

Looking Unto Jesus

(Hebrews 12:1-4)

Pastor Kelly Sensenig



I heard about a man in Texas who invited a lot of bachelors out to his ranch. He got them all around and then stood up before them and said, "Look over there at my Olympic size swimming pool. I have filled it with crocodiles and alligators." He said, "If there is anyone willing to swim from one end of that swimming pool to the other

end of that pool and get out on the other side alive, I'll give him one of three things. I'll give him a 500-acre ranch, a million dollars in cash, or the hand of my daughter in marriage. Whichever one you want."

He had no sooner said it than somebody jumped into that pool. "Splash," he heard it and looked and there was a guy in that pool who didn't even take his shoes off. He still had a three-piece suit on. He was swimming for all he was worth. Water was flying everywhere. Crocodiles snapping and alligators chasing him, and this guy was going through it all. He swam all the way to the other end. He climbed out soaking wet without a scratch on him. He was breathing mighty deeply trying to get his breath.

The rich Texan went over to him and said, "Son, I meant this as a practical joke. I didn't really mean for anyone to swim that pool. But you did it and I'm as good as my word. Which one do you want, the five-hundred-acre ranch, the one million dollars in cash, or my daughter's hand in marriage?" The young man looked at the rich Texan and said, "I just want to get my hands on the man that pushed me into that swimming pool!"

I have discovered over the years that some Christians need crocodiles and alligators to motivate them! But if we keep our eyes on Jesus, we will have all the motivation we need to live a dedicated and devoted life for Him.

Satan wants to keep us from “looking unto Jesus” (Heb. 12:2) who should be our true inspiration and motivation for Christian living (Phil. 1:21). We can very easily be sidetracked from focusing on Christ’s example of faith, His endurance through suffering, and the legacy of victory He leaves behind for us. Looking unto Jesus means we are to focus on His sufferings on our behalf, His testimony of faith and commitment to God’s plan, and His glorious victory in His resurrection and exaltation at the right hand of the Father.

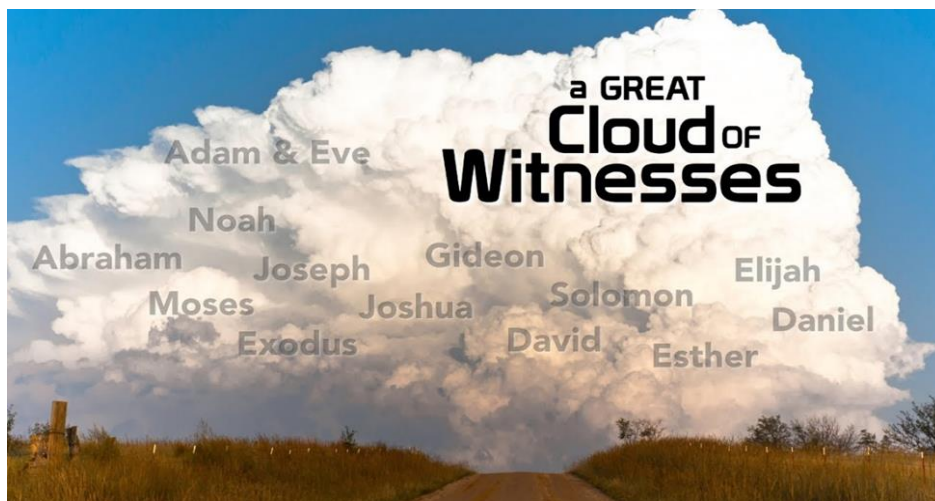
Jesus was a winner, and we can also win! A constant focus on Christ’s commitment, endurance, faith, sufferings, and victory inspires us to live like He did, possessing the same kind of faith and endurance in the midst of our own suffering, so we can pass through our trials victoriously. We are to look unto Jesus for *inspiration* and then practice *imitation*. We are to imitate Christ’s example (1 Pet. 2:21; Eph. 5:1) and we do this by drawing upon the sufficiency of His sanctifying grace and power (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 6:10). So, we need to keep looking unto Jesus for both motivation and transformation.

Hebrews 12:1-2

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed (*surrounded*) about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author (*originator*) and finisher (*completer*) of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

There are three important observations from this text.

A. The faithful that went before us.



Hebrews 12:1 says, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed (*surrounded*) about with so great a cloud of witnesses.” The words “compassed about” speak of being surrounded by a large crowd in an amphitheater or sports arena. For this reason, some have taken Hebrews 12:1 to mean that the heavenly saints are sitting in the arena of Heaven watching the earthly saints live out their lives here on earth.

Many over the years have interpreted verse one to mean that while God’s children are living down here on earth, they are in some sense surrounded by the heavenly saints, who are sitting in the celestial grandstands of Heaven, watching the saints run the earthly race of their Christian lives. In other words, many believe that the saints in Heaven are like spectators in a stadium (like the fans sitting in the stands at the Super Bowl) witnessing our every move and cheering us on.

While this may seem comforting to contemplate, the Bible does not teach that the saints in Heaven are watching us. It must be acknowledged that this interpretation does not align with the context and flow of thought from Hebrews chapter eleven. Let me give you some deep theology as we begin to look at this subject. Put on your thinking caps. Hebrews chapter 12 follows Hebrews chapter 11. I know that this is a brilliant deduction! But seriously, the two chapters are connected and interrelated for a reason, and the writer is not introducing something unrelated to chapter 11 such as the saints in Heaven watching us.

The Bible is teaching that the “witnesses” in Hebrews 12:1 are not our modern-day loved ones who have departed and are now in Heaven looking down on us, but the faithful saints in Hebrews 11 who lived victorious lives by trusting in God. The Old Testament saints like Noah, Moses, Abraham, Rahab and all the rest mentioned in Hebrews 11 (the heroes of faith) in a figurative sense become a witness and example to us (like a martyr) on how to live by faith today when the world and culture is against us.

The word “witnesses” in this context does not mean “spectators.” Our English word “martyr” comes directly from the Greek word *marturos* which is translated here as “witness.” Therefore, the people of Hebrews 11 are not witnessing what we are doing as spectators in Heaven; rather, like a martyr

as this word suggests, they are bearing witness to us by their own exemplary living how God can see us through life.

So, these saints are not witnessing or watching us, we are to be looking at them, the testimony they have left behind for us on how to maintain a strong and vibrant faith in the hard and difficult trials of life. They are heroes of faith and give an authentic witness to us on how to keep on keeping on and remain faithful to God to the end of our days on earth. They are not looking at us; we are to be looking back to them (the Old Testament saints) and they become a witness and example to us on how to live by faith (Heb. 11:4,5,7,9, 11, 17, 20, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 31).

