activity, they automatically won't be spiritual pitfalls to beware of, as long as the Word of God doesn't *explicitly* condemn it or address it.

Operating as if God's *silence* on any given subject equates to a *license* to pursue it.

Let's go back to our analogy of the swimming competition to illustrate this dangerous mindset:

Imagine the swimmer sitting down before the big race, and he's got the official Olympic rule book out and he is combing through it, page after page.

He's got his heart set on a particular method he wants to try out, and now he is going to the rulebook so that he will have ammunition to justify this activity before others.

He finishes combing through the book, and right before the race he pulls out this baggy sweatshirt, puts it on, and he lines up and gets ready to dive in the pool and race.

And when some of the other swimmers question him on that and ask him what he is doing, he gets defensive and arrogant towards the other swimmers and even his coach, he pulls out the rule book and he says:

"you can't show me one sentence in this rule book that says I can't wear a sweatshirt when I swim." Show it to me, you legalist. You're placing burdens on me that the rule book doesn't even place on me."

That sounds just like the foolish Christian in the church today who carelessly and recklessly thinks through matters of Christian freedom. Not carefully considering whether or not it could be a hindrance slowing them down in the Christian race.

The author of Hebrews says that no wise person would put hindrances in their lives that could serve to impede their growth.

And notice there in verse 1 he says "**every weight.**" No matter what it is, no area of your life is off limits to the Lord.

It's not specific because it will often look differently in each person's life.

What might be unnecessary baggage in one person's spiritual life might be totally harmless for another person.

Now just so we're thinking in terms of application here, what would be some examples of modern day weights, modern day encumbrances in the Christian life?

What are some things that aren't sinful in and of themselves, but can frequently slow us down when we approach them in an undisciplined manner?

I just jotted down a few to help us get our minds thinking in the right categories:

=Close relationships with individuals who are either unbelievers, or professing believers living like the world. That's a weight, that will slow you down.

Obviously, I'm not talking about relationships that are evangelistically oriented, where you are building a relationship with someone, you are serving them so that you can more effectively minister to them.

No, this would be a *careless* approach to relationships which have no ministry mindset whatsoever.

Find a Christian who is running at half speed in the race you will normally find the weight of ungodly influences, ungodly relationships.

In light of Pastor Brian Arnold's recent visit, here is what he said: "your friends are a mirror of who you are, and a map of where you're going."

Consider those you naturally gravitate toward in your life. Do they promote your godliness? Do they make you afraid to sin?

=Media, internet, television, social media use. Again, not inherently sinful things, many believers can use them responsibly. But they can easily become weights if they are approached in an unwise manner.

Let me speak to the moms with multiple young ones in the home for a moment: you are probably perpetually exhausted and feel as if you don't have any time to spare.

And certainly there may be days or seasons where you are stretched so thin in the right things that there is no time for anything else.

But I think more commonly, if you are someone who is saying, "I'm so busy, I don't have time to do what I should be doing," well, have you evaluated how much time is spent needlessly scrolling through various social media platforms?"

How much time is spent on YouTube or browsing various internet sites?

Can you really say before the Lord, in the time I have control over, I invest intentionally in my spiritual life?

Matthew 6:33, **“seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.”**

1 Timothy 4:7, **“discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.”**

Your priorities, your life should be tailored to promote godliness. And when it is, whatever is harmful to that goal, whatever is hindering that, will become clear.

Next, notice there in verse 1, not only are we to lay aside, put off every encumbrance, but also the **“sin which so easily entangles us.”**

So we’ve gone from the gray areas, the wisdom issues of the Christian life, the weights that could be slowing us down but aren’t inherently sinful.

To now the things that *are* inherently sinful. And the fact that the author refers to sin as that which **“easily entangles,”**

It *skillfully surrounds* us, as one lexicon put it. And as soon as we give it in inch, it takes a mile.

Another quote we heard from Pastor Brian Arnold this past weekend: “Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.”

There’s so many different directions we could go with this tonight, but I think one of the reasons we are vulnerable to this is because we prefer to deal in vague generalities when it comes to our sin.

As I’ve heard one pastor say, we don’t kill sin by chance, but rather by choice.”
And you cannot be laying aside sin if you’re not confessing it as sin.

What is your confession life look like? There’s a direct parallel between your confession of sin and your spiritual life.

