



Scotts Hill Baptist Church

FAITHFUL YET FLAWED • RUN FOCUSED • HEBREWS 12:1-2; 1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27 •

MAIN POINT

Believers live the Christian life well by laying aside their sin, focusing on Christ, fostering self-discipline, and remaining steadfast to the end.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What hobby or home projects have you begun, but have yet to finish? What might keep a person from finishing such a project?

How important is it for believers to live out their faith, finishing life well?

Many people begin the Christian life well, but they fail to finish it well. Sin, disappointment, unrealistic expectations, and difficulties can all contribute to our failing to finish what we've started. The New Testament writers give us four things we can do that will help us finish well.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ HEBREWS 12:1.

What are the ramifications for a runner who fails to get rid of extra clothing and items not needed for the race?

How does this relate to the believer who fails to address sin in his or her life?

What steps can a believer take to address the sin that might get in the way of finishing well?

The writer of Hebrews called on his readers to address their sins, directing them to remove anything that got in the way of their remaining faithful to Christ. Believers are forgiven of sin, but that does not mean they are exempt from sin. Believers must be aware of the temptations to which they are susceptible, taking action to safeguard themselves as much as possible.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ HEBREWS 12:1B-2.

What are the problems with focusing on anyone or anything other than Jesus? How do we balance making Jesus our main priority with the daily responsibilities and demands of life?

What are the dangers of focusing on the lives of others as opposed to the paths Jesus sets before us as individuals?

How can a believer make sure his or her focus is on Christ? What does a life focused on Jesus look like?

Theodore Roosevelt once said, "Comparison is the thief of joy." The Book of Hebrews anticipates this truth. The writer of Hebrews called on his readers to remain focused on Jesus as they lived their own personal journeys. Placing one's focus on others will only lead to disappointment and frustration. Focusing on Jesus and remaining faithful to the course He has set before each of us as individuals leads to contentment and joy.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27.

Paul used a boxing illustration to make his point about self-control. What other images or illustrations could be used to make the same point?

How might a lack of self-control disqualify a person from finishing well?

How does a person develop self-control in his or her life?

Paul called on the Corinthian believers to practice self-control in a culture dominated by moral laxity and perversion. Failing to develop and practice self-control leads to moral failure, disgracing both the believer and the cause of Christ. By purposefully focusing on Christ and the rewards of obedience, one can bring honor to Christ through his or her lifestyle.

What are some spiritual disciplines that you can incorporate into your life to reinforce self-control?

ASK TWO VOLUNTEERS TO READ GALATIANS 6:9 AND 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16.

Compare these two passages from Paul. What words are the same? How do they address the same issue? What issues do they address?

How might we phrase the prohibitions in these passages (do not...) in a positive way (do...)?

What can cause a person to lose hope and give up in life? What can a person do to guard against disappointment and losing hope in life?

In his letters to the Galatians and Corinthians, Paul called on believers to remain steadfast in their faith regardless of the situations they face. These words came from an apostle who endured persecution for the sake of the gospel. Laying aside sin, focusing on Christ, and fostering self-discipline help a believer remain steadfast to the end.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Imagine you are on your deathbed. When you look back on your life, what do you want to be known for? Starting today, how can you make sure you finish the spiritual legacy that you started before you go to be with the Lord?

How would you rate the degree to which you are focused on Christ? What practical spiritual disciplines do you need to implement in your life to increase your focus on Christ?

Identify your weaknesses, the areas in your life where temptation always seems to be lurking. What steps do you need to take to safeguard yourself against falling to temptation?

Of the four actions identified (laying aside sin, focusing on Christ, fostering self-discipline, and remaining steadfast), which one needs the greatest adjustment in your life? What adjustments will you make this week?

PRAYER

Thank the Lord for providing us salvation through faith in His Son. Ask the Lord to help us remain focused on Him so we can live a life that honors Him every day.

COMMENTARY

| HEBREWS 12:1-2

12:1. The word therefore connects the list of Hebrew heroes of the faith in chapter 11 with the exhortation in 12:1-3. The large cloud of witnesses refers to these Old Testament people of faith. The historical personalities testify believers can and must persevere in their faith in God even when they do not experience the fulfillment of all His promises. Witnesses are those who “give testimony” about what they have experienced. Out of their experiences with God, the Hebrew stalwarts gave witness of faith that endures.