These are not heavenly saints witnessing us but earthly saints of the past who have left behind a great legacy of faith and bear witness to us concerning what it means to walk by faith in hard times. These “witnesses” are not the saints floating around on clouds in Heaven as spectators watching us. Instead, the saints of Hebrews chapter 11 are compared to a great “cloud” (*an idiom or symbolic expression of many people – a great assembly, multitude, a throng*) who went before us to give us an historic witness or demonstration on how to live by faith to the end of our days on earth.

William MacDonald concurs with this:

“This does not mean that they are spectators of what goes on on earth. Rather they witness to us by their lives of faith and endurance and set a high standard for us to duplicate.”

So, the Old Testament saints are not literally witnessing or watching us today but rather they become witnesses to us in a figurative sense, giving us an example, testimony, and inspiration on how to walk by faith. The writer’s main point is that we have many good examples of people who faithfully trusted God in the past who are bearing witness to us by their lives and testimonies how to walk by faith in difficult times. Go back and read Hebrews chapter eleven!

One night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to flee to the roof. The father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to his son, "Jump! I'll catch you." He knew the boy had to jump to save his life. All

the boy could see, however, was flame, smoke, and blackness. As can be imagined, he was afraid to leave the roof. His father kept yelling: "Jump! I will catch you." But the boy protested, "Daddy, I can't see you." The father replied, "But I can see you and that's all that matters."

We are reminded that God sees what we are passing through and that when we place our faith in His purpose and plan for our lives, whatever that might be, we can know that God will see us through. We can jump by faith, live by faith, and find that God will take care of us.

Glen Davidson felt God's call to the ministry while working as a successful businessman. He began taking Bible courses at night, and eventually obtained his Bible school degree. Prior to graduation, he informed his boss that he'd be leaving shortly to work as a pastor in a rural church. Neither the owner of the company nor the boss believed it, and they neglected to obtain a replacement for Glen. Eventually Glen told the boss that he really was leaving, and they needed to locate a replacement as soon as possible. The owner of the company, still doubting Glen's sincerity, instructed Glen's boss, "Offer him a \$500.00 raise, and if he takes it, fire him on the spot!" Well, Glenn did not take the raise for nothing could deter him from doing God's will for his life. He was not motivated by money but by being devoted to Christ and His purpose for his life.

B. The race that is set before us.



Hebrews 12:1 goes on to say, "let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before

us.” The writer now paints the picture that Christians are involved in a race that must be won. The imagery of a race is seen elsewhere in Scripture.

1 Corinthians 9:24 uses the same imagery:

“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.”

Christians are pictured as athletes running in a race. We do not enter a race to lose it. We enter a race to ultimately win it. We should strive to be winners – not losers! This should be our goal and ambition when it comes to participating in the race of the Christian life. Of course, we must understand that the race of the Christian life is not a competition against other saints but an individual race that needs to be won against the world, the flesh, and the Devil (1 John 2:15-17; James 4:7) and which ends in victory and awards.

Paul brings this out in 2 Timothy 4:7-8:

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

Paul said, “I have finished my course.” He had won the race! There were many bumps and curves along the way, but he ended up gaining a win in the end. This reminds us that there is a race to be won, victories to gain, and reward at the end when we stand before Jesus Christ!

Once again, the Christian race is not a competitive event to see who comes in first, but an endurance run to see who finishes faithfully. It's like the experience of Bill Broadhurst, who entered the Pepsi Challenge 10,000-meter road race in Omaha, Nebraska. Ten years earlier, surgery for an aneurysm in the brain had left him paralyzed on his left side. Now, on a misty July morning in 1981, he stands with 1,200 strong-looking men and women at the starting line. The gun cracks! The crowd surges forward. Bill throws his stiff left leg forward, pivots on it as his right foot hits the ground. His slow plop-plop-plop rhythm seems to mock him as the pack fades into the distance. Sweat rolls down his face, pain pierces his ankle, but he keeps

going. Six miles and two hours and twenty-nine minutes later, Bill reaches the finish line.

A man approached him from a small group of bystanders. Bill recognizes him from pictures in the newspaper. He's Bill Rodgers, the famous marathon runner. "Here," says Rodgers, putting his newly won medal around Bill's neck. "You've worked harder for this than I have." Broadhurst had also been a winner. And we are all winners when we remain faithful to what God has called us to do and how to live. But so often sin bogs us down and we no longer are persevering in the race! We have stopped running! When Jesus comes, He may find us sitting somewhere in the grandstands of life as one who has not finished the race. There is no time to waste. Jesus is coming again. Let us be running and let us be winners!

How do we stay in the race?

1. We get rid of the things that bog us down.

The Bible says, "let us lay aside every weight." This sounds like a diet commercial! Many Americans have at one time or another experienced the dieting routine. In fact, some authorities estimate that more than one-third of the nation's population is interested in losing weight. Everyone knows that to succeed in this practice, you must keep at it; yet many people fail. One woman said, "I have lost 40 pounds." When her friend looked at her doubtfully, she continued, "It's true. I have lost 5 pounds -- eight times!" Of course, the "weights" mentioned in Hebrews chapter 12 refer to obstructions that bog us down when running the Christian race.



Weights in the Christian life can appear in many different forms. They might be specific people that are getting in the way of us winning the race. The weights might be money, material possessions, work, fame, hobbies, friends, family, or something else that specifically steals away your devotion from

Jesus Christ and keeps you from running an effective Christian race. Weights bog us down! We need to stay loose and light in the race or else we will get far behind and in the end lose the race and reward which we otherwise could have gained.

A winning athlete does not choose between the good and the bad; he chooses between the better and the best. And if we are going to live the Christian life as God wants us to live it, then we must learn to get rid of the weights that bog us down. This involves setting new priorities in life and making new commitments. It involves establishing what is most important in life, establishing new goals, and setting aside those things that come before the Lord. It means we put Jesus first and everything else second (Matt. 6:33). Sometimes it involves actually getting rid of something altogether that has become a stumbling block to you or a heavy weight that is keeping you from doing the will of God. In fact, even those things which are not sinful in and of themselves can become sin to us when they keep us from doing God's will.

My wife and I exercise at a local track in our area that is open to the public. I remember seeing a man who was training for some event. He actually had a parachute hooked up to him so when he ran around the track the parachute would open and slow him down. I suppose he was trying to build endurance, but the sad thing is that the parachute was bogging him down.

