HUDSON'S HOPE CHAPEL

Run the Race

May 31, 2026 · Series: Greater Still - The Glory of Jesus in Hebrews · Luke Hughes-Bunger

Main Passage: Hebrews 12:1-17 (ESV)

Big Idea: Because we are surrounded by witnesses and sustained by Jesus, we must run with endurance, receive the Father's discipline, and pursue holiness together.

Introduction

Late last year, Michelle Khare took part in the Great World Race: seven marathons on seven continents in seven days.

After completing the first marathon in Cape Town, the runners boarded a plane. Only fourteen hours later, they stood at the starting line in Antarctica. They faced cold, wind, and snow after already running 26.2 miles.

The warming shelter on the course was both a gift and a temptation. Inside, finishers were resting and eating warm food. Each time the runners stopped to warm up, they had to decide whether to remain in the shelter or step back out into the cold.

Khare ran most of the Antarctic race alongside another competitor, Tariq Amassyali. They encouraged one another through the difficult miles. Near the end, when Tariq slowed down, he urged her to keep going.

That story gives us a helpful picture for Hebrews 12. The Christian life is not a sprint or a display of inner toughness. It is a race that requires endurance. We need other believers beside us. But the people beside us are not the finish line or the prize. Jesus is the One toward whom we run.

Run With Endurance by Fixing Your Eyes on Jesus

Hebrews 12 begins with the word "therefore." This passage grows directly out of Hebrews 11.

Last week, we saw a long history of people who trusted God even when fulfillment felt distant or costly. Their lives surround us as a "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1).

The main point is not that the saints of Hebrews 11 are spectators watching us from the stands. Their lives bear witness to the faithfulness of God.

Abraham testifies that God's promises are worth trusting even when we cannot see the whole path. Moses testifies that the reproach of Christ is worth more than the treasures of Egypt. The suffering saints testify that faith is still worthwhile when obedience is costly and deliverance does not come immediately.

Their lives remind us:

- God is faithful.
- His promises are worth trusting.
- The race is worth running.

Because of that, Hebrews says we must "lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely" (Heb. 12:1).

Sin entangles us. It trips us up and slows our obedience. If we are serious about running the race, we cannot make peace with it. Some things need to be confessed, repented of, and laid aside.

But the writer also speaks about "every weight." A weight is not necessarily sinful in itself. A runner does not only avoid things that are forbidden. A runner leaves behind anything that makes it harder to run well.

Some weights are habits that consume our attention. Some are comforts we have learned to need too much. Some are commitments that crowd out prayer, worship, rest, and fellowship.

Even good things can become burdens when they do not belong to the particular race God has set before us.

This can be difficult because the answer will not be identical for everyone. Something permissible for one person may be something God is asking another person to release. Faithful endurance sometimes requires the humility to say no to a good opportunity because it is not ours to carry.

The question is not only, "Is this technically sinful?"

The question is also, "Is this helping me run the race God has given me to run?"

This is not an excuse to become passive or self-protective. Hebrews is calling us to endurance, not avoidance. But endurance requires wisdom. We cannot run every race, meet every need, accept every invitation, or carry every responsibility. Sometimes faithfulness means saying yes with courage. Sometimes it means saying no with humility so that we can remain faithful to what God has actually placed before us.

Then verse 2 tells us where to look:

"looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith..." (Heb. 12:2)

Jesus is not simply another example after the saints of Hebrews 11. He begins our faith, sustains it, and brings it to completion. He endured the cross, despised its shame, and is now seated at the right hand of God's throne.

Hebrews speaks directly to weary and fainthearted people. It does not deny exhaustion. It gives us somewhere to look in the middle of it.

Endure Hardship as the Loving Discipline of Your Father

If we are running toward Jesus, why does the race still hurt so much?

Hebrews answers by giving believers the category of discipline:

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves..." (Heb. 12:5-6)

There are two wrong ways to respond to hardship. We can regard it lightly, refusing to learn from it and focusing only on escape. Or we can collapse under it, believing that pain means God has abandoned us.

The word "discipline" includes the idea of training and formation. This is not God venting anger on His children. Christ has already borne condemnation at the cross. This is fatherly training.

That does not mean every painful event can be traced neatly to a specific sin. When someone is grieving, sick, or overwhelmed, we should not speculate carelessly about the lesson God is trying to teach them.

But Hebrews does tell believers that suffering is never meaningless. Our Father does not waste painful miles.

God disciplines us "for our good, that we may share his holiness" (Heb. 12:10). Hebrews is honest that discipline feels painful rather than pleasant. Yet it later yields "the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:11).

The pain is not the goal. Holiness is the goal.

When hardship comes, we can ask:

- How might my Father be training me through this?
- What is He showing me about my dependence on Him?
- Where is He loosening my grip on lesser things?
- How is He teaching me to look more steadily to Jesus?

Strengthen One Another and Pursue Holiness Seriously

Verse 12 turns outward:

"Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet..."

The Christian life is personal, but it is never private.

Later in the Great World Race, Tariq and Michelle ran together again in Colombia. The bond formed in Antarctica mattered when accumulated fatigue had taken its toll. In Portugal, a crowd of supporters also came out to encourage the runners. Deep into a punishing week, many competitors ran their fastest race.

No one else could run the miles for them. But the people around them mattered.

That is part of what the church is for.

Churches should be places where weak knees are strengthened, not mocked or ignored. We should ask who needs a phone call, prayer, practical support, or a reminder that the race is not over.

But Hebrews does not stop with encouragement. It tells us to "strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

Holiness is not vague niceness or polished church behavior. Jesus does not forgive us so we can remain comfortably unchanged. He saves us from sin and trains us in righteousness.

Verse 15 warns about a "root of bitterness." Bitterness rarely remains private. It grows quietly and eventually spreads. We must deal honestly with resentment before it hardens.

Then Hebrews points to Esau. He traded his birthright for a single meal. He exchanged lasting blessing for immediate appetite.

That danger is still real. Drift often happens quietly: a little compromise, a little bitterness, and a growing attachment to immediate relief. Eventually, the warmth of the shelter begins to look more appealing than the finish line.

Application and Conclusion

The Christian life is not won by a fast start. It is a race that requires endurance.

This week:

- identify one sin that must be repented of rather than managed
- consider whether one good commitment has become a weight you need to release
- ask how the Father may be training you through a present hardship
- strengthen one tired believer directly and specifically
- deal honestly with bitterness before it grows deeper roots

If you are not a Christian, this is not an invitation to save yourself through religious effort. You cannot run your way into the love of God. Come to Jesus, the One who endured the cross for sinners.

If you are a believer, remember that you are not running alone. God has given us one another. More importantly, Jesus has already endured, reached the throne, and promised to bring His people home.

Keep going. Keep strengthening one another. Keep pursuing holiness. Keep looking to Jesus.

Discussion Guide Questions

1. What part of the Great World Race story helps you understand Hebrews 12 most clearly?
2. How does the word "therefore" connect Hebrews 12 to Hebrews 11?
3. In what sense are the saints of Hebrews 11 a "great cloud of witnesses"?

4. What is the difference between a sin and a weight in Hebrews 12:1?
5. Can a good thing become a weight? What makes that question difficult in practice?
6. What does it mean to run "the race that is set before us" rather than designing our own race?
7. Why is Jesus more than merely a good example of endurance?
8. How does the finished work of Christ shape the way we understand the Father's discipline?
9. How can we avoid drawing simplistic conclusions about another person's suffering?
10. What does it look like for a church to strengthen weak knees?
11. Why is bitterness dangerous to the whole community?
12. What is one practical step you need to take this week to run with greater endurance?