

Running the Race to the Very End

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, it's great to be back. It's fantastic seeing all the faces that I know and other faces that I don't know.
- It's been a whole year since Mel and I have been here. We've actually just been on two months of holidays in Queensland. It was a great break. We flew to Brisbane.
- We drove up the coast from Brisbane all the way to Cairns, and a bit above Cairns, up to the Daintree, and then all the way back as well. And we saw some amazing things.
- The Great Barrier Reef was amazing, so I went out twice to snorkel. We went to Mossman Gorge in the Daintree Wilderness, and that's quite a breathtaking place to go to as well.
- And we went to Steve Irwin's Australia Zoo. Crikey! We saw some crocodiles. We fed elephants, and there were Bengal tigers there playing with their keepers quite roughly.
- [0 : 5 7] That was fun to watch. We also went to Fraser Island, and that's a beautiful island. It's the biggest sand island in the world. And the Sunshine Coast beaches, which we just lazed upon at night, which is beautiful.
- While we were away, Mel and I, we ate a lot. We lazed around hotel pools. We forgot to brush our teeth. We slept in.
- It was great. Seven weeks of relaxing, of comfort, just being slothful, really. It was a fantastic holiday until I started to notice that I'd lost fitness.
- Until I lost fitness. Until I noticed that I needed to actually let out my belt one notch. And that's when the holiday came to reality, what I was doing.
- Too much relaxation. When I went for a jog around the Sunshine Coast, I could hardly go for five minutes without stopping. And I'd realised that I'd slipped back quite a lot in my fitness.
- [2 : 0 3] And when we can all go on holidays, in our Christian lives as well, it's easy, if not easier, to lose our fitness in our Christian lives.
- And before we know it, we can hardly go around the block in our Christian walk. Out of condition, below par. And tonight's passage from the book of Hebrews attempts to address this apathy.
- This, I suppose, unfitness. It warns us about the danger of taking holidays on our Christian walk.
- And it calls and encourages Christians to get into shape. Get spiritually fit is the first point. Of this passage.
- Look there in verse 1. Have it open with you. It's actually on page 978. Because we're going to also go back into chapter 11 a little bit. But Hebrews 12, verse 1.
- [3 : 1 1] Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also throw aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely.
- You've probably seen the latest Jenny Craig ads, no doubt. We have the ones with Kirstie Alley in them. They're quite entertaining. I like them. In one of them, she's walking along the street and she's got this big coat over her.

She's covering up. And a guy walks past and says, hmm, looking good, Mama. Or something like that. I don't know how it actually goes. But in mock surprise, she looks at the camera and she says, is he talking to me?

And then she flings off her coat to reveal the trimmed down, slim, Kirstie Alley. And she starts dancing with all these men around the street to the anthem, it's raining men, hallelujah, it's raining men.

Now, if that's not designed to motivate women to join Jenny Craig, I don't know what is. You see, Jenny Craig know that losing weight is a pretty hard thing to do, actually.

[4 : 23] They know that people need to see an example of success before they'll think it's possible for themselves, before they'll join up.

And that's sort of what we get here at the very beginning of this verse. You see, God is saying, or God presents his faithful witnesses, his faithful servants, his cloud of witnesses to us as an example are supposed to inspire us, to inspire us to get spiritually fit, to join up, to urge us to live by faith.

So, what he does is he presents these heroes to us in the previous chapter. That's why we've got therefore in the very first verse of chapter 12. So, go back into chapter 11, flip the page back.

I don't know how many people got their Bibles open because I can hear it go. In verse 4 of chapter 11, it starts with Abel. And Abel, by faith, presented a pleasing sacrifice to God.

You can't present any sacrifice to God if it's not by faith. Otherwise, it won't be pleasing to God. Verse 5, Enoch, because of faith, he was taken up by God and he never saw death.

[5 : 57] Faith prevents death. Noah, by faith, listened to God's warning of impending judgment and was saved.

Faith saves. Abraham, in verse 8, by faith, received promises from God and his son, even though he was well beyond his age to conceive.

By faith. Isaac and Jacob and in verse 22, Joseph, by faith, told the Israelites to take his bones because he knew that they were going to go to the promised land.

That's how much he, by faith, believed God. And then finally, in verse 23, Moses is presented by faith, he left the comforts of Egypt and the power of Egypt, which he no doubt had, and later returned to deliver God in a more powerful way, by a mighty hand, by faith.

You see, they're presented to us as examples to encourage us to get spiritually fit, to throw aside weight, to lose weight that impedes us, that impeded them.