You know, there are many things that can slow us up in the race of the Christian life. Again, sometimes there are things in our lives (work, hobbies, material possessions) that are not necessarily sin, but which can get in the way of us serving and living for Jesus Christ as we should and therefore these weights bog us down. They act like parachutes that slow us down and keep us in the back of the race. Instead of advancing we are bogged down by the various weights that can impede our spiritual progress.

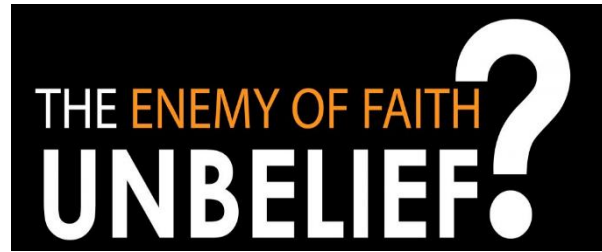
- ✓ Has something been holding your back from gaining ground in your race?
- ✓ Can you identify some weights in your life that might be bogging you down?
- ✓ Do you have a plan to get rid of the weights?

2. We get rid of the sin that overtakes our lives.

The Bible also speaks about “the sin which doth so easily beset us.”

The word “beset” means that which surrounds or entangles and causes impediment. Any sin can bog us down from a spiritual

perspective, but I suppose the writer could have a specific sin in mind after speaking about the faith demonstrated by all the saints (Hebrews 11) and the faith of Christ (“the finisher of faith” - Hebrews 12:2). The saints of the past and Christ Himself exhibited tremendous faith in their lives. In other words, “the sin” is likely focusing on the specific sin of unbelief or not possessing faith in God’s plan and purpose for our lives, doubting God’s spiritual sufficiency or supply for us as we pass through trials and persecution. It’s the sin of unbelief, lacking faith in God and His purpose for our lives.



Someone said:

“Unbelief puts our circumstances between us and God, but faith puts God between us and our circumstances.”

Unbelief is a specific sin that can haunt us if we don’t deal with it. It keeps coming back to us and impeding our running ability in the race of the Christian life. If we are *doubting* and not *depending* on Christ’s power and sufficiency to meet our needs, we are going to lose our spiritual breath and stamina and stop running!

If we doubt God’s *purpose* and *providence* over our lives, and His *power* to sustain us in the race, we can quickly revert to the back of the pack where there are many other losers! In fact, we might get out of the race completely and end up sitting in the grandstands eating popcorn and hotdogs! Some Christians allow the sin of unbelief to take them out of the race. They do not believe God can sustain them; they do not accept the changes God brings their way and flop in their faith. As a result, they stop running.

It was unbelief that kept Israel out of the Promised Land, and it is unbelief that hinders us from experiencing our spiritual inheritance in Christ (Heb.

3:12, 19; 4:6, 11). We often live a defeated life because we lack faith in God's precious promises and specifically His promise and provision for victory (1 John 5:4). The sin of unbelief keeps us from living for God as we should, and we no longer depend upon God to live a sanctified life and claim His victory. So, when we are told to get rid of the sinful weight of unbelief the writer is actually reminding us to get back to faith! Get rid of sin of unbelief and get back to faith! Faith is still the victory! If we will kick unbelief out of our hearts and lives, we will get back to walking by faith in God's power, plan, provision, and promises. This is what Hebrews chapter eleven is all about!

Hebrews 11:6

"But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

The sin of unbelief will keep us bogged down in life and this is really the underlying sin which is the cause of all other sins that hinder our lives. Some of you are really tangled up in sin today – you are neglecting your devotions with God, you are living for yourself, you are doing your own thing, you are lusting after dirty things, you are viewing things on TV and the Internet that you should not be watching, you are avoiding church, you are holding a grudge against someone, you will not forgive you wife or husband. You are drinking alcohol again! What is it? What is holding you back? I'll tell you what it is – it's sin. Specifically, it's the sin of unbelief, not relying on God's victorious provision for your life. It's a lack of a faith which is holding you back, keeping you out of the race and from looking unto Jesus!

Why don't you admit it and stop denying it. Your problem today is that you are no longer shocked at the sin in your life. And for this reason, sin entangles your life and ties you up in knots. Sin keeps us from doing the will of God! The old saying is true: "Sin takes us further than we want to go, keeps us longer than we want to stay, and costs us more than we want to pay!" It's so easy to become tied up or entangled with sin! But ultimately, it's the sin of unbelief that is the culprit. We sin because we don't believe in God's provision of victory and His sufficiency to grant us the power, sanctification, satisfaction, and contentment we need to be fulfilled in life (2 Pet. 1:3-4). Beloved, we must keep on believing!

The sin of unbelief can “easily beset us” or entangle us in life and take us down the wrong path. The sin of unbelief can very easily surround our lives, controls us, and keep us from winning the race of the Christian life. Therefore, we must keep on believing! We must keep believing in God’s purpose, power, and promises for our lives if we are going to stay in the race.

- ✓ Has your faith been failing?
- ✓ What event has challenged your faith?
- ✓ Are you ready to once again believe in God’s sufficiency?
- ✓ Have you been relying on God’s promises?
- ✓ Do you believe that faith is still the victory?

3. We get rid of the spirit of lethargy.

The Bible goes on to say that we must “run with patience the race that is set before us.” Paul uses the imagery of a race to depict what the Christian life is all about. It can be compared to a race. The imagery it taken from the world of athletics – the Greek and Roman Olympics. The word “race” (agone) speaks of an



intense contest. We get our word agony from this word. The Christian life is compared to an intense contest which is full of emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual agony. Like a foot race, living the Christian life involves perseverance, pain, exhaustion, and opposition. It’s not an easy contest. It takes a tremendous amount of faith and perseverance to remain patient and poised in the race. We are called upon to get rid of a spirit of lethargy and laxity and regain a spirit of endurance, enthusiasm, and motivation to live for Christ.

Sometimes the last lap that I run on the track gets tough. I was running the other day and I had a strong head wind. It made my running much harder. It was not easy. Jesus said that living the Christian life, running in the race, is not always easy.

Luke 14:27-28

“And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? “

Patience is an important aspect of running the race of the Christian life. We must pace ourselves and save some strength for the end of the race. We must learn to patiently endure the trials that come into our life and face them with God’s strengthening and enabling grace. Patience is a virtue, a Christian virtue that is part of our maturing process. Patience boils down to endurance and every runner needs to build up his or her endurance to win the race. We need spiritual stamina. We need perseverance and patience. We must stay on the racecourse. We must never stop running. The Devil likes to grab our running shoes and keep us from moving forward and making process.

