

“DISCARD YOUR DISTRACTIONS”

In the Military and corporate world, the term mission statement has taken root.

I believe to be in compliance with my Personal Mission Statement, this morning, I would like to share a message that I pray will encourage you, my friends and fellow Christ followers—
not to give up, but rather endure the obstacles that life brings us.

I believe what we must do is:

To demonstrate and practice fearless faith.

IF YOU ARE ABLE, Please stand with me and let us read this morning text from God’s Word:
Heb 12: 1-3 ESV

1. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2 looking to Jesus, the founder 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.

3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

How do you know if someone runs marathons?
Don’t worry, they’ll freakin’ tell you!

My first point:
KEEP ON RUNNING

ALMOST 9 YEARS AGO ON APRIL 15, 2013, A TRAGIC EVENT HAPPENED THAT CHANGED THE LIVES OF SEVERAL HUNDRED PEOPLE THAT WERE IN ATTENDANCE.

THIS TERRIBLE ATTACK AFFECTED THE CITY OF BOSTON FOR YEARS TO COME.

THIS TRAGIC EVENT WAS THE BOSTON MARATHON BOMBINGS, THAT CLAIMED THE LIVES OF 3 SPECTATORS AND INJURED OVER 260 OTHERS.

THE TRAUMATIC EVENT CAUSED SEVERAL PEOPLE TO LOSE THEIR LEG, FROM THE BLAST OF THE EXPLOSION.

REQUIRING SEVERAL MONTHS AND YEARS OF PHYSICAL THERAPY AND TRAINING IN ORDER FOR THEM TO WALK AND GET AROUND AGAIN WITH ARTIFICIAL LIMBS.

DESPITE THE HORRIFIC OUTCOME OF THE BOSTON MARATHON BOMBING,

SEVERAL OF THE VICTIMS OF THIS EVENT ASSEMBLED MARKING THE ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY BY:

STANDING TOGETHER.

PRESSING ON TO CONTINUE TO LIVE THEIR LIVES.

SOME LEARNING TO DO THE BASIC THINGS THAT WE TAKE FOR GRANTED.

SUCH AS STANDING UP ON OUR OWN.

WALKING...DANCING...AND RUNNING.

SOME OF THE VICTIMS HAVE VOWED TO RUN AGAIN IN THIS HISTORIC MARATHON.

AND MANY OF THEIR STORIES HAVE BEEN AN INSPIRATION TO MANY OTHERS.

WHEN FACED WITH OBSTACLES IN THEIR LIVES, INSTEAD OF ALLOWING THIS EVENT TO PARALYZE THEM, MANY HAVE DECIDED TO KEEP ON RUNNING.

THIS IS THE SAME MESSAGE THAT THE APOSTLE PAUL GIVES US IN OUR TEXT TODAY.

HE ENCOURAGES US ALL TO KEEP ON RUNNING THE RACE THAT GOD HAS PLACED BEFORE US.

EVEN WHEN WE ENDURE DISCOURAGING TIMES IN OUR LIVE.

THE AUTHOR WRITES TO THE JEWISH BELIEVERS OF JESUS CHRIST DURING A TIME WHEN THEY STRUGGLED WITH THEIR FAITH.

DURING A TIME WHEN THERE WAS TENSION AND DIFFICULTY IN THE WORLD, AS THEY EMBRACED THEIR NEW CHRISTIAN FAITH.

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, (CHAPTER 11) OF HEBREWS.

KNOWN AS THE "FAITH CHAPTER"

THE WRITER, GIVES US A LONG LIST OF WITNESSES, AND THEIR TESTIMONY OF FAITH.

IT IS IN THEIR FEARLESS FAITH THAT THEY CONTINUED THEIR RACE THAT WAS SET BEFORE THEM.

THEY SERVE AS AN EXAMPLE — THAT NO MATTER WHATEVER WE MAY FACE IN LIFE, WE MUST KEEP ON RUNNING,

AND BY LIVING A LIFE OF FEARLESS FAITH, HE WILL GET US THROUGH.

WHEN WE ENDURE THE TEST THERE WILL BE A TESTIMONY.

