

Hebrews

- I. The Necessity of Discipline for Living A Life of Faith
 - A. **Hebrews 12:1-2** . . . 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, [2] **fixing 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.
 - B. Today, we are adding one more activity to the list of activities that makes up our part in living a life of faith – and the activity we are adding is a **focus on Jesus** that is just as vital as putting off every unnecessary weight (encumbrance), putting off every sin that we are aware of, and running with endurance the race that God sets before us so that we cross the finish line a winner.
 - C. Prayer
- II. Fixing Our Eyes On Jesus
 - A. **Hebrews 12:2** . . . fixing 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.
 1. This verse is not the first time God brings to our attention the wisdom and benefits of fixing our focus on Jesus. Centuries before the NT was written, David, in writing his psalms, speaks of maintaining a continual focus on God.
 - a. Obviously, when David sinned with Bathsheba and against Uriah, her husband, David turned away from his focus on God and focused elsewhere – such as on himself, and on gratifying his desires, and on protecting his reputation.
 - b. However, in spite of his failures, David knew the wisdom and benefits of keeping a keen focus on God – as shown by a start to finish view of his life and writings. And it is this quality in David’s life that I want us to examine first as we consider what God wants to say to us about **fixing our eyes on Jesus**.
 2. Now it is important for us to understand that it is not the mere act of fixing our eyes on Jesus that makes us a winner in the marathon of faith – any more than reading our Bible every day conforms us to the likeness of Christ or keeps us from sinning.

- a. What makes us a winner, is responding to what our fixed focus on Jesus shows us about such things as faith in God, obedience to God, humility, godly thinking, holy living, Christ-like character, love, speaking the truth, compassion, resisting temptation, endurance, and suffering for righteousness sake.
 - b. And of course, our response produces an ever broadening and increasing affect on our spiritual practices and disciplines, our daily preparation, our prayer life, and our behavior.
3. There is one more point I want to make before examining David's fixed focus on God. Jesus said in **Matthew 6:24** . . . "No one can serve both God and riches." John said it another way in **I John 2:15** . . . "If anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him." These two statements show us that there is a spiritual law of relationship equal to the natural law of gravity.
- a. And according to this law, we cannot fix our eyes on Jesus and on our flesh and the world at the same time. We cannot follow Jesus and the devil or our fleshly desires at the same time.
 - b. Therefore, fixing our eyes on Jesus naturally turns us away from the allurements of the world and the pleasures of the flesh – **and** it opens us more and more to the influence of Christ's life and will over our life and will – and this is why a fixed focus on Jesus has an ever broadening effect on us.
4. With this principle in mind, I want to begin building for you a picture of the ever broadening effect that comes from fixing our eyes on Jesus. And as I said, we will begin with David and two of his Psalms to show how his focus on God affected his life.
- a. **Psalms 16:8** . . . I have set the LORD continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.
 - (1) This verse does not contain two distinct thoughts, but one. The first statement produces the second. We see this same truth in **James 4:8** . . . "draw near to God and He will draw near to you." The point of **Psalm 16:8** is that when our focus is continually on God, He is continually at our right hand – and that is our hand of power! In other words, when He is with us – because we are drawing near to Him – His presence is a source of security that nothing the devil or this world throws at us can shake.
 - (2) There is one more point I want to make from this Psalm. You cannot draw near to God while clinging to your encumbrances or ignoring your besetting sins. In other

words, to fix your eyes on Jesus so as to have confidence in his presence and empowerment, and to experience the security of his presence, you must lay aside encumbrances and besetting sins and run with endurance.

b. **Psalms 25:15** . . . My eyes are continually toward the LORD, For He will pluck my feet out of the net.

(1) We cannot fix our eyes on Jesus without living as he calls us to live and wills us to live. To live otherwise is to turn your gaze away from Jesus to other things.

(2) Therefore, as we live according to his will and word, we can count on him doing two great works for us – works that protect us from the snares and darts of the devil:

(a) **I Corinthians 10:13** . . . No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will **not allow** you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will **provide the way of escape** also, so that you will be able to endure it.