And by default, we’re going to be very bad in this area. Naturally, we are going to engage in shallow confession at best.

We need to look no further than Genesis 3:8. **“They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the ^lcool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.**

There’s the presence of guilt and the evidence of guilt. That’s why we stiff arm God and keep Him at a distance.

⁹Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid

myself.” ¹¹ And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹² The man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.” ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

Adam deflects and blame shifts. Eve does the same. They both become professional excuse makers the instant they become sinners.

Notice, neither one of them denied that they did it. they both confessed in one sense – they both said “**I ate.**”

But what did both of them also do? They blamed their sin on other factors. Thus, in their very confession there was a defense, a justification of their actions.

That’s not confession. That’s not calling your sin what God calls it and admitting the cause of your sin is what God says is your sin, your own heart’s desires, James 1:14.

And so we can’t be laying aside sin when we are not actually confessing it to the Lord, but justifying it, defending it, making excuses for it, blaming it on other factors that soften the offense, makes the sin less incriminating.

Not only shallow confession, but also prayerlessness would be another sin that needs to be laid aside in order to run with endurance.

Prayerlessness is an evidence of the lack of faith, pride, and even in some cases, a lack of repentance.

Why is that? Because to pray about a particular burden, requires you to conform that burden to the will of God as revealed in Scripture.

It requires you to humbly submit that burden to the Lord and believe what He says about it.

And sometimes we’re not ready to do that so we won’t pray, because we don’t *want* the Lord involved in it, if we’re being honest.

We won’t have to humble ourselves, crucify our fleshly desires and human wisdom and come under the authority of God.

Prayerlessness is a sin that will keep you from persevering the way you ought.

=an undisciplined thought life. allowing fears and anxieties to run rampant.

Allowing the “what ifs” of anxieties to flourish in your thinking. Allowing the “if only’s” of discontentment to rule over you.

An undisciplined thought life like that will lead to self-absorption and selfishness. Your world will completely shrink down to your world, and your world alone. Your circumstances and your suffering.

Everything in your life will be filtered through the lens of self and your circumstances.

That will weigh you down because no one grows and endures in the Christian life who is self-focused, and self-entitled.

Listen to the saints, lay aside sin, and now the third key to an enduring faith: Look to the Savior.

This will be in at the end of verse 1 and all of verse 2, notice the text, **and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² [a]fixing our eyes on Jesus, the [b]author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

Now, we've talking about the main idea, "run with endurance," but before we get to verse 2, notice that little phrase, **"the race that is set before us."**

You ever thought, "I wouldn't have planned my life like this if I were God." Of course you wouldn't.

None of us would. For several reasons. First of all, we don't value or prioritize our Christlikeness the way God does.

And therefore, we would not ordain the details of our lives with that chief goal in mind, conformity to Christ.

Rather, what we would do instead is ordain easy, comfortable circumstances involving little or no suffering.

Any trials we might be willing to ordain for our lives would be of such a degree that they could be endured in our own strength and solved with mere human resources.

Of course you wouldn't plan your life just like this if you were in charge. And you should be thankful for that.

Because you would mess it up. You don't know what you need, you don't know what it takes to get you to glory.

You don't know all of the things God is sparing you from, even when He does ordain difficulty in your life.

The race is not something we choose, it's something that is "set before us." We don't choose it, we don't control it. We *respond* to it.

Similar to the way that runners in a race do not get there early and set up the race before they run.

They don't make the track, they don't put the cones out, or the finish line. They simply show up, prepare, and *respond* to the elements within the race.

And this is where faith comes in – believing that your life, with all of the particulars involved, has been prescribed by your heavenly Father in mercy and grace for your ultimate good.

He knows exactly what you need, and don't need, and He knows exactly how much you can endure by his grace.

So there is no room for believing things like, "I would run faster in my race, more obediently and with more stamina *if* I didn't have to deal with this circumstance in my life or this person, or this difficulty over here."

No, that's not the case. The race is "**set before you.**" God has placed those very difficulties in your life to grow your faith and increase your capacity to endure.