THE APOSTLE PAUL USES THE METAPHOR OF AN ATHLETIC COMPETITION TO DESCRIBE OUR CHRISTIAN JOURNEY.

HE IS EXPLAINING THAT WE ARE TO RUN WITH ENDURANCE THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US.

THIS IDEA OF OUR CHRISTIAN JOURNEY BEING COMPARED TO A RACE IS NOTHING NEW FOR PAUL.

HE OFTEN USED THE SYMBOLISM OF AN ATHLETE SO THAT OTHERS COULD RELATE TO WHAT WAS BEING SAID.

THE PEOPLE UNDERSTOOD WHAT IT MEANS TO RUN A RACE.

PAUL OFTEN PLACED HIMSELF AS A RUNNER WHO HAD A RACE TO FINISH.

AND NOTHING WOULD STOP HIM FROM FINISHING THAT RACE.

WE SEE HIM REFERENCE THIS IN ACTS 20.

IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT THE ORIGINAL GREEK WORD FOR RACE MEANT SOMETHING DIFFERENT THAN WE UNDERSTAND IT TO MEAN TODAY.

IN PAUL'S ERA, RACE WAS OFTEN USED TO DESCRIBE A CONFLICT OR STRUGGLE OF MANY KINDS.

WE ARE TO RUN THIS RACE THAT WAS SET BEFORE US WITH ENDURANCE.

WITHIN OUR LIVES WE ARE TO FACE THIS RACE AND

WE ARE TO ENDURE THIS RACE BY EXHIBITING FEARLESS FAITH.

WHEN WE LOOK TO JESUS, WE WILL FINISH OUR RACE.

THERE MAY BE TIMES IN OUR LIVES WHEN WE MAY GET DISCOURAGED BY THE OBSTACLES THAT WE FACE IN LIFE.

IN TIMES LIKE THESE, LET US CONTINUE TO RUN THE RACE BEFORE US, WITH ENDURANCE

LOOKING TO JESUS WHO WILL GIVE US THE STRENGTH TO BEGIN AND FINISH OUR RACE.

I BELIEVE THAT THE TEXT TODAY GIVES US THREE POINTS WE CAN GLEAN FROM TO ENCOURAGE US TO KEEP ON RUNNING THE RACE THAT HAS BEEN SET BEFORE US.

FIRST, I BELIEVE THAT THIS TEXT TELLS US THAT OTHERS HAVE ENDURED THE RACE THAT WE FACE.

LET US LOOK AT THE A CLAUSE OF THE TEXT IN VERSE 1.

THEREFORE, WE ALSO, SINCE WE ARE SURROUNDED BY SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

THE AUTHOR BEGINS THIS VERSE BY SAYING (THEREFORE) AS A CONTINUATION AND DEMONSTRATION OF THE ENDURING FAITH THAT IS FOUND IN HEBREWS 11.

ALL OF GOD'S PEOPLE IN THIS PREVIOUS CHAPTER FACED SOME OF THE SAME TRIALS AND OBSTACLES WE FACE AND BY FAITH.

THEY OVERCOME THEM ALL.

PAUL SAYS THEREFORE, WE ALSO.

MEANING WE ARE GOING TO FACE THE SAME KIND OF STORMS.

WE ARE INCLUDED IN THE TESTING OF OUR FAITH.

WE ARE TAKING PART IN GOD'S NARRATIVE.

WE ARE ALSO GOING TO FACE SOME STRUGGLES.

IF YOU CAN, JUST REFLECT FOR A MOMENT ON SOME OF THE STORMS YOU HAVE FACED.

THESE PAST FEW DAYS.....
THESE PAST FEW WEEKS.....
MONTHS
OR YEAR!!!!

WHATEVER IT IS YOU HAVE FACED OR ARE GONNA FACE PAUL SAYS....

THEREFORE...WE ALSO..."

WILL FACE WHAT THE CHAMPIONS OF FAITH IN HEBREWS 11 FACED.

BUT THEN WE SEE, THAT THE AUTHOR ENVISIONS A GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES THAT SURROUND US.

THE CHAMPIONS AND FINISHERS OF THE RACE WE ARE IN.

