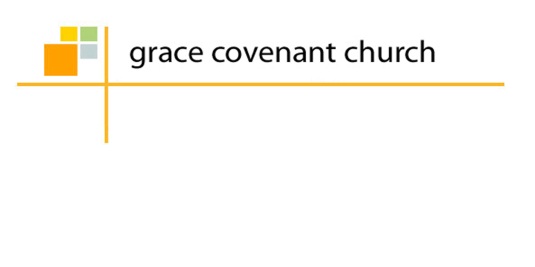
Running the Race



***, 2005***

For most of the semester we have been talking about Jephthah, Gideon, Barak, and Samson, who were men God used to turn his people, the Israelites, away from their sinful ways back to Him. One of the astounding points is that these men were far from perfect, as we learned, they doubted and tested God stumbled to their worldly lusts, and even lead people in worshipping idols, but God redeemed them. He took their failures and made them His victories. We have touched on how these men, though imperfect, were written in the Hall of Faith (Hebrews 11). In this Bible Study we will see how we too can be empowered to walk in faith in the ways these men were. Hebrews 12 shows us how to run the race well.

Discussion question: Have you ever started something new only to give it up a few weeks late? Share with your group.

Read Hebrews 12:1-2

1. This scripture likens the Christian walk to a race. In what ways might this be so? What kind of race are we running?

The Bible often uses metaphors to describe our walk with Christ (think slavery (2 Timothy), marriage (Romans 7), warfare (Ephesians 6)). This is observation questions, but some examples include witness=spectators, “run with perseverance”, etc. Paul uses this same metaphor in 1Corinthians 9:24 asking us to run towards the incorruptible crown that we may run to win. In the same vein this passage is asking us to throw off the hindrances and sins that keep us from winning or finishing (more on this later). Another fun point is that the passage says “let us run”, which can be an exhortation and an encouragement. It does not merely say “run” as a command or “you run” singular, but it says “let *us* run”. It is indicating that we are not alone running the race. Lastly, this is not a sprint. The author says to run with endurance. This is an endurance race- a marathon.

1. What does the “cloud of witnesses” this passage refers to? Who can be considered these types of witnesses in our lives? How might they be used in our own race?

There are two ways to look at this. It can refer to the people mentioned previously in chapter 11, specifically we’re looking at Jephthah, Gideon, Samson, and Barak with the idea is that these past “heroes of faith” are people who we can imitate in our walks of faith, so we have witnessed their faith. The other side is also true, we are now walking in faith as they witness our faith- they are attesting to our faith. Just like in a race, the faith heroes in chapter 11 were models for us to follow in our training, but now they are spectators to attest to how we run our race. (Pretty cool huh?!) On a side note, this can refer to the fact that part of this message is that every Christian lives within historical tradition of faithfulness and every Christian is responsible to hand the tradition of faith and obedience to the next generation (if you get to this point you could talk about discipleship/evangelism…but that might be a tangent). The goal is to think about how community can be a source of encouragement and accountability as we walk our Christian lives.

1. According to this passage, what are some things that hinder the runners from running the race? What are some characteristics of God’s people as they run the race? How can these characteristics help us not be hindered? (Romans 5:3-5, James 1:2-4, 2 Timothy 4:7-8)

Verse one says “let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles”. Depending no the people in your family group, you might be tempted to try to talk about the differences between hindrances and sins, but I urge that you focus on the fact that this is a verse that is commanding actions. It’s saying we must “run”, “throw off”, basically, asking us to focus on not sitting and continuing to watch others walk faithfully, but for us to go at it on our own.

Characteristics are in the next section of the verse where it says “run with perseverance”, “fix our eyes on Jesus”. As we discussed before, this isn’t a sprint, it’s a marathon. We must continually throw off the extra weight that bogs us down and removes our ability to run with perseverance, but we can only do this when we are focused. Runners often are told to run with a focus on the finish line, to run with their head up so that they can see where they’re going. This is the same way for Christian; we must run with our heads up so that we always have our eyes fixed on Jesus.

John Macarthur puts it this way, “The obstructions are thrown away, the weights are thrown off, the race is under way, we have the encouragement of all those who ran the race in the past and went right on through trial and crisis after crisis and there we are running this race and we're looking at a perfect example of faith and that's Jesus Christ.”

1. In verse 2, how might looking to Jesus’ suffering help us have focus in our own walk? What do we see in the passage to clue us in?

We see a shift in tone from the previous passage where this is more in the indicative mode instead of the imperative mode. It helps us shift our attention away from the people of faith that were described in chapter 11 and to the best example, Jesus Christ. The implication here is that the Christ has gone before us, in the human form, to allow us to walk as He did. He is the ultimate example for our faith. In a race you hit a point where the lactic acid builds up and you begin to run out of steam, at this point, it’s a mind game of your endurance. In a similar way, this passage is asking us to not beg stuck in the moment when the lactic acid builds, but realize that Christ already went before us. He suffered so we may know how to suffer through our faith. We can look at him as the great encourager. We see that beyond the suffering there is joy and further, along with Christ we can have this intimate relationship with God (“sit at his right hand”). We are no longer burdened to loose this race, but we are victorious through His cross.

1. What are some practical ways you can finish the race well this year and begin next semester setting yourself to finish stronger?

This is the sharing question designed to close off the year and help people reflect on what has happened this semester, how they can continue strong through the end (or maybe they aren’t even in the race yet), and to focus on how they can apply the things they’ve learned or better focus so that following years can be more focused and intentional.