So, instead of the specific pathway and the challenges and difficulties that come along with your race, there is ultimately one thing that needs to preoccupy your vision when you run, notice the next phrase in verse 2, "**fixing our eyes on Jesus.**"

Grammatically, the way the participle is functioning we could state it this way: **let us run the race set before us with endurance *by* fixing our eyes on Jesus.**

Again, let's consider the flow of the argument here in this passage: As one commentator put it:

"Okay, the course has been set. We have the testimony of all those who lived by faith and endured in times past. The weights and obstructions have been stripped off. The race is underway.

We're running the race, but we've got to have a pattern for the race. We've got to have somebody who shows us how we are best able to run it. We've got to have someone there to give us hope when we trip and fall, and here's our example."

Fixing our eyes on Jesus. Literally the word means "**to direct one's attention to without distraction.**"

So, negatively, turning our attention and focus away from everything, everyone, even ourselves, and instead persistently fixing them on Jesus.

Just thinking about how this verse relates to verse 1. You might be saying to yourself: "if we are to look to Jesus as a way of life, focus our gaze on Him, what are we to make of the first verse we looked at today, namely, that we are to also remember the saints and look at their testimony?"

Which is it? Are we supposed to focus on past saints or focus on Jesus? The author seems to be pointing us in two different directions.

I think we can achieve balance between these ideas this way: “we are to *listen* to the witnesses, but always *look* at Jesus.”

In other words, we listen to the witnesses because they preached a much better message than they lived. Not saying they were hypocrites, but they were sinners. They had weaknesses.

So we *listen* to them but we constantly *look* to Jesus because he not only preached a perfect message, he lived a perfect life.

Therefore, He is the supreme encouragement and example. He is the greater witness, the greater testifier.

First, notice in the passage here he’s referred to as the *author* of our faith. Most likely the idea of *pioneer* or *primary example* is what is intended by that word for “author.”

Jesus coined the phrase which should summarize the heart of every believer, when praying to the Father, “not my will but yours be done.”

He never once said to the Father, “not your will but mine be done.” “... I do not seek my own will but the will of Him who sent me.” John 5:30

And not only is Jesus the chief example of faith, but notice again Hebrews 12:2, he is the **perfecter of faith**.

The one who brought faith to a successful conclusion. From his birth until his death he perfectly obeyed the law on our behalf.

“It is finished” he cried as he breathed his last on the cross. Meaning, his perfect life and his perfect atonement had reached its conclusion. There was no more work or ministry needed in order to do the Father’s will.

Christians get asked this question all the time: Why is your way the only way? Why can’t other religions be true as well?

Well, for starters, *no one can improve on Jesus’ work*. He is the beginning and the end of our faith. That is why he alone is the way to the Father.

Even if we were capable of doing works which weren’t tainted by sin, it would be the epitome of arrogance to think that we could please the Father more than His Son could.

That’s one major reason why we embrace the exclusivity of Christ. He is the perfecter of our faith. No religious system or person can improve on the Son’s work.

And notice, in the middle of verse 2, what else is highlighted about Jesus: **“who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,”**

This is just Hebrews 11:6 in action, **“and without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he REWARDS those who seek him.”**

Move down a few verses to 11:9-10, **“by faith Abraham went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. FOR he was looking FORWARD to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.”**

So there we see Abraham living out Hebrews 11:6 and the faith that comes to God knowing that he will fulfill his promises. There is a resurrection to be gained.

And then one of the clearest examples a few verses down in Hebrews 11:24-26, **“by faith Moses, when he was grown up refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, FOR he was looking to the REWARD.”**

So in Hebrews 12:2 the author is showing that the ultimate example Jesus Christ, whom you are to fix your gaze upon, endured the most horrific suffering imaginable by considering the joy that would be his when he would be reunited with His Father and exalted to his right hand.

And because of this, notice middle of verse 2, he also endured the cross by **“despising the shame.”**

Despising is a little misleading for us because when we think of despising we think of a person who hates something, scorns something, looks down with contempt.

But that’s not really the idea here. Here’s the idea behind this word: to consider something not important enough to be an object of concern, to disregard, render insignificant.

So, the author is saying Jesus endured his greatest suffering, the cross by “thinking little of the shame, by not focusing on the fact that though he was innocent, he died as a despised criminal. By not preaching to himself over and over, This isn’t fair, I don’t deserve this.”

No, he thought little of the injustice he was receiving. He regarded it as insignificant.

You can hear echoes of Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 4:17, where he called the church to view their trials and suffering as light, momentary affliction in light of the eternal weight of glory which would be theirs.