James 1:3

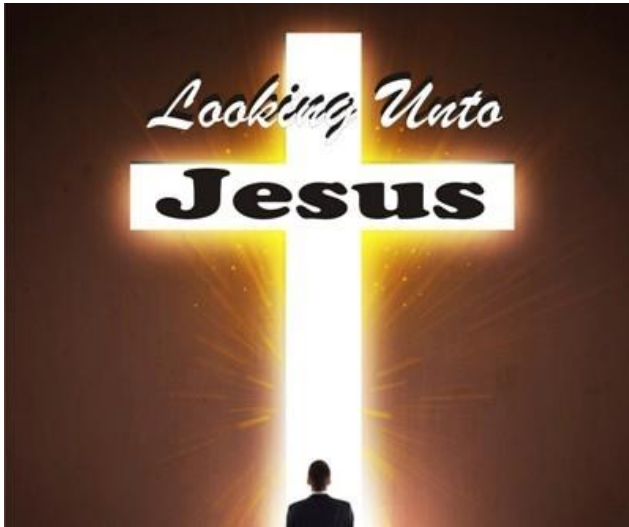
“Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”

You are not going to be effective in the race without perseverance or patience. Patience is what keeps us in the race, so we do not give up. It’s what gives us the persevering spirit to go on and not quit. It’s always too soon to quit! One Greek scholar said this about the word patience. “In the New Testament, this word describes the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings.”

A grandson named Ryan, who served in the Iraq war, told his grandfather: “Sometimes the hard road is the best road!” He was right for it’s often the hard road that grows us and brings greater spirituality maturity and Christlikeness into our lives.

- ✓ Have you been persevering in your Christian life?
- ✓ In what ways can you improve your spiritual endurance?
- ✓ Have you been lazy and sometimes lethargic in your approach to living the Christian life?
- ✓ What can you do to improve your commitment to Christ’s cause?

C. The focus that is before us.



Hebrews 12:2

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Jesus leaves behind the legacy of the greatest example of someone who lived by faith. His life, death, resurrection, and

ascension inspire us to live by faith as He did while we pass through God’s purpose and way for our lives. We are to keep our focus on Christ – His suffering, endurance, faith, and victory so we can be encouraged and inspired to go on in life.

A. T. Robertson said, “Fix your eyes on Jesus, after a glance at ‘the cloud of witnesses’ (Hebrews 11) for He is the Goal.” A. W. Pink also agrees with this when writing: “The cloud of witnesses is not the object on which our heart is fixed. They testify of faith, and we cherish their memory with gratitude, and walk with a firmer step because of the music of their lives. Our eye, however, is fixed, not on many, but on One; not on the army, but the Leader; not on the servants, but the Lord. We see Jesus only, and from Him we derive our true strength, even as He is our light of life.” Our Lord endured far more than any of the heroes of faith named in Hebrews 11. Therefore, He is a perfect example for us to follow.

Someone said:

“Look around and be distressed. Look within and be depressed. Look at Jesus and be at rest!

I never saw an effective runner who was always looking behind his back. Lot’s wife looked back, and she was turned into a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26). Peter took his eyes off Jesus and instead looked at the boisterous waves (Matt. 14:30). The result was he began to sink! We are not to be looking back or at the trials we are facing while running the race. Instead, we are to be “looking

unto Jesus.” This is because Jesus is ahead of us - He is at the finish line waiting for us! If we are going to be effective in the race, we must be looking in the right direction – our eyes must be fixed upon Jesus!

“Open our eyes Lord,
We want to see Jesus
To reach out and touch Him
And say that we love Him.
Open our ears Lord
And Help us to listen
Open our eyes Lord
We want to see Jesus!”

The secret of persistence is found in this phrase - "looking unto Jesus." Like all good runners, we must look away from all the distractions. Many times we look at other people and look at the past and look at the obstacles that are before us, the giants we are facing in life (Numb. 13:33), instead of looking unto Jesus.

The word “looking” (Heb. 12:2) conveys the idea to consider attentively. It means to turn the eyes away from other things and fix them on something. In this case, It’s Jesus! Jesus is our inspiration and motivation to go on and live the Christian life! This is why we must look to Jesus, His example, how He was beaten and bruised for each one of us, how He endured by faith and won the victory in the end. We find the inspiration we need to go on in life from the example of Jesus. We must ultimately look to Christ instead of the past, people, or the pressures that we are facing. Christ’s life and testimony will inspire us to move forward in our Christian life.

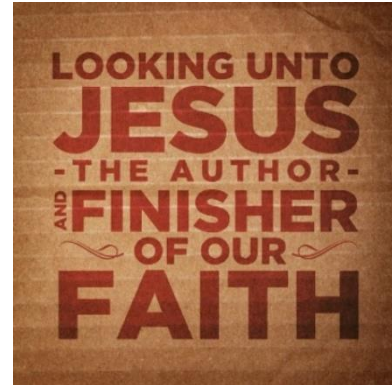
We can stay in the race because our vision of Jesus thrills our souls and keeps a fire burning in our hearts! We are to be looking to Jesus! When we get our eyes off Jesus we will not remain in the race. Of course, we cannot visually see Jesus, so the writer obviously means we must be constantly reflecting on Jesus. Jesus is the answer! Yes, it’s still Jesus!

“Jesus, Jesus, Jesus; there's just something about that name.
Master, Savior, Jesus, like the fragrance after the rain;
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, let all Heaven and earth proclaim
Kings and kingdoms will all pass away,
But there's something about that name.”

How do we keep looking unto Jesus? How do we keep our focus on Jesus?

a. We must look at His personal example of faith.

The Bible states that Jesus “is the author and finisher of *our* faith” (literally – “faith). The word “author” means, “one who takes a lead and gives an example” as a captain of a ship would. The word can also suggest a pioneer or trailblazer since they are people who take the lead and open new pathways of exploration. They are examples of leaders and originators of good things. The word “author” was used in Hebrews 2:10 and suggests here that Jesus “pioneered” or trailblazed the path of faith Christians should follow.



Jesus was the greatest example of One who walked and lived by faith, in accordance with God’s will, and He alone is our prime example that we must look to or reflect upon in our daily routine of life. He also was the “finisher of faith.” This means that Jesus “perfected” or consummated the way of faith (how to live by faith) since He reached the end of the race successfully. He followed the Father’s will and died upon the cross and then rose again demonstrating to us how to live by faith and be victorious.

What was it that enabled our Lord to endure the cross? It was His faith that enabled Him to endure. He kept the eyes of His faith on “the joy that was set before Him” as we will see in a moment. What a pioneer He was! What an example of one who lived by faith and finished the race victoriously! Jesus provides us with the greatest example of someone who lived by faith and His faith legacy provides us with incentive to stay in the race today and do God’s will. We must keep looking unto Jesus, reflecting or thinking about Him and His tremendous faith in the Father’s purpose and plan for His life. He is our pioneer and trailblazer that gives us the inspiration to go on in life and never quit!

b. We must look at His passion upon the cross.

The Scriptures go on to say that Jesus “endured the cross, despising the shame.” The cross speaks of Christ’s passion. The cross of Jesus! We need to embrace the cross of Jesus once again and in a greater way.



“Embrace the cross
Where Jesus suffered
Though it will cost
All you claim as yours.
Your sacrifice will seem small
Beside the treasure
Eternity can't measure
What Jesus holds in store.”

The cross reminds us of Christ's shame, embarrassment, the pain, the mockery, and ultimately His death (Phil. 2:8). The Bible says that “his visage (face) was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men” (Isa. 52:14). Since He endured the worst kind of death for you and me, we should endure for Him. The “shame” involved what Christ suffered at the hands of men which included His nakedness (Matt. 19:23-24). It embraced the hours of darkness during which He was judicially separated from the Father. Jesus was “despising the shame” (Heb. 12:2) which means He was thinking little or nothing about the shame He would face. This is because He was thinking about you and me. Reflect on all the shame that was associated with Calvary. Oh, the shame of it, my Lord, crucified Him that day! The cross was the most cruel and disgraceful death known to mankind.

“That day when they crucified my Saviour,
He was willing to pay all the cost.
When they drove the nails through His body,
They were nailing my sins to His cross.

Oh the shame of it, my sins crucified Him that day,
My sins were to blame.
Forgive me Lord I pray,
I will live so the world can know that I love You
For nailing my sins to the cross.”

If you will see Jesus dying on the cross for you in agony, great pain, and shame, you will get back in the race. If you see Jesus on the cross with the crown of thorns upon His head, with his face so marred more than any other man (Isa. 52:14) and taking your sins and the wrath of God upon Himself, you will get back in the race!! You will throw off your weights immediately, get

rid of your unbelief, and start running! There is a cross that must remain before us if we are going to stay in the race – it's the cross of Jesus.

Why don't we serve Jesus more than we do? Why don't we do what is right? It's because we do not see Jesus lifted upon the cross (John 12:32). We forget that Jesus died for me! Christians are flocking to motivational seminars today to try and discover how to recharge their spiritual batteries in life. But there is only one seminar that I must attend to motivate me and keep me in the race. It's called the seminar of Christ's passion – His cross. At the foot of the cross my heart will be broken. At the foot of the cross my tears will flow from my cheeks. At the foot of the cross I will be motivated to live for Jesus. Jesus endured the cross and He sets the example for us to endure.

Galatians 2:20

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

When we keep looking unto Jesus, who loved and gave Himself for us, we cannot continue to live in sin, depression, and defeat. Instead, His model or example inspires us to live by faith, to endure, to be willing to suffer for His cause, and share in His victory over sin, death, hell, and the worst trials we could possibly face in life.

"As at the cross I humbly bow
And gaze upon Thy thorn-crowned brow,
And view the precious bleeding form
By cruel nails so bruised and torn,
Knowing Thy suffering was for me,
In grief I cry, "How can it be?"

The cross will correct our wrong attitudes in life and get us off our lazy chair! Grace will do the work of sanctifying and transforming us (Titus 2:11-12). The cross will change everything! I don't need a four-point sermon on how to get up when I'm down. I need to see only one thing – Jesus dying for me. Yes, Jesus died for me! It doesn't mean a whole lot to some Christians anymore! This is why they are disobedient, disoriented in life, disillusioned, depressed, and why they have dropped out of the race.

Jesus endured the cross! Since He endured for us, we should endure for Him today and stay in the race, remaining committed to Him and His cause. We have lost sight of the wonder of the cross, the wonder of the ages, and the wonder of it all! We may be lazy, uncommitted, and going to church only occasionally because we have not seen Jesus suffering and dying for us on the cross! Beloved, we are not overworked but undermotivated! “Sir, we would see Jesus” (John 12:21). This should be our heart’s desire and motivation!

I am reminded of what A.J. Gossip said:

“Get the people in the sight of Calvary. Pause there... hushed and reverent; enable them to look, to see it, make it real to them, not just an old tale that has lost its wonder and its stab, but a tremendous awful fact.”

Galatians 3:13 says, “Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree.” It was on the cross that Jesus was stripped of His garments, and He hung upon the cross in open nakedness and shame (Ps. 22:18). Then too, there upon the cross Jesus experienced the legal or judicial separation of the Father in the hours of darkness when he bore the sins of the world (Matt. 27:46). Jesus experienced great shame for you and me. We will never understand the depth of His shame that He passed through in those hours of darkness upon the cross. But we must keep “looking unto Jesus” (His example) to find motivation, endurance, power, and victory.

“My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary,
Savior divine!”

Jesus suffered and died on the cross for a reason: “who for the joy that was set before him.” Jesus went to the cross because of the joy that He looked forward to after His sufferings were complete. What joy was this? It was a twofold joy.

First, Jesus looked forward to the joy of the His exaltation. It was the anticipated joy of His resurrection and ascension to the Father. Jesus saw the

joy of His resurrection and exaltation at the Father's right hand and this helped him to endure the cross.

From Psalm 16:8–10, Jesus knew that He would come out of the tomb alive. "I have set the LORD always before me: because *he is* at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence *is* fulness of joy; at thy right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore."

So "the joy that was set before Him" would include Jesus completing the Father's will on the cross, His resurrection, and exaltation. This is alluded to in the context where Jesus assumed His triumphant position and is "sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).

Jesus anticipated this joyous occasion in John 17:5:

"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

Second, although not mentioned in this context, Jesus also looked forward to the joy of saved souls. The joy that Jesus possessed was also centered upon His joyful anticipation of presenting believers to the Father in glory.