(b) **Romans 8:28** . . . And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

5. Now that we have looked at these two Psalms, I want to return to **Hebrews 12:2** and a few scriptures from other parts of the NT to see what God has to say to us from the NT about fixing our eyes on Jesus. As we consider these NT scriptures, continue building your own picture of how fixing your eyes on Jesus produces an ever broadening effect on your heart, your mind, your character, your spiritual practices, your daily preparation, your prayer life, and your behavior.

B. **Hebrews 12:2** . . . fixing 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.

1. Jesus is the author and perfecter of faith

a. **author** – also translated as leader, captain, prince; speaks of one who leads the way like a king leading his troops into battle. Therefore, as the author of faith, Jesus leads us through this life of faith. He leads us along the path of the race that God sets before us – and if we keep our eyes on him, he will lead us to victory.

- (1) Of course, following requires fixing our eyes on Jesus so we don't lose sight of him. You cannot be following Jesus when your focus is on something other than him.
 - (2) And we should bear in mind that following Jesus has its costs – such as the denial of self and bearing our cross day by day. Yet these costs are of little consequence compared to crossing the finish line a winner.
- b. **perfecter** – Jesus is the perfect example of living each day by faith in God.
- (1) **NOTE:** Jesus is not the perfecter of our faith, but rather the perfect example of a life of faith.
 - (2) Therefore, it is as we fix our eyes on Jesus, the perfecter of faith, that we have a day by day example of what we need to do and how we need to live to wind up a winner at the end of the race.
 - (3) And right here is where truth sets us free. God has not willed that we compare our lives to the average sinner or even the common Christian to see how good we are doing. God wills us to compare our lives to Christ – with the intent of becoming conformed to the likeness of Christ. So measure your life against his life – the perfecter of faith.
2. For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross
- a. The principle here is the same principle stated in **James 1:2-4** . . . 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.
 - (1) Does this scripture say that the trial itself is to be counted a joy? No! It says the **result** of going through the trial is what we count a joy. And what is the result that brings us so much joy? Stronger faith – which produces longer endurance in the face of trials and tribulations – which produces greater godliness in us. You see, trials may be exceedingly painful and even sorrowful, yet they are the path to greater godliness – and that is our joy!
 - (2) So it was with Jesus. The cross wasn't his joy, it was what lay beyond the cross that was his joy. He endured the cross – with all of its injustice, cruel suffering, degrading

humiliation, and even a time of separation from God – he endured all that for the joy of winning the prize that came from enduring the cross.

- (3) And what was the prize? The joy of being an obedient son. The defeat of Satan. The redemption of sinful humanity. The reconciliation of repentant and redeemed people to God. And, being restored to his rightful place at the right hand of God in Heaven. This was the joy that drove Jesus to endure the cross as he ran his marathon of faith.
 - b. So what does this mean for us? When we fix our eyes on Jesus we see more than Jesus. We see hope for attaining a pure heart and a holy life – in this life. We see the hope of truly loving God with all our being. We see the open door of eternity with God. We hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” We see the crowns and rewards for living a holy life in a sin-sick world. And we see those who have come to faith in Christ through the seed we’ve sown. This is the joy set before us – the joy that drives us – like it drove Jesus – to endure hardship and suffering along the course that God sets before us.
3. Jesus despised the shame of the cross.
 - a. To be crucified by Rome – a nation known for its rule of law – was a great shame, for it was understood by everyone that anyone hung on a cross was so evil that even Roman justice declared them deserving of this horrifying and humiliating death.
 - b. In being crucified, Jesus had to bear this humiliating label even though he didn’t deserve it. In other words, he had to accept what the masses thought of him because of the way he died.
 - c. Yet being publicly and unjustly shamed did not stop Jesus from enduring the cross. In fact, he despised the shame. This means he considered the shame unworthy of a second thought. What he treasured, what he counted worthy, was not what the people thought of him, but what God thought of him.
 - d. What is the message here for us? When we fix our eyes on Jesus, what he thinks of us will matter so much that it will be as if what others think of us doesn’t matter at all. When we fear public rejection and ridicule or long for public acceptance

and approval, we have stopped living by faith and have turned our focus away from Jesus to ourselves.