LET ME SUGGEST THAT THEY ARE OUR HEAVENLY CHEERLEADERS.

I like to think that of Jimbo, Bill Hagar, Ms Helen, Joe Davis and so many others of this fellowship are our cheerleaders, cheering and encouraging us along.

I BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE ENCOURAGING US TO FINISH THE RACE SET BEFORE US.

PAUL PAINTS THIS PICTURE AS IF WE ARE IN A GREAT COLLISEUM FILLED WITH ALL OF THESE SPECTATORS, CHEERING US ON TO RUN OUR RACE.

BUT THESE ARE NOT JUST SPECTATORS.

THESE ARE FORMER PARTICIPANTS.

THESE ARE FORMER RUNNERS, NOW IN GLORY GIVING US HEAVENLY HIGH FIVES.

AND ENCOURAGING US TO KEEP ON RUNNING.

THEY HAVE ENDURED THE RACE THAT WE NOW FACE.

THEY HAVE BEEN VICTORIOUS BECAUSE THEY KEPT ON RUNNING.

THEY ARE NOW IN GLORY BECAUSE THEY RAN TO THE FINISH LINE.

MY FRIENDS —THE SAME PEOPLE FOUND IN HEBREWS CHAPTER 11 ARE NO DIFFERENT THAN YOU OR ME.

THERE IS NOTHING ABOUT THEM THAT MAKES THEM A SUPER- HUMAN.

BUT IS WAS, BY FAITH, THAT THEY ENDURED WHAT THEY WENT THROUGH.

DON'T WE SEE THAT OTHERS HAVE ENDURED THE RACE THAT WE FACE.

IN THIS RACE THAT WE FACE IN OUR LIVES IT IS NOT ABOUT TRYING TO FINISH FIRST...

CHRIST ALREADY WON THE VICTORY FOR US.

IT'S ALL ABOUT BEING FAITHFUL AND FINISHING...

IT'S ALL ABOUT ENDURING TO THE END....

IT'S ALL ABOUT RUNNING TO THE FINISH LINE...

SOMETIMES —THERE ARE OBSTACLES THAT COME OUR WAY THAT ARE HINDRANCES TO OUR CHRISTIAN RACE.

THESE OBSTACALS GET IN THE WAY OF OUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH.

THESE OBSTACLES — GET IN THE WAY AND DETER OR SLOW US DOWN FROM FINISHING THE RACE SET BEFORE US.

THIS IS WHAT I BELIEVE PAUL WAS TALKING ABOUT IN REMAINDER OF VERSE 1....

THE B CLAUSE OF VERSE 1 SAYS

let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

I BELIEVE THAT THE TEXT TELLS US THAT OTHERS HAVE ENDURED THE RACE THAT WE FACE.

FOR ME THAT PASSAGES SAYS

“WE HAVE TO DISCARD OUR DISTRACTIONS...”

THE AUTHOR SAYS WE ARE TO

“Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely,”

ARE THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS IN OUR LIVES THAT ARE SLOWING US DOWN
IN OUR CHRISTIAN RACE?

ARE THERE ARE THINGS IN OUR LIVES THAT WE:

MUST DISCARD THAT ARE DISTRACTING US FROM WHAT GOD HAS FOR US?

YOU SEE MY FRIENDS, THESE THINGS CAN HOLD US BACK FROM GROWING
SPIRITUALLY.

SIN CAN STUNT OUR GROWTH, AND PREVENT US FROM GROWING, THE WAY
THAT GOD WANTS US TO GROW.

THAT REMINDS ME OF WHAT IT TAKES TO GROW TOMATOES.

NOW I DON'T HAVE A GREEN THUMB AND PROBABLY WOULD KILL A
CACTUS.

BUT I DO KNOW A LITTLE WHEN IT COMES TO GROWING CERTAIN KINDS OF
TOMATOES.

I KNOW THAT THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS THAT YOU NEED.

YOU SEE WHEN YOU PLANT TOMATOES IN THE GROUND.

CERTAIN VARIETIES OF TOMATOES NEED TO HAVE STAKES/CAGES FOR SUPPORT.

