

- I. My Notes ... WWC message 1/24
- II. Series: Practicing What We Believe
 - Title: Stay The Course
 - Text: Hebrews 12:1-3; Micah 6:8
 - Quote: "The Christian life is not a sprint but a marathon of obedience." — Eugene Peterson (Pastor, Author)
- III. Introduction
 - We've spent the last several weeks exploring what it means to have a faith that lives ... faith that is more than belief, more than sentiment, more than a moment. We've been learning what it means to trust God in ways that shape our decisions, our relationships, our priorities, and our future. We have learned that the substance of faith is found in trusting God when we don't see or struggle to understand. We talked about listening. Listening is more than hearing (acknowledgement), it leads to action. We can listen to God's voice through Scripture and learn what it sounds like to us as we lean into (depend on) the Holy Spirit. Faith is seen in our dependence on our Lord throughout our daily lives. It is about understanding that there are distractions and disturbances that can take our focus and attention away from the guidance and direction of the Lord. Faith is obedience, it is action that is a result of our belief and trust.
 - Rees Howells was a Welsh coal miner who turned intercessor and his life became a testimony of what enduring faith looks like. He was an ordinary man with no special platform, but he learned to listen to God with unusual clarity. When God spoke, he obeyed — even when it cost him reputation, comfort, or security. During the darkest days of World War II, while the world trembled, Howells and his small community prayed with such perseverance that they believed God would turn the tide. And history records that at key moments, breakthroughs came. His life reminds us that faith isn't just believing in God's power — it's trusting Him enough to keep going, keep obeying, and keep praying when everything in you wants to quit.
 - There are many that like comparisons. Let me ask, how is your life identified? What is your living testimony? Most of us are ordinary people that want to honor the Lord God in our lives. There is a cost. But with that there is a legacy that follows. Are you leaving others a reminder that faith works? That it is the only way to live ...
 - Today, let's discover the last step in this part of our journey. A living and authentic faith is a decision (a choice) that keeps going, even when the next step might not be clear. It refuses to quit, it endures. And most of all, this faith honors the Lord throughout the moments of the day.

IV. Understand That

- Let's look at a passage that helps us clarify what it means to live by faith. We can learn from the examples of those who walked before us and apply those lessons to our journey today.
- **Hebrews 12:1-3 NET**
12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, we must get rid of every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and run with endurance the race set out for us, 12:2 keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set out for him he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. 12:3 Think of him who endured such opposition against himself by sinners, so that you may not grow weary in your souls and give up.
- It would be nice (but unrealistic) to think that we have come to this moment without there being external influences or situations that have shaped our attitudes. The writer of Hebrews has just spent time (in Chapter 11) telling us about how those who had gone before us lived by faith and some didn't see the results of what had been promised them. Yet, they lived consistent and faithful to their belief and trust in the Lord God. Their lives were full of ups and downs, of victories and setbacks ... Yet, what we learned is that their lives were "well-lived."
- We have arrived at the next stage of the discussion. Let's take a deep breath and look carefully at what is being said.
- "We are surrounded" (vs. 1) ... I just referred to Hebrews 11—Abraham, Moses, Rahab, David—were not spectators in an arena; they are testimonies of what God can do through ordinary people who trust Him.
- You are not alone in the challenges or distractions that you have faced or are facing at this very moment. You are not the first person that has had the challenge of trusting God in moments of uncertainty or doubt.
- Those heroes, the icons of our faith, struggled with doubt, with insecurity, with poor choices, with any of the same things that believers face today. The stories and the struggles that we read in Scripture are meant to show us that God cares. That He is sustainer and way maker. That no one is too far from the reach of God's mercy and grace.
- Not only are we surrounded by those who have faced similar circumstances, but we are encouraged to lay aside those things that get in the way and cause distraction or deception, those things that burden us. "We must get rid of every sin" that attaches itself to our journey. Sometimes it is easier said than done, right? There are things that some of us are carrying that we have been carrying for far too long. Choose to put them down. There are burdens that are too much for us to pick up, they drain our strength. Let them be. There are distractions that add weight to our daily walk. Change your viewpoint.

- Now, it might sound as if I have given you a checklist. Not so. Understand that perseverance, that living our faith daily, requires an honest inventory of what we are dealing with. Those concerns, those cares, those questions can weigh us down if we are not willing to look at them. Take off the blinders and look deeply at what is getting in the way. It might be slowing you down or robbing your hunger to grow in grace and intimacy with the Lord. There may be something stopping you from following where God is leading. It takes a sincere look, an honest evaluation of where you are at this moment.
- This might help your viewpoint. Carrying excess weight won't allow you to walk the path that you have been called to walk. It gets in the way. Dropping the burden (discovering forgiveness and reconciliation), letting go of things that are keeping you stuck, might just help you find the next step in your journey.

V. The Path

- The writer of Hebrews is encouraging believers to “run with endurance the race set out for us” (vs.fo 1). Each person has a path they can walk. It's a journey where you discover your value, your abilities, and what truly matters. One of those “go to” Scriptures for me is a great reminder of this. *“God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us to do good works, which God planned in advance for us to live our lives doing.” (Ephesians 2:10 NCV).* From the beginning God had a plan. It was to have a relationship with us (His Creation) that thrived. Part of the plan was reflected in the purpose the Lord God had for each of us. He created us to do “good works” ... you know, that “Love God, Love Others” things I frequently talk about.
- And it goes deeper than that. Everyone is looking for meaning, for purpose. It is through our bond with Jesus Christ that we will find it. In his time of confession and repentance, David cried out to the Lord, acknowledging His goodness and grace. God spoke to David, *“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.” (Psalm 32:8 CSB).*
- Please note that nowhere in Scripture does it say that the journey of a believer is going to be easy, to be without difficulty. We are a sum of our experiences, both good and bad. The choice to continue, to remain faithful, to see our “salvation” through to completion (ref. Philippians 2:12) is what we can make. Remember that Paul encourages believers, *“37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:37-39 CSB).* Difficulties, setbacks, poor choices, NOTHING will separate us God's mercy and grace.

- Your path has been laid out (by God), there is a race to choose to participate in. Stay the course. Use your gifts, live with purpose and obedience.

VI. The How

- What I have just said might be overwhelming to some. “Rick, you don’t know what I have been through. You don’t know what I am carrying.” You are right ... I don’t. But God does. He isn’t pushing you away. He isn’t rejecting you because of your flaws and faults. These haven’t caught Him off-guard.
- Look again what the writer of Hebrews said (I’ll read it from a different translation) ... *Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we’re in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he’s there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls! (Hebrews 12:2-3 MSG).*
- Faith is a gift. It grows as we continue to focus on the giver. That’s how Jesus did it. He maintained His focus on the Father. All that Jesus did was to honor and glorify God. In this passage, some translations use the word “Author” and some use “Pioneer” ... I’ll say it this way – Jesus was the One who lived with complete trust and focus on God. Who Jesus was, His character, His behaviors, was directly tied to the Father. That’s why Jesus could say, *“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”* (John 14:9). Jesus lived by faith, not that outside circumstances didn’t impact Him. He got cold, He was hungry at times, His heart broke for what was going on around Him. But Jesus maintained His focus on the Father.

VII. What the Path Looks Like

- We have been talking about how to run. Let’s look at what the everyday race looks like.
- **Micah 6:8 ICB** (I really like the way that the International Children’s Bible says it)
The Lord has told you what is good. He has told you what he wants from you: Do what is right to other people. Love being kind to others. And live humbly, trusting your God.
- Do what is right to others – treat them fairly, be understanding, act with integrity. Remember, you might not be aware of the circumstances that brought them to the place that they are at.
- Be kind – that should be our motto. Loving mercy lifts us up along with others. It was kindness and mercy that brought us to a place of repentance and restoration (read Romans 2:4 if you need a reminder).

- Live humbly, trusting God – it’s not about you. Our lives reflect Jesus to people who are desperately in need of His grace and compassion. Walking humbly is about doing our best to stay in step with the Lord. Remaining obedient and always surrendered.
- This is a pattern for life. One that lives by faith and isn’t defined by circumstances.

VIII. Wrapping Up

- As we come to the end of this message—and really, the end of this part of our journey—I want you to hear something clearly: God has not called you to run someone else’s race. He has called you to run yours. And He has given you everything you need to run it with endurance.
 - You are surrounded.
 - You are strengthened.
 - You are seen.
 - You are loved.

And you have been called to something meaningful—to significance—to love as you have been loved.
- So lay down the weight. Fix your eyes on Jesus. Take the next step—whatever it is.
- And trust that the God who began this work in you will carry it to completion.
- And as you go into this week, let Micah 6:8 be the pattern of your path:
 - Do what is right—even when it’s costly.
 - Love mercy—because mercy is the language of those who have received grace.
 - Walk humbly with your God—because humility keeps you close to the One who leads you.
- This is what endurance looks like. This is what faith looks like. This is what a life surrendered to Jesus looks like. So, stay the course. Run your race. And may your life become a testimony—just like those who have gone before you—that faith works, faith endures, and faith honors the Lord.
- Let’s Pray
- Grace First, Grace Always