Jude 1:24

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

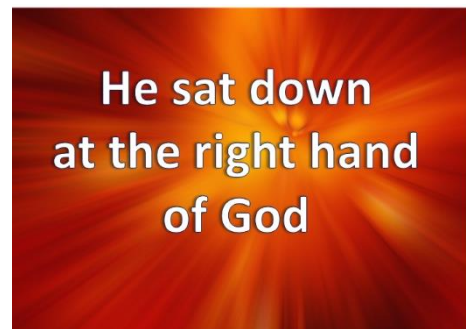
The joy that Jesus looked forward to would also include the joyful anticipation and prospect of the salvation of lost people. Jesus did not enjoy the pain and agony of the cross, but he did look forward to the many souls that would be saved through the completion of His redemptive work. Jesus endured short-term pain because of the certainty of long-term gain. The gain would be the joyful blessing of seeing souls saved. He looked forward to the joy and anticipation of seeing you and me saved! So Jesus looked past the suffering and shame and kept His eyes on you and me.

“I shall forever lift my eyes to Calvary
To view the cross where Jesus died for me.
How marvelous the grace that caught my falling soul
He looked beyond my fault and saw my need.”

By way of application, we too must look past our suffering and ahead to the joy that awaits us – our “eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). The best is yet to come for God’s children! A time of eternal joy is coming when we will be in Heaven, possess our redeemed body, reflect Christlikeness, and enjoy the presence of Christ Himself. We must look past “our light affliction, which is but for a moment” and keep our focus on the future. This is what Jesus did and He is our example to follow.

c. We must look at His position at God’s right hand.

The Bible continues to say that Jesus is “set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” This is His place of victorious exaltation which Jesus possesses today at this very moment (Heb. 1:3; 8:1). Jesus is the Victor who defeated sin, death, Hell, and the grave and is today at the right hand of God where He shares the very same nature of the triune God. He is rewarded with the exalted position at the right hand of God. The writer of Hebrews mentions this exalted position several times in the epistle. Jesus is the great Victor, and this inspires us to keep on keeping on knowing that there is coming a day of great reward and blessing after the time of suffering! There is a crown or time of exaltation after the trials we face on earth.



Christ triumphed in that He endured. He was rewarded with the exalted position at the right hand of God (the Heavenly Father). Jesus’ victorious risen and ascended life at God’s right hand reminds us that we too can experience victory over the hardships and temptations of life and will one day receive reward and exaltation after the race is finished.

James 4:10

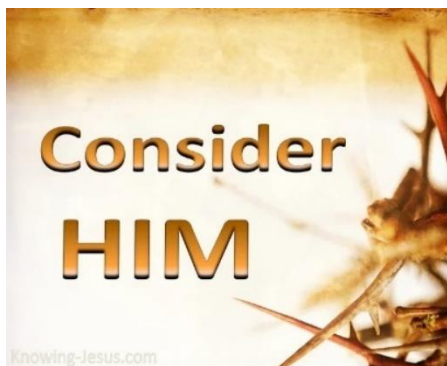
“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”

William MacDonald states that Jesus "not only began the race but finished it triumphantly. For Him the race course stretched from heaven to Bethlehem, then on to Gethsemane and Calvary, then out of the tomb and back to heaven. At no time did He falter or turn back. He kept His eyes fixed on the coming glory when all the redeemed would be gathered with Him eternally.”

In a similar way, we must remain in the race and stay on course! Jesus as the great Victor at God’s right hand motivates us to do the same thing – to finish our course in life (2 Tim. 4:7). Christ victory reminds us that we too can be victors when passing through suffering and sorrow. We do not have to be defeated in the race that is before us. What a compelling example and model Jesus is to each one of us today as we see Him exalted high beside the Father’s throne (Heb. 1:3; 8:1). He is a winner, and we can be a winner too! We can be a winner in this life and also the next life as Jesus demonstrates to us. It’s true, “The crown awaits the conquest; lead on, O God of might.” After the race there is coming a day of reward and great blessing (2 Cor. 5:10). Don’t quit! It will be worth it all when we see Jesus! Christ’s victory in the past gives us courage for the present and hope for the future. Keep your eyes on the prize.

“Let us then be true and faithful,
Trusting, serving every day;
Just one glimpse of Him in glory
Will the toils of life repay.”

d. We must look at His pain in the hands of sinners.



We are also to “consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself” (Heb. 12:3). The word “consider” speaks of perceptive contemplation (“to think carefully about” or “to reason thoroughly”). In other words, we are to create a mental analogy of Jesus Christ and analyze what He went through for us. The Greek word was used in

the field of mathematics and business for adding a column of numbers or figures. We are to mentally ponder what Jesus went through for us at the hands of sinners. The “contradiction [opposition and hostility] of sinners” refers to the terrible mockery, vocal ridicule, and scourging that Jesus took at the hands of His enemies. The nails that were driven through His hands and feet also came from sinners.

Think of the mental anguish and physical pain Jesus went through as He was opposed by sinners. It was a dreadfully horrible experience.

Isaiah 52:14 prophetically records:

“As many were astonished at thee; his visage (*face*) was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.”

Jesus was totally disfigured at the hands of sinners. He was beaten beyond recognition.

1 Peter 2:21-23 declares:

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously.”

As God’s saints, we need to keep looking unto Jesus! We need to keep our eyes riveted on Jesus. His own suffering at the hands of sinners and on the cross will inspire and enable us to enter the “fellowship of his sufferings” (Phil. 3:10). The example of Jesus should motivate us to live by faith, maintain our spiritual endurance, cause us to imitate His suffering, and to ultimately live in victory as He did. Jesus won and so can we!

There was a farmer who was teaching his son to plow with a mule. "To make straight furrows, son, just pick out an object beyond the field and keep your eyes fixed on it." The boy nodded claiming he understood, and the farmer left. When he came back an hour later, the farmer was shocked to see a field of twisted furrows. "What happened, son? I thought I told you to keep your eye on an object beyond the field." "I did, Dad," the boy replied, pointing to

the standard he had chosen - a cow in the adjoining pasture who kept walking in different directions! This humorous story holds a serious lesson. Whether you're plowing a field or running the race called the Christian life, it's critical that you keep your eyes on the right target. Our target and focus is Jesus! Despite all the great men and women of faith we read about in Hebrews 11, only Jesus Himself is worthy of our undivided loyalty and attention (Heb. 12:2). The Old Testament saints had the promises; we have Jesus. They looked for a City; we look unto Jesus!

Robert Murray McCheyne advised:

"For every one look at your problems, your weaknesses, your failures -- take ten looks at Jesus."