The writer urged his readers to lay aside every weight. The image is of marathon runners who remove extra clothing that might hinder winning. Believers are to remove anything that hinders their Christian living.

The Hebrew Christians were to put aside the sin that so easily ensnared them. Ensnared likely has the idea of something that entangles a runner’s legs, such as a long robe. The sin can refer to a particular, troubling sin or to sin as a reality that will cause believers to trip and fall. Christians must get rid of such sins.

The readers were to run with endurance. Endurance means “perseverance,” “holding out.” Race means “contest” or “conflict.” Lies before us literally is “being set before us”; God has set believers’ racecourse—their work and their prize. The Christian life is a demanding long-distance race that requires perseverance—staying power.

12:2. Believers are to focus their attention on Jesus—the supreme example of enduring faith and the goal toward which we move. The phrase keeping . . . eyes on means “viewing with undivided attention” by looking away from everything else. The tense conveys continuous action: We are to keep on placing our fixed attention on Jesus, who is the source and perfecter of our faith. Source means “author,” “pioneer,” and “leader” (see 2:10). Perfecter can have the sense of Jesus’ bringing faith to its intended goal or of His being the goal of faith. Our faith literally is “the faith”—Christian faith. Old Testament saints were good examples of faith; Jesus is the perfect example. He provides salvation, and He moves believers toward spiritual maturity—being like Him.

Jesus ran His race with endurance and won. His joy was completing His mission of making salvation available. Also, beyond His redemptive death were resurrection and exaltation. He endured a cross, a painful and humiliating method of execution. In light of the joy . . . before Him, He considered crucifixion's shame to be of no consequence; He disregarded or disdained it. Jesus had faith in and was obedient to God, and now He sits at God's right hand.

| 1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

9:24-26a. If athletes compete by the rules and master self-control in everything, all for the purpose of winning a crown that will fade away, how much more should Christians discipline themselves for a crown that will never fade away?

9:26b-27. Paul viewed his boxing opponent as his own body. When it resisted giving up rights and liberties, he brought it under strict control (lit "I enslave it"). Paul had already stated that he endured everything (v. 12), made himself a slave to all (v. 19), and exercised self-control (v. 25) to allow a hearing for the gospel (by not taking a wage).

| GALATIANS 6:9

The Christian life is a marathon race, so we must not get tired (i.e., grow weary or lose heart). Doing good is not seeking to be justified by works, but living as God has planned for those who have received His gracious salvation through faith (Eph 2:8-10). To "sow to the Spirit" over the long haul means taking the opportunity (Gk *kairos*; "opportune or appointed time") that the Lord places before us to work for the good of all.

| 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16

4:16. The Greek word translated therefore turns our attention to what Paul had previously written, particularly 4:1-15. His expression we do not lose heart repeats a portion of 4:1. In 4:1 Paul did not lose heart because of God's mercy and because of the greatness of the ministry God had given him. Paul humbly realized that the ministry he was engaged in was a consequence of God's mercy to him. In 4:16 Paul stated that he did not lose heart because even though his outer man was decaying, his inner man was being renewed day by day. By the phrase our outer man is decaying, Paul referred to the aging process of the physical body, perhaps including all its faculties and energies such as mental processes.

This reference to the outer man should not be confused with Paul's references elsewhere to the "old self," a reference to the unregenerate nature (see Rom. 6:6).

The form of the word translated is decaying indicates a constant and irreversible process. In contrast to this constant decay, Paul stated that our inner man is being renewed day by day. By use of the expression inner man, Paul referred to the real but unseen aspect of himself. The expression denotes the source of a person's will, emotions, thoughts, and affections. In Ephesians 3:16 Paul prayed that God would grant believers "to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." In effect, Paul contrasted his deteriorating physical body with his growing spiritual nature. The deterioration of his physical body was related to his afflictions and persecutions (see 4:17). Paradoxically, Paul was wasting away and growing at the same time. We must always remember, however, that Paul anticipated the believer's future existence with God not as disembodied souls but rather as whole persons with resurrection bodies.