4. Jesus said of himself that he was meek and humble of heart:
 - a. **Matthew 11:29** . . . Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.
 - b. Meekness and humility of heart are two character qualities that transform us from self-focused, self-pitying, insecure, anxious, self-righteous, aggressive, argumentative, easily angered, hostile, controlling people whose feelings are easily hurt, into Christians with confident faith in the goodness of God, with a love for others that easily sacrifices self for their good, with a humility that exalts others above self, and with a life that honors God.
 - c. Do you long for a meekness and humility of heart like that of Christ's? Do you long for it enough to take his yoke upon you and to keep your eyes fixed on him?

5. God said of Jesus that he loved righteousness and hated lawlessness:
 - a. **Hebrews 1:9** . . . You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your companions.
 - b. I think it is safe to say that few Christians attain to this level of Christ-like perfection. But I wish to also say that this should be our goal – a goal we strive for to our last breath. Why?
 - c. It is good and commendable to resist temptation from the knowledge of right and wrong and a serious, vigilant use of self-discipline. It is a sign of advanced spiritual maturity to resist temptation from a heart and mind that loves God, and therefore loves righteousness and hates lawlessness.
 - (1) Neither condition sets us free from temptation or self-discipline, for we read that Christ was tempted many times and we see his use of knowledge and self-discipline in resisting it.
 - (2) But reliance on knowledge and self-discipline as our primary basis for resisting temptation is an indication we still love what we ought to hate and still hate what we ought to love.

- d. Let me explain.
 - (1) Doing what we know is right because we fear God – and hence the use of knowledge and self-discipline – is good, but it also is an indication that our old nature in that specific area of temptation is alive and eager to gratify itself. You see, loving what we ought to hate, though we resist it as we ought, gives added power to the temptation and works against our resolve to resist.
 - (2) To become like Christ in this is to do what we know is right because we love God – and in so doing, love what God loves (which is righteousness) and hate what God hates (which is lawlessness). Then when tempted, we want to say no to sin because we hate the very idea of rebelling against God and the harm to others that comes from our rebellion. And we want to say yes to righteousness because we love pleasing God and the good that comes to all involved from our obedience.
- e. Let me give you one example. At the end of his forty days in the wilderness, Jesus was tempted by the devil to miraculously feed himself. Without question, Jesus was extremely hungry – so the temptation was real. However, because he hated lawlessness – which is choosing self-rule in defiance of God’s rule, Jesus abhorred the very idea of deciding for himself what miracles he would do, even when it came to satisfying a powerfully felt need for food. And in loving righteousness, Jesus found the greater joy or comfort in doing His father’s will – and as of that moment, his Father hadn’t decided to feed Jesus yet. The proof of all this is in Jesus’ response to the devil: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’ ”
- f. Oh that we would be so conformed to the image of Christ as to love righteousness and hate lawlessness. And how shall we arrive at that condition? By throwing off every encumbrance, putting off every besetting sin, running with endurance, and **fixing our eyes on Jesus**.

III. Conclusion

- A. If you are going to cross the finish line a winner in this marathon of faith, you must lay aside every encumbrance and every besetting sin, and you must persevere to the end.

- B. But there is another part of this running to win that is equally essential. You must **replace** what you have removed with spiritual truth, holy thoughts, godly desires, and Christ-like behavior. And how do you do this? First and foremost, you replace what you have removed by **fixing your eyes on Jesus** – for this is the way to experience the ever broadening effect of the nature and character and life of Jesus on your heart, your mind, your character, your spiritual practices, your daily preparation, your prayer life, and your behavior.
- C. Or to put it another way, the natural effect of fixing our eyes on Jesus is increased purity of heart, greater holiness of character, and obvious growth in godly behavior.