- ✓ What has been the main focus in your everyday living?
- ✓ How often do you reflect upon Christ and what He went through for you?
- ✓ Does Christ's sufferings at the hands of sinners open your own heart to stand up for truth and suffer for Him?
- ✓ When you feel isolated and alone, do you remember how Christ hung on the cross alone – separated from the Father?
- ✓ Is the cross of Christ a daily inspiration to you and motivational factor for you to love Him and live the Christian life?
- ✓ Does Christ's victory in His resurrection and ascension inspire and motivate you to walk in victory?
- ✓ Does the faith Christ displayed in leaving Heaven, suffering, dying on the cross, and completing His mission on earth motivate you to live by faith and remain faithful to Him?
- ✓ How can Christ's endurance help you to endure?

What is the overall application of this passage to our lives today?

- **The example of Jesus keeps us from discouragement.**

The text says we are to remember what Christ passed through for us and how He was victorious in the end "lest ye be weary and faint in your minds" (Heb. 12:3c). When we think of all that Jesus went through for us it should keep us from a drooping and discouraged spirit. His example of suffering

inspires us to take our suffering and lot in life and live by faith as Jesus did during His terrible sufferings and hardships.

On the cross Jesus suffered greatly and yet He endured or persevered by faith and finished the work the Father gave Him to do (John 17:4). Jesus' example of courageous faith during His time of suffering and His triumphant victory through His resurrection and ascension to Glory should inspire us! His example of suffering, faith, and victory keeps us from overcoming discouragement, debilitating despair, and life-altering depression. It's true that when the days are weary and the long night dreary, Jesus cares and He is there for us. Keep looking unto Him for unending strength and stability in life.

The word "weary" (tired and sick) is talking about psychological discouragement ("in your minds"). Depression is normally a spiritual problem. The word "faint" means to be unloosed, weakened, exhausted from a mental and therefore spiritual standpoint which often leads to all kinds of spiritual problems. Depression keeps us from living by faith and following the example of Jesus who lived by faith in spite of great persecution – even the death of the cross.

We become mentally depressed when we keep thinking about ourselves! Depression is a selfish thing! Self-pity is a defeating mindset. We start to sing: "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen." "Swing low sweet chariot." Instead of looking at ourselves we must keep looking unto Jesus! This is the way out of depression. The leader and pioneer of faith is our example to look to in the time of suffering. We see Jesus being separated from the Father, suffering, being shamed, sacrificing Himself on the cross, and yet maintaining His faith in the Father's plan and becoming a great victor through all of His suffering.

Christ's suffering puts our own earthly suffering in a different light and helps us to keep trusting the Lord in spite of great difficulties. The example of Jesus' suffering and faith inspires us to rest in the Father's plan for our own lives and go on and walk by faith – even when it means heartache and hardship. The example of Christ's faith during His suffering helps us to walk by faith during our own suffering. We must keep our eyes on Jesus! The cross will help maintain our focus. In fact, our focus and the inspiration we receive

from the great pioneer of faith will keep us from depression. It will help us to maintain our spiritual equilibrium and sanity.

An old legend tells of an angel who was sent by God to inform Satan that all the methods he uses to defeat God's children would be taken from him. The Devil pleaded to be allowed to keep just one. "Let me retain depression," he begged. The angel, thinking this is a modest request, agreed. "Good!" he exclaimed, as he laughed to himself. "In that one gift, I have secured all."

➤ **The example of Jesus keeps us from deception.**

Hebrews 12:4

"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

When we think of the way that Jesus suffered at the hands of sinners, we must not deceive ourselves by making a wrong judgment, declaring that we who are alive have suffered to the same extent and intensity that Jesus did. This is absurd! We must stop fooling ourselves. The phrase "not yet resisted" is a word for martyrdom – "to be put in the place of another." Also, "unto blood" means that no Christian who is still living has been martyred or no Christian still living has been put to death in the place of another person and has died the same cruel bloody death as Jesus did! You cannot compare your suffering with the suffering of Jesus! You have not endured people crucifying you on a cross, where your face was disfigured beyond recognition, and where you ultimately died as a martyr in terrible agony. But Jesus did (Phil. 2:8).

Also, you have not faced the same "striving against sin" or struggle against sin as Christ did with sinners who opposed Him. The point is this, no person who is still alive in his body has faced sin as Jesus did when suffering at the hands of wicked sinners and the forces of evil. The readers of this epistle (you and me today) must stop deceiving ourselves. We have not gone through hardship and suffered untold agony as Jesus did where we were disfigured behind recognition (Isa. 52:14) and placed upon a cross to die. Our suffering cannot be compared with His. It pales in comparison to Christ's suffering. In other words, we who are alive have nothing on Jesus and the way He suffered at the hands of sinners. Nails were never driven through your hands

and feet by sinners. You never hung on a cross in total shame and agony as Jesus did.

Leslie Dunkin told about a dog he had when he was a boy. His father would occasionally test the dog's obedience. He would place a tempting piece of meat on the floor and give the command, "No!" The dog, who must have had a strong urge to go for the meat, was placed in a most difficult situation—to obey or disobey his master's command. Dunkin said, "The dog never looked at the meat. He seemed to feel that if he did, the temptation to disobey would be too great. So he looked steadily at my father's face." Dunkin then made this spiritual application: "There is a lesson for us all. Always look up to the Master's face."

Looking unto Jesus! When we look down and see all the problems we must then look up and find the solution!

Colossians 3:1

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."

Looking unto Jesus! He is our inspiration for faith, our motivation to persevere during hard times, and our example on how to live victoriously and remain committed to God's will. Don't tell me you can't go on! Don't tell me you are tired, worn out, and want out of the race! Keep looking to Jesus! And when we do, we can go on in our Christian lives. Hebrews 6:1 says, "Let us go on!" Yes, we can go on for Jesus provides us with the example, inspiration, incentive, and power to do so!

If you don't want to serve Jesus and commit your life to Him, then you will have to look past the cross and refuse to "consider him" who died the sinner's death and suffered so greatly for you. If we would have a fresh vision of Jesus dying for us on the cross, we would stop all the excuses and get back in the race. As we looked to the cross in initial faith (John 3:14-15), so we must continue to look to the cross for inspiration, courage, and hope!

"Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine,
Moment by moment, O Lord, I am Thine."

Jesus is our inspiration, our role model of faith, and our Lord and Savior who “loved us gave himself for us” (Gal. 2:20). The cross stimulates us to love God (2 Cor. 5:14), live for Him, and run the race that is set before us!

