



12 August 2020

Mid-Week Encouragement

Hebrews 12:1-3

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, ²fixing 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. ³ For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Our Christian journey is like a marathon race. It's not about how fast we sprint off at the start of the race, but it is about finishing the race and finishing it well.

Let us consider three things that will help us *run with endurance the race that is set before us*:

1. Train for the Race

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵ Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

When Paul says, "*only one receives the prize*", he is not advocating competition among believers, for each of us have our own race to run. But he is exhorting us to run the race like an athlete who wants to win i.e. to run to the best of our ability, with commitment and effort. One of my son's friends is an aspiring Olympic swimmer and to pursue his dream he keeps to a strict training regime and has chosen to make sacrifices in things that teenagers often value: sleeping in, social life and unhealthy foods. If he is willing to do this for a perishable Olympic medal, how much more we, for an imperishable crown from Jesus.

By the grace of God, let us exercise discipline and self-control in all things, and train diligently and consistently. Let us build our faith muscles by knowing the risen Christ and obeying the Word of God, by keeping ourselves in the love of Christ, by talking to God in prayer and learning to listen out for His voice, by walking in step with the Holy Spirit and exercising faith. We want to be well-trained so that we can run with endurance the race marked out for us.

2. Run with Endurance

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

Endurance is a quality that cannot be developed in good times. In good times, there is no need to endure, it is a time we rejoice and give thanks! To endure is to hold fast to one's faith in Christ in the face of adversities and trials. And because we live in a broken world and there are also spiritual forces of darkness working against us, we will encounter trials. In God's infinite love and wisdom, He allows trials in our lives to grow in us the fruit of endurance. This is a very important quality to have, especially in these uncertain times when we see an increase in conflicts, persecutions, natural disasters, pestilence and economic shakings.

Our response in times of testing is critical. The lenses through which we view trials and testing can either draw us closer to God or cause us to turn away. What we have been doing in cultivating our love relationship with God and growing to know Him will be tested. Will we still believe that God is who He says He is, our good and loving Father? Will we choose to continue to love and trust Him even though we cannot understand why we are facing the trial?

It is in this crucible of testing that our faith, which is so precious to God, can come out refined by the fire to become like gold. The result of learning to endure is that we become mature in faith, lacking nothing needed to press on to finish the race well. And God is loving and merciful, He does not let us struggle through the testing alone. He has already sent His own Son, our Lord Jesus, who endured the scorn of men and bore the shame and torture of the cross, for the joy of fulfilling the Father's will and seeing mankind reconciled to God. Our Lord Jesus understands what it is to endure suffering so let us fix our eyes on Him, the author and perfecter of faith.

3. Fix our eyes on Jesus

As we go through trials, many may grow weary and in Hebrews 12:2-3, we are given a powerful handle so that we do not come to the point where we lose heart and give up – we are to fix our eyes on Jesus. Here are some ways to keep our focus on Jesus.

i. Draw near to Jesus.

Jesus invites all to *“draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16)*. Whatever your need, talk to Jesus about it. Tell Him your fears and anxieties. Cry out to Him in your weariness and when you feel weak. Ask Him to renew your strength. His grace is always more than enough for you, and His power finds its full expression through your weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

ii. Turn to the Word of God.

One of the key ways God gives grace and strength to the weary is by the Word of God, which is living and powerful. In Psalms 19:7-8, the Psalmist describes what the Word of God can do for those who would read it, heed it and obey it - God speaks through Scripture to revive the soul, make wise the simple, rejoice the heart and enlighten the eyes. Instead of focusing on the circumstances of the trial you are facing, turn to the Word of God and let faith arise.

iii. Do not give up meeting together in the Body of Christ.

When we are facing trials, it can be tempting to stop attending CG because we are discouraged or feel embarrassed about our situation. Please do not do that! This temptation is from the devil for his intention is to isolate us from the very people whom God has given to encourage and support us, and all the more during our time of testing. How true and wise are the words in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, *“Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labour. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.”*

Indeed Jesus is the Author and Perfecter of faith: our faith journey began when we believed in Jesus as our Saviour and Lord and Philippians 1:6 carries a wonderful assurance that *“He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus”*.

God’s love and peace be with you
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