It’s the same with Christ. He regarded his suffering as insignificant in light of eternity and the consummation of all things.

Is this what you do with your difficulties? Don't we tend to maximize our difficulties, magnify them to the degree that they overshadow and cancel out the promises of God and the future joys we will experience?

A few months ago I taught in the youth ministry and we looked at a passage on complaining and grumbling in the Christian life.

And I gave them an illustration of John Newton. He wrote of a poor man who was going to New York to take possession of a large estate, upon which he would become very wealthy.

And after a few days of travel his carriage breaks down just a mile before he got to the estate, which obliged him to walk the rest of the way;

Newton writes, "what a fool we should think of him, if we saw him ringing his hands, and blubbering out as he walked the final mile, "My [carriage] is broken! My [carriage] is broken!"

But that is our tendency. Focused only on what this life has for me. Magnifying trials and minimizing what God says is true and has promised is coming.

Well, our forerunner Jesus rendered his mistreatment as not significant enough to focus on. He fixed his mind on truth. He knew what was coming.

The last phrase there in verse 2 is really an expression of the joy that was previously mentioned in verse 2, namely, the joy of exaltation, the writer says that Jesus **"is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."**

Jesus has been exalted. This is the place He has gone as his people's forerunner. That is the goal of the pathway of faith.

Jesus has reached it first, but others who triumph and endure will share it with him. It's the joy and reward of exaltation.

Jesus promised this very thing to the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:21, "to the one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne."

This is a figurative expression highlighting the fact that we will reign with Christ.

Now, let's just take note of the implication of this last point, fixing our eyes on Jesus. That is the means by which we will endure.

Which also means that when we are preoccupied with something else, someone else, or ourselves, we won't endure.

What's an example of that? Comparisons with other believers. Looking around to see where others are in the race and what specific obstacles they have to endure compared with you.

How do you shepherd your heart in that moment? Well, besides this text here in Hebrews 12 I love the end of John's gospel, 21:21-22, Peter looks to another runner in the race, instead of Jesus.

He looks to John and he starts to wonder what John's race is going to look like and what Jesus has planned for John.

So Peter asks Jesus a question about John's life. What are you planning for John, what's his race going to look like?"

And the response of Jesus is worth noting, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you, you follow me!"

So there's the instruction directly from the mouth of Jesus as to how to shepherd your heart anytime your gaze starts to wonder off of Christ in the midst of your race.

Remember his words to Peter: "What is that to you? You follow me!"

Maybe you're not tempted toward comparisons with other believers, maybe you engage in forms of self-centered introspection, and that's how you fail to preoccupy yourself with Jesus

What is self-centered introspection? Let's allow puritan John Flavel to explain: "Happy were it, if puzzled and perplexed Christians would turn their eyes from the defects that are in their obedience, to the fullness and completeness of Christ's obedience: and see themselves complete in him, when most lame and defective in themselves"

Now, he's not saying don't examine yourself, ignore your sin, don't identify areas that you need to grow in. He's saying, *don't stop there*. Don't let it terminate on you.

When you spot sin or any spiritual defection in your life you remind yourself that Jesus obeyed perfectly on your behalf in that particular area, and if you are trusting in Him there is no condemnation for you.

You are to be preoccupied with Jesus, not your sin.

This text also tells us that there is no such thing as a struggling believer, a depressed believer, a believer with limited victory, a sluggish believer, an apathetic believer, who is constantly mediating on the person and work of Jesus.

No, their spiritual vision is preoccupied and consumed with themselves, their circumstances, or other people.

This text is the vaccine for our dysfunctional spiritual vision. Or stated positively, this is the formula for an enduring life.

We listen to the testimony of those who gone before us. We remember that we are a part of an assembly that is testifying to us of the faithfulness of God to come through on his promises when life doesn't make sense.

We lay aside sin, removing any and all hindrances in our life, things that weigh us down, and things that trip us up. Structuring our life for the purpose of godliness. Confessing and forsaking all known sin.

And finally we keep on looking to Jesus. We turn our gaze and attention away from everything and everyone else and look to Him, who ran the race perfectly on our behalf.

Endurance tomorrow begins with spiritual urgency today. And Hebrews 12:1-2 provides you with the formula to endure well.