[7 : 15] they weren't distracted by the charms and the riches of this world. They threw aside the sin that clung around them and threatened to trip them up and prevent them from running.

They didn't indulge in the temporary pleasures of sin. They longed for something better. And in verse 13, it tells us what these people longed for, what it was that motivated them.

Look there in verse 13. All of these witnesses died in faith without having received the promises of God, though from a distance they saw and they greeted them.

They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of a land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return.

But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God.

[8 : 34] Indeed, he has prepared a city for them. You see, their faith is not based, it is not wishful thinking, it is based on fact.

God has prepared a homeland for them. And they believe God had something better prepared for them.

A heavenly homeland, a better country. They believed God was preparing a heavenly city for them to enter. And because they believed God, they could never be satisfied here.

They gave up this world for something better. They weren't satisfied with this world. They wanted more.

And so they threw aside all weight that impeded them from getting there. They threw aside the sin that clung to them and tripped them up and threatened to pull them down to earth.

[9 : 49] Tonight, how's your fitness? Are you spiritually fit? weight? Are you throwing aside that weight which threatens to drag you down?

Are you throwing aside the sin that threatens to cling and trip and pull you earthward, not heavenward?

if you're spiritually unfit and most of us have a bit of excess, don't we? Well, my advice is to look at God's witnesses who declare that faith is worth it.

Shedding the weight is worth it. Throwing aside the sin is worth it. For God has prepared a heavenly city for you, a heavenly homeland that is so much better than here.

So that's the first thing in Hebrews. These verses in Hebrews teach us, get spiritually fit. The second thing is run the race with endurance.

[11 : 21] run the race with endurance. Go back to chapter 12, verse 1. It says, therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, people who are faithful, who are examples to us, let us also throw aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely.

Let's get fit. and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us. Chris Lee had done all the training and he was ready to race.

He was one of the fittest men on the face of the planet at that time in 1998. But he was afraid, very afraid, of the enormous task that was set before him.

He thought about the 3.8km swim and he thought, yep, not too bad. But his heart sank, thinking about 180km on the bike, in blustery, windy conditions.

And he dared not even imagine the pain that he would experience with a 42.2km marathon on top of it all in 35 degree heat.

[12 : 43] In 1998, Chris Lee, he looked the Hawaiian Ironman triathlon in the eyes and he didn't blink and he raced his guts out.

He swam, he rode, he ran. And at one stage, early in the run, he was in the lead. And it looked like he was going to win.

And at that moment, he felt great. He was on a high. He thought he was going to be the world champion, triathlete. But then he started to feel a bit sick.

And all of a sudden, he couldn't hold down liquids and fluids. He started vomiting, became dehydrated. And then he got some stabbing pains in his abdomen.

Just really sharp pains, right down low. And he couldn't run anymore. And he started to stagger. And he kept going.

[13 : 46] And tears were streaming down his face as competitors started to go past him. And with every ounce of determination, he collapsed over the finish line in sixth place.

Chris had to be taken to hospital, operated on immediately. The extreme nature of the race had taken its toll. A part of his bowel had actually died during the race.

And it started to poison all his system. And they removed it. And after many months of slow recovery, he was well again. But the Hawaiian Ironman race is an extreme race.

It is both glorious and it is both heartbreaking. Glorious and heartbreaking. And it reduces men to quivering lumps, yet raises some of them to the heights of physical ecstasy.

It's extreme. There's no half measures. It's not something that is done half-heartedly. It's to be respected, treated with indifference at your peril.

[15 : 03] The race that God has set before you and I is an extreme race. More extreme. The race to a better country is not accomplished by half measures.

The race to a heavenly homeland not done half-heartedly. The race to God's heavenly city and his glory not done with indifference.

Because the race to glory is a mixture of highs and lows. The race is extreme. It's an extreme race and it even tells us here at the end of Hebrews 11 how extreme it is.

Have a look at this. This is amazing. In verse 32, Hebrews 11, have a look at this. This is the extremity of the race that we are in. And what more should I say?

For time would fail me to tell you of all the other witnesses such as Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah and David and Samuel and the other prophets who through faith, and here are the highs, conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

[16 : 39] women received their dead by resurrection. Glorious highs in this race that God has set before us.

But we keep reading. Look there in verse 35. Others, that's ominous, were tortured, refusing to accept release in order to obtain a better resurrection.

They weren't going to deny God. They were going to be faithful to the end. Others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned to death. They were sawn in two. They were killed by the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats and destitute. persecuted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy.

The world is not worthy of them because they raced and they finished. With perseverance they raced in faith.

