



Hebrews 12:1-2

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

SUMMARY

It's easy to begin something. Finishing something, however, is hard. That's because finishing what we begin requires us to endure the setbacks we face along the way.

The Christian life is no different, as the Hebrews knew too well. In "former days" their enthusiasm for the gospel helped them to joyfully withstand the setbacks of persecution (Hebrews 10:32-35). But as time went on, the cost of following Jesus was beginning to wear down their enthusiasm. Thoughts of giving it all up were becoming more frequent.

After reminding his readers of their former zeal, the author reminded them that they needed endurance and faith (10:36-39). In chapter 11 he focused on the latter. Here in chapter 12 he takes up the topic of endurance.

He starts by concluding that they're "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses". Every person mentioned in chapter 11 is like another witness coming up to the witness stand in a courtroom, testifying that God is faithful to his promises, that our faith in him pays off, and that it is possible to finish the race.

Looking to them and their testimony should give the Hebrews (and us) fresh energy to “run with endurance the race that is set before us”. Endurance also requires us to shed excess weight. Sin is one such weight that should be shed through repentance. Other weights include things which are good in themselves but slow us down.¹

Above all, endurance requires fixating on Jesus (v 2), who is yet another example of someone who endured the race by faith, obeying to the point of death because he saw “the joy set before him”. But he’s more than an example. Whereas the witnesses of chapter 11 testify that finishing the race is possible, Jesus can provide the strength needed to finish it (see also 4:16). That is, while they can only *encourage* us to keep running, Jesus can also *empower* us to do so.

DISCUSS

It’s easier to begin something than it is to finish it. How have you seen this to be true in your own life? Have you ever started something but not finished it? (Project, New Year’s resolution, etc.) What made finishing it hard?

In what ways does sin wear down our endurance in the Christian life? What sins in your life do you need to repent of?

What are some things in your life that can tend to slow you down and distract you from following Jesus, even if they’re not sinful in themselves? (Hobbies, rhythms of life, etc.)

What is your current outlook on the race that is the Christian life? Are you excited and motivated to keep running? Are you exhausted and want to quit? Somewhere in between? Wherever you’re at, how can the “witnesses” of chapter 11 encourage you to keep going? What does it practically look like for you to “look to Jesus” for help this week?

¹ These will differ person to person. These weights could be “ambition, anxieties, hobbies, wealth or fame. Each runner must honestly judge what hinders faith for him or her and resolutely lay it aside, even though others seem to be unhindered by the same thing.” (Ray Stedman)