TOMATOES WHEN THEY GROW HAVE NO NATURAL WAY OF HOLDING
THEMSELVES UP AND IF LEFT ON THEIR OWN THE TOMATOES WILL VINE ALONG
THE GROUND.

WHEN THEY VINE AND GROW ALONG THE GROUND, IT WILL STUNT THE
GROWTH OF THE PLANT,

AND IT WON'T PRODUCE THE FRUIT THAT IT WAS CREATED TO PRODUCE.

ALSO, WHEN THE PLANT IS LEFT ON THE GROUND, IT IS SUBJECT TO ALL KINDS
OF INSECTS THAT CAN DESTROY THE TOMATO PLANT.

THE PLANT'S GROWTH IS STUNTED IT IS HINDERED ON THE GROUND.

ISN'T THAT WHAT SIN DOES IN OUR LIVES.

IF WE AREN'T MINDFUL THERE ARE SINS OF THE WORLD THAT CAN EASILY
ENSNARE US AND PREVENT US FROM GROWING.

THAT IS WHY, WHEN YOU PLANT CERTAIN TYPES OF TOMATO PLANTS YOU HAVE TO PLANT A WOODEN STAKE OR CAGE IN THE GROUND RIGHT NEXT TO IT.

AND WHEN IT BEGINS TO GROW YOU TIE IT TO THE STAKE, AND IT WILL BEGIN TO PRODUCE FRUIT.

IT WILL BEGIN TO GROW AND THE STAKE WILL SUPPORT THE WEIGHT OF THE PLANT.

THE STAKE WILL PROVIDE A DIRECTION FOR THE TOMATO PLANT TO GROW IN.

THAT IS JUST LIKE US:

AS CHRISTIANS, WHEN WE ARE CLINGING TO THE CROSS OF JESUS,

WE WILL PRODUCE THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT — WE WILL GROW SPIRITUALLY.

PUTTING AWAY THE THINGS THAT CAUSE US TO SIN.

PUTTING AWAY THE SINS THAT EASILY ENSNARE US AND AS WE CLING TO THE CROSS OF JESUS.

HE WILL PROVIDE THE DIRECTION IN OUR GROWTH.

HE WILL HELP US TO GROW UP SPIRITUALLY.

WE HAVE TO DISCARD OUR DISTRACTIONS.

THERE MAY BE SOMETHING THAT IS HOLDING YOU BACK FROM YOUR RACE.

THERE MAY BE SOME HINDRANCE THAT IS HOLDING YOU BACK FROM HIS HEAVENLY PLAN FOR YOU.

BUT THE AUTHOR ISN'T JUST TALKING ABOUT THE SINS THAT HOLD US BACK.

HE SAYS ALSO TO "LAY ASIDE EVERY WEIGHT."

THESE ARE THINGS IN OUR LIVES THAT MY NOT NECESSARILY BE SIN.

BUT IT IS HOLDING US BACK FROM RUNNING THE RACE.

IT MAY BE A WRONG CHOICE THAT WE ARE MAKING.

IT MAY BE SOMETHING THAT IS HINDERING US COMPARED TO SOMETHING ELSE THAT MAY NOT.

LET ME SEE IF I CAN MAKE THIS PLAIN.

I WOULD SUBMIT THAT STATISTICALLY THERE ARE SOME OF US IN HERE THIS MORNING — THAT HAVE SOME SORT OF BAGGAGE IN OUR LIVES.

THINGS THAT WE HAVE GROWN COMFORTABLE WITH IT.

WHETHER IT IS EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE FROM OUR CHILDHOOD OR FROM BAD RELATIONSHIPS.

THINGS THAT WE JUST KEEP CARRYING WITH US.

SOMETIMES THAT BAGGAGE CAN WEIGH US DOWN AND BECOME STUMBLING BLOCKS FOR US.

BUT OFTEN, WE GROW USED TO THEM AND DON'T WANT TO GO THROUGH THE TROUBLE AND PAIN OF DISCARDING THEM.

IT IS EASIER TO STAY STUCK IN THE PAST.

BUT MAYBE THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS BEEN PRICKING OUR HEARTS.

I DON'T KNOW WHO, I'M SPEAKING TO THIS MORNING, MAYBE JUST TO MYSELF.

BUT, THE LORD WANTS YOU AND ME TO DISCARD OUR DISTRACTIONS.

LAY ASIDE THAT WEIGHT THAT IS HOLDING US BACK.

LET IT GO.

BECAUSE IT IS STOPPING US FROM RUNNING OUR RACE.

I REMEMBER THAT ALL THROUGHOUT MY TEENAGE YEARS I WAS INVOLVED IN COMPETITIVE SPORTS:

WHETHER IT WAS FOOTBALL, HOCKEY, OR BASEBALL.

BUT TRUTH BE TOLD, HOCKEY WAS MY FAVORITE!!
I LOVED PLAYING HOCKEY.

MY HIGH SCHOOL HOCKEY COACH WAS AN AWESOME, AND SOMEWHAT SCARY MAN, AND HAD TREMENDOUS IMPACT ON MY LIFE.

COACH JOHN ELDERT WAS A RETIRED MARINE CORPS SGT MAJOR.

I REMEMBER TRAINING AND PRACTICING FOR HOCKEY.

AND ONE OF THE THINGS COACH ELDERT HAD ME, AND THE REST OF THE SQUAD DO WAS TO WEAR ANKLE WEIGHTS.

AS A MATTER OF FACT:

I REMEMBER THAT COACH EVEN RECOMMENDED TO MY PARENTS THAT THEY BUY ME ANKLE WEIGHTS FOR MY BIRTHDAY.

AND AS A TEENAGER I WANTED OTHER STUFF.

I DIDN'T WANT THE ANKLE WEIGHTS.

I REMEMBER IN MY MIND SAYING, "WHAT AM I GONNA DO WITH THESE THINGS,"

BUT THERE WAS A PURPOSE.

YOU SEE, THE DAY OF A HOCKEY GAME COACH ELDERT WOULD HAVE US WEAR THE WEIGHTS ALL DAY LONG.

JUST ABOUT UP UNTIL THE TIME HE WENT ON TO THE ICE AND THEN HE WOULD HAVE US TAKE THEM OFF.

AFTER HAVING THE WEIGHTS ON ALL DAY —WHEN IT CAME TIME TO SKATE MY FEET AND LEGS FELT LIGHTER AND IT FELT LIKE I WAS SKATING ON AIR.

IT MADE ME SKATE FASTER BECAUSE I DIDN'T HAVE THE HINDRANCE ANYMORE.

NOW, I'M NOT GONNA SAY WE WON EVERY GAME, BECAUSE WE HAD WORN THE ANKLE WEIGHTS, SPOILER ALERT ...WE DIDN'T, WE LOST ONE — BUT WERE STILL DISTRICT CHAMPS

BUT I KNOW IT MADE SKATING UP AND DOWN THE RINK EASIER.

JUST IMAGINE, IF I KEPT THE WEIGHTS ON DURING THE GAME MORE THAN LIKELY I WOULD BEEN THE SLOWEST GUY ON THE ICE.

THAT IS WHY I HAD TO DISCARD THE WEIGHTS.

SO THAT I COULD SKATE.

THE AUTHOR IS TELLING US HERE WE NEED TO PUT DOWN WHAT IS PREVENTING US FROM RUNNING THE RACE,

SO THAT WE CAN FINISH.

SO THAT WE CAN RUN WITH ENDURANCE.

WE NEED TO DISCARD ALL OF OUR DISTRACTIONS —

SO WE CAN RUN WITH ENDURANCE.

WITH DETERMINATION

WITH THE PATIENCE

TO MASTER AND OVERCOME WHAT IS PUT BEFORE US.

THERE MAY BE MOMENTS WHEN YOU FIND YOURSELF OVERWHELMED BY YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

IT WON'T BE A RACE YOU'VE TRAINED FOR,

IT MAY BE A RACE THAT YOU DON'T WANT TO FACE.

BUT IT WILL BE THE RACE YOU'RE IN.

AT THAT POINT—WE HAVE TO MAKE UP OUR MINDS TO KEEP ON RUNNING.

WE ARