

Focus On Jesus Christ

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Key Scripture

Hebrews 12:2 (ESV) Looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Sermon in One Sentence

In a world full of distractions and diversions, our spiritual vitality, perseverance, and ultimate joy are found in continually fixing our gaze upon Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega of our salvation.

Introduction

Have you ever tried to thread a needle while looking at something else? Or perhaps driven a car while glancing at your phone, just for a moment? Even for a split second, diverting our attention from the task at hand inevitably leads to a missed connection, a swerving vehicle, or worse. In our fast-paced, information-saturated age, our attention is a precious commodity constantly being pulled in a thousand different directions. We live in a world designed to distract us, to fragment our focus, and to scatter our spiritual energies.

This constant bombardment of demands on our attention isn't just an inconvenience; it can be a spiritual crisis. When our gaze drifts from what matters most, our faith can waver, our endurance can falter, and our sense of purpose can erode. The spiritual journey, much like threading a needle or driving safely, requires singular focus, especially when the path grows difficult or the temptations abound.

The writer of Hebrews understood this profoundly. Knowing the immense pressures facing his original audience—pressures that resonate powerfully with our own—he didn't just offer encouragement; he provided a clear, uncompromising directive. He points us to the only one truly worthy of our undivided attention, the only one who can sustain us through every trial and perfect every aspect of our faith. He bids us, with an urgency that echoes through the centuries, to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

Historical & Biblical Context

The Epistle to the Hebrews is a masterful work of theological instruction and pastoral exhortation, likely written in the mid-first century to a community of Jewish Christians who were undergoing intense persecution and temptation to revert to Judaism. This community was weary; some were wavering in their commitment to Christ, considering abandoning their new faith to return to the familiar rituals and perceived safety of their old traditions. The writer's primary goal was to demonstrate the absolute supremacy and superiority of Jesus Christ over every aspect of the old covenant—prophets, angels, Moses, priesthood, sacrifices, and institutions.

Chapter 11, often called the "Hall of Faith," reminds them of the great cloud of witnesses who persevered by faith. This sets the stage for Chapter 12, which begins with the imagery of a spiritual race. The "great cloud of witnesses" isn't spectating from a distance but encircling them, cheering them on. In this context of a strenuous race, burdened by hindrances and sins, the writer issues his powerful injunction: to lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and to "run with endurance the race that is set before us, *looking to Jesus*." It is in Jesus alone that they (and we) will find the motivation, the strength, and the ultimate reward for their journey of faith.

Main Point I — The Unwavering Gaze: Our Call to Spiritual Focus

Scripture: Hebrews 12:2a "Looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..."

Our spiritual journey is not a stroll in the park; it is depicted as a demanding race, full of obstacles and requiring immense discipline. The very first command we encounter in our key text is an active, ongoing one: "Looking to Jesus." The Greek word here, *aphorao*, means to "look away from other things and fix one's gaze upon" a single object. It implies a deliberate, intentional turning from distractions and a singular concentration on Christ. In a world clamoring for our attention, this is a radical act of spiritual intentionality, a conscious decision to prioritize Christ above all competing concerns, worries, and worldly allurements that threaten to derail our faith and sap our spiritual strength.

Why such an emphatic instruction to fix our gaze solely on Him? Because Jesus is not merely a historical figure or a moral teacher; He is the "author and perfecter of our faith." As the "author" (archegos), He inaugurated our faith, pioneering the path to salvation. He is the originator, the one who blazed the trail we are now called to follow. As the "perfecter" (teleiotes), He brings our faith to its completion and ultimate goal. He doesn't just start the work; He finishes it. Our faith is not self-generated or self-sustained; it begins and ends in Him. Therefore, keeping our eyes on Jesus means recognizing that our entire spiritual existence—its beginning, its sustenance, and its culmination—is utterly dependent on Him. Without Him, we cannot run this race; without Him, our faith has no foundation or destination.

Main Point II — The Enduring Example: Christ's Perseverance in Suffering

Scripture: Hebrews 12:2b "...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame..."

As we fix our gaze upon Jesus, we aren't just looking at the source of our faith; we are beholding the ultimate example of perseverance through suffering. The passage reveals the astounding truth that Jesus himself faced unspeakable pain and humiliation. He "endured the cross," the most agonizing and shameful form of execution known to the ancient world. This was not a passive suffering; the word "endured" (*hypomeno*) signifies active, persistent steadfastness in the face of adversity. He didn't just experience the cross; He bore it with unwavering resolve, fully committed to His Father's will and humanity's salvation.

Crucially, Jesus did this "for the joy that was set before Him." This was not a joy *in* the suffering itself, but the joy *beyond* the suffering—the joy of bringing many sons and daughters to glory, the joy of fulfilling the Father's redemptive plan, the joy of His ultimate exaltation. It was this future, promised joy, this glorious outcome, that fueled His endurance. Furthermore, He "despised the shame." The cross was an instrument of

public degradation, designed not only to inflict physical pain but also to humiliate the victim. Yet, Jesus, in His divine majesty and perfect love, considered the temporary ignominy as nothing compared to the eternal victory and the salvation of His people. His suffering, therefore, was not a defeat but a strategic act of obedient love, showing us that even the most profound pain can be endured when empowered by purpose and sustained by the hope of future glory.

Main Point III — The Ultimate Destination: Christ's Exalted Position

Scripture: Hebrews 12:2c "...and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

The race of faith has a finish line, and the ultimate reward is not just the prize awaiting us, but the position that Christ Himself now occupies. After enduring the cross and despising its shame, Jesus "is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." This isn't just a casual repose; it is a declaration of His absolute triumph, His divine authority, and His eternal reign. In ancient Near Eastern cultures, to be seated at the right hand of a king signified unparalleled honor, power, and authority. For Jesus, it means His redemptive work is complete, His victory over sin and death is decisive, and His reign as King of kings and Lord of lords is established forever.

This glorious position of Christ offers profound comfort and incredible motivation for us, the weary runners in this race of faith. It reminds us that our Leader, our Author, and our Finisher has already completed His journey and now reigns supreme. He is not a distant, passive observer; He actively intercedes for us, His presence a constant source of strength and encouragement. When we are tempted to give up, when the burdens of life seem too heavy, or when our focus wavers, we are to look to Him in His exalted state. His ascension and enthronement are the guarantee of our own future glory and the ultimate validation of our faith. His seat at God's right hand is the beacon that draws us onward, assuring us that our transient sufferings are leading to an eternal weight of glory in His presence.

Illustration

Consider the story of a tightrope walker, Charles Blondin, who famously crossed Niagara Falls on a tightrope multiple times in the mid-19th century. On one occasion, he pushed a wheelbarrow across. Then, he asked the crowd, "Who believes I can push a man across in this wheelbarrow?" The roaring crowd, having seen his previous feats, shouted back their belief. Blondin then pointed to a spectator and said, "Alright, you get in." The crowd went silent, and the man famously demurred. The crowd believed *in* Blondin, but they didn't believe *with* him, or better yet, *on* him, to the point of entrusting their very lives to his ability. Our faith in Jesus must be more than mere intellectual assent; it must be a constant, unwavering gaze that trusts Him with our lives, our challenges, and our eternal destiny, knowing that He has already crossed the chasm of sin and death and has proven Himself utterly trustworthy.

Practical Application

1. Start Your Day with Jesus: Prioritize spending intentional time in prayer and Scripture each morning, consciously "looking to Jesus" before the demands and distractions of the day begin to crowd your mind.

2. Identify and Lay Aside Distractions: Reflect honestly on what consistently pulls your focus away from Christ (e.g., social media, excessive entertainment, worry, toxic relationships). Confess these distractions as "weights" or "sins" and actively work to reduce their influence.

3. Remember Christ's Joy in Suffering: When facing struggles or temptations, intentionally recall Jesus' endurance of the cross "for the joy set before Him." Let His example motivate you to persevere, knowing that your momentary struggles also lead to a greater, eternal joy.

4. Practice Spiritual Discernment: Before making major decisions or reacting to difficult situations, pause and ask, "What would it mean to look to Jesus in this moment?" Seek His wisdom and guidance rather than relying solely on your own understanding or worldly advice.

5. Fix Your Hope on His Exaltation: Regularly meditate on the truth that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God. This should fill you with hope, assurance, and confidence in His ultimate victory and your own secure future in Him.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the primary "weights" or "sins that cling so closely" in your life that hinder your ability to fix your gaze on Jesus?
2. How does understanding Jesus as both the "author" and "perfecter" of your faith change your perspective on your own spiritual journey?
3. In what specific ways does reflecting on Christ's endurance of the cross and His despising of shame encourage you during times of personal suffering or humiliation?
4. How can the truth of Jesus' exaltation at the right hand of God empower you to live more courageously and faithfully in your daily life?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Son, Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith. Forgive us for our wandering gazes and our distracted hearts. By Your Holy Spirit, strengthen us to turn from all that competes for our attention and to fix our eyes steadfastly on Him who endured the cross for the joy set before Him. May His suffering inspire us, His victory empower us, and His exalted position fill us with enduring hope and unwavering commitment. Amen.

Benediction

Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.