

Hebrews 12:2-4

2 looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Traditionally it has been thought that Hebrews was written to the Hebrew people. Therefore, we have the title *Hebrews*. However, the identity of the original readers is unclear. What we do know is that they were Christians that were experiencing some form of persecution. In contemporary society when we have a church fight or split people often say “I didn’t think it would happen in the church.” But when you look at the New Testament letters it is easy to see that the early church had significant struggles and conflict. Hebrews is no exception. It was written to inspire people like a pep rally. They needed inspiration for endurance and confidence to face persecution without falling away due to pressure from their social environment.

Jesus is the pioneer of our faith. He is the originator. He opens up the spiritual frontier. Jesus is also the perfecter of our faith. He is the purifying agent that fine tunes our faith into perfection. We look to Jesus to follow his preaching, teaching, and his love. His example of love is way beyond the realm of ordinary people. His example of love is perfect. He willingly endured the cross. This is tremendous love. He did this not for himself, or for his own glory. He did this for us and God’s glory.

If you grow weary or if you lose heart, then consider Jesus and everything that he endured. Consider the hostility that was set against him so that you do not lose heart. A good title for this message would be *Do Not Lose Heart*. However, I think the main thing is to focus on Jesus. When you focus on Jesus then you are not as likely to lose heart because then you are not focused on your problem but on what he has done for you. This fills you with love and appreciation and helps to erase negative emotions. We all struggle against sin but we do not go to the level of Jesus efforts to eradicate it. We do not shed our own blood. The beauty in all of this is that he did this so that we do not have to.

The lesson is one of maintaining focus on Christ, the heavenly realm, and the love of God. Jesus is the prime example of faithful endurance. We do not know the audience or the situation of Hebrews but what we do know is that for some reason they needed faithful endurance. The warning is do not fall away. The problem is one of indifference. This is the same problem that we face today.

Several months ago I was doing a graveside service and after the service was over a man came up to talk with me. We did not know each other but he knew that I am a preacher because I conducted the service. He talked about a frustration that he has with contemporary churches. He said “We should all focus on Jesus instead of all these things that people do that divide us. I said “That’s what we stand for as Disciples of Christ.” I invited him to come and join us in worship and see. But I know from years of experience that the real problem is not issues that go on in the life of the church. The real problem lies within the individual. It is his own internal issues that become stumbling blocks that cause him to be lapsed. He does not come and worship God because of his emotions. He

lets covert issues be stumbling blocks that get in his way of worshipping God. He focus is on his issue instead of focusing on Christ. We need to focus on Jesus. We can all agree on what he said and did. What we disagree on is our opinions. If we were sincerely true to Christ as members of the body of Christ, we would be one united body doing exactly what he tells us to do.

The author of Hebrews uses athletic language like running a marathon. You can't just get up and run and assume you will win the race. You have to get in shape and practice. I emphasize you have to be both in shape and in practice. When I ran the Virginia ten miler ten years ago, I was in shape but I was out of practice. To get in shape I ran one mile, then two, then three and I kept on increasing it until I reached ten miles. I thought I was ready. But I was out of practice. I did not run the course. I did not practice the terrain and I did not practice running up hills. I made an effort but I was not in focus. So, I came in near the end.

In the religious realm, winning the race is not a matter of coming in first. It is a matter of crossing the finish line. I beat the person that came in first. I looked it up and he quit after only 47 minutes and I kept on running for over 2 hours. Tenacity is a biblical mandate. In the Parable of the Sower, the seed sown on the path represents someone that didn't make it to the end. The seed that fell on the rocky soil did not last to the end. The seed that fell in the thorns got choked out and didn't make it to the end. According to Jesus the one who endures to the end will be saved (Matthew 10:22, 24:13). Your example is Jesus, keep your eyes on the prize and everything else will come together.