“O my Savior, make me see
How dearly thou hast paid for me.”

I read about a small boy who was consistently late coming home from school. His parents warned him one day that he must be home on time that afternoon, but nevertheless he arrived later than ever. His mother met him at the door and said nothing. At dinner that night, the boy looked at his plate. There was only a slice of bread and a glass of water. He looked at his father’s full plate and then at his father, but his father remained silent. The boy was crushed.

The father waited for the full impact to sink in, then quietly took the boy’s plate and placed it in front of himself. He took his own plate of meat and potatoes, put it in front of the boy, and smiled at his son. When that boy grew to be a man, he said, “All my life I’ve known what Jesus is like by what my father did that night.”

Christ’s suffering, faith, and victory inspires us to go on in life and live by faith in God’s plan for our own personal lives. If we keep looking unto Jesus, we will simplify our lives. We will not become bogged down, depressed, and get into ruts that we cannot get out of. Keep it simple! Keep looking unto Jesus!

The songwriter beautifully wrote:

“My heart is stirred when’er I think of Jesus!
That blessed name that set the captive free,
No other name through which I find salvation
No other name has meant so much to me.”

If we are to live as victorious Christians, then we need to learn how to keep our focus upon the Lord Jesus Christ when distractions, distress, discouragement, disillusionment, and death grasp for our attention.

Our focus must be on Jesus continually. We need to keep looking at Christ's example to receive inspiration, motivation, to increase our faith, and to experience His spiritual strength and victory as we pass through the trials related to life. "Looking unto Jesus" (Heb. 12:2). The meaning of this word "looking" is illustrated by a hiker in the wilderness who needs to walk across a lot of ground. To keep from getting lost or wasting time, he finds a landmark such as a big tree or mountain, and he heads toward that mark. He keeps it in sight to keep himself from getting lost.

Erwin Lutzer wrote:

"Jesus is the true here Who can inspire His own to follow in His footsteps."

"Sweetly, Lord, have we heard Thee calling,
'Come, follow Me!'
And we see where Thy footprints falling,
Lead us to Thee.
Footprints of Jesus that make the pathway glow;
We will follow the steps of Jesus where'er they go."

When you stop focusing on the faith and victory of Jesus you can get scared and lose your spiritual way in life. We must turn our eyes way from the things that disturb and deter us from living the Christian life and focus our mind and attention on Christ's example of faith, suffering, and victory. Our gaze or focus upon Christ will provide us with the incentive, strength, stability, sanctification, victory, spiritual dynamic, and peace we need so we can persevere. So we can keep running the race that is set before us.

Ron Hamilton wrote:

"There's a course that must be finished
There's a race that must be run,
There's a mission to accomplish,
And a battle to be won.
We've been called to take the challenge
By God's might and through His son
He will give us grace to complete the race
Moving forward! pressing on!"

Toward the hope of our high calling,
Toward the promised we received,
With the strength that we've been given,
Pressing on to victory!
And toward the One who's run before us,
As we lay each weight aside.
'Til the race is run, 'till the price is won,
'Til we reach the finish line.
Press on!

Waywardness (Heb. 3:13), weariness (Heb. 12:3), wickedness (1 Cor. 5:8), and worry (Phil. 4:6) can keep us from running an effective race. You cannot win the race by looking back (Phil. 3:13) but unswervingly fixing your eyes on Jesus. If you feel the tug to throw in the towel and quit – keep looking or focusing upon Christ (His suffering, faith, and victory). You will find renewed strength, vision, and power that comes from the Lord.

Rod Mattoon summarized the need to keep “looking unto Jesus” (His example of suffering, strength, endurance, and victory) to help us when we are passing through hard times.

- If Problems stalk your life like a shadow on a sunny day, leaving you drained and discouraged, by God’s grace look unto Jesus for the strength you need.
- If Pain racks your body like the sting from a viper or scorch from a flame, leaving you in despair and distress, then look unto Jesus for His soothing care.
- If Panic grips you like a leech in a swamp or tick on a deer, leaving you with dread and desperation, then look unto Jesus for serenity and stillness.
- If Pessimism robs you of your joy like a thief that cleans out a bank, leaving you depressed and doubtful, then look unto Jesus for satisfaction and the stimulation of your spirit.
- If Pandemonium rocks your life with confusion like a storm-tossed ship on a raging sea, leaving you disconcerted and distracted, then look unto Jesus for stability and sharpness of mind.

The late beloved pastor James Montgomery Boice wrote that "The only thing that will ever get us moving along this path of self-denial and discipleship is fixing our eyes on Jesus and what He has done for us, coming to love Him as a result, and thus wanting also to be with Him both now and always. Jesus is our only possible model for self-denial. He is the very image of cross-bearing. And it is for love of Him and a desire to be like Him that we take up our cross and willingly follow Him (Mk 8:34, 35, 36)."

There is a fable about a dog who loved to chase other animals. He bragged about his great running skill and said he could catch anything. Well, it wasn't long until his boastful claims were put to the test by a rabbit. With ease the little creature outran his barking pursuer. The other animals, watching with glee, began to laugh. The dog excused himself, however, by saying, "You forget, folks, that I was only running for fun. He was running for his life!"

Motivation makes a difference in everything that we do. In fact, it determines the way believers serve the Lord. It changes our attitude and outlook on life. Some people serve the Lord halfheartedly because they feel obligated. But there are others who serve Him with a sense of urgency and zeal for they are deeply grateful for God's saving grace in their lives. The grace and love of Jesus, the pioneer of faith, should stir our hearts and rekindle the flame of passion and pursuit of His own character and ways. The secret is to keep looking unto the example of Jesus to experience inspiration, motivation, and transformation, so we might become more like Him (2 Cor. 3:18).

Once again, looking unto Jesus or maintaining a steadfast, laser like focus on Christ should result in both the *inspiration* we need to stay in the race of the Christian life and the *imitation* of His character and conduct as we follow in His footsteps. Beloved, we must turn our eyes upon Jesus again (and again and again!) so we might remain continually focused on His legacy of faith, suffering, sanctification, endurance, victory, and experience His life-transforming power in our daily lives.

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the Light of His glory and grace."

Right now, in the midst of whatever trying circumstances you might be facing, turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look unto Jesus. Stay focused on the Lord. Let His faith, suffering, and victory inspire you to endure and go on! Keep running. Finish your race. Be a winner!