[17 : 57] No half measures. Their eyes fixed on heaven, on the prize. They weren't half hearted but believed God's promises with their whole heart and they ran the race.

God has set before them and they endured. Are you prepared to run?

run? Because there's no options. You must run in order to get the reward at the end.

You must be prepared to look it in the eyes, this race that God has set before us and run and run and run no matter what and not back off and pull out.

Chris Lee ran and ran and he experienced extreme highs and extreme lows in that race and he finished because there's no glory for those who don't run.

[19 : 08] There's no glory for those who pull out. No prize if you don't endure to the end. you must run. There's no options.

You must run believing and trusting that it's worth it in the end. Convinced that you're running to something better.

Run the race with endurance. It's too tough. The race is too tough.

How do we do it? Well, the writer of the Hebrews gives us the answer. Focus on Jesus, the great finisher.

Focus on Jesus, the great finisher. Hebrews 1. Let's read it together. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also throw aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely.

[20 : 19] Let's get fit. Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us. Let's keep going. Don't stop. And here it is, the most important thing.

Looking to Jesus, the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith. the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

For who, for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and he has taken his seat at the right hand of God, the throne of God.

Consider him, look to him, examine him, who endured such hostility against himself from sinners so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.

Chris Lee, he didn't win, the Hawaiian Ironman, but he persevered and he endured to the end. And although he is remembered for his great finish, his amazing finish, it goes down in the annals of triathlon, all triathletes know about Chris Lee.

[21 : 34] And although he is a great example and inspiration to all triathletes, all competitors, he is not able to help them. He can't get out there and swim for them, jump on their bike.

They are on their own in that race. They are on their own. Thank God that in our race, the Christian race for eternal glory isn't like that at all.

It's not like that at all. We're not left to tough it out by ourselves. We're not deserted to grin and bear it.

We have someone who has gone before us and now goes with us to help us.

We have a great finisher who has finished the race perfectly himself. Jesus, the pioneer, it says there, who endured and underwent great suffering, disregarding the shame of the cross, us, in order to experience the joy of pioneering our faith.

[23 : 04] That's what he pioneers, our faith. He pioneers the faith of his brothers and sisters who follow him into heaven.

That's what Jesus has done for us. He's the pioneer of our faith. faith in order to give us a start in the Christian race towards God's promised glory. So as we race, focus on the great finisher who blazed the trail for us.

He's the one. Don't look to anyone else. They're back in the pack with us, struggling. We have a great finisher.

who now helps us to finish the race as well. Jesus the perfecter, it also says there. That's how it describes him. Pioneer, perfecter, who now intercedes for us at the right hand of God almighty to guarantee that our faith is perfected, completed, in order to ensure that we finish this race.

that is set before us in order to ensure that we'll experience the joy and the glory that he experiences now at the right hand of God.

[24 : 34] We will be around the throne with him and Jesus guarantees it because whatever he pioneers, he perfects because he is perfect.

focus on Jesus, the great finisher, lest we think we're racing alone, without help deserted, and we drop out, we give up.

consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners so that we may not grow weary or lose heart.

Praise God that Jesus pioneered our faith by dying on the cross. grace. That's why he endured it, so that he would experience the great joy of perfecting his brothers and sisters in Christ, in him.

Tonight you may be weary. I don't know what's going on in your life. I don't know the things that trouble you, the struggles that you have.

[25 : 50] you may be weary. Maybe you're losing heart. Maybe you've noticed lately that you've become spiritually unfit.

You've gone on holidays. Maybe the race has taken its toll on you. You're not running anymore. It's more like a stagger.

Take heart. Take heart. For if Jesus endured and suffered so much in order to pioneer your faith, do you not think that he will perfect that?

To bring it to completion? To glorify himself in that? of course he will. Look to him.

Therefore, trust him. Trust him. Believe in him. Place your faith in him alone. And use that assurance to motivate you to get spiritually fit and to run the race with endurance.

[27 : 15] focus on Jesus, the great finisher of your faith. Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you that Jesus is both pioneer and perfecter.

And therefore, Lord, we have great confidence to throw off the things that weigh us down and the sin that clings and trips and drags us down.

that we have great confidence and to run the race with perseverance. Lord God, reveal this great truth to us that Jesus died in order to bask in the glory and experience the joy of pioneering and perfecting the faith of his brothers and sisters, the fellow heirs, us.

And Lord, strengthen us. Give us great joy on that race. and when things are tough, Lord, we pray that you would be ever present, encouraging us and reminding us that Jesus is with us, perfecting us.

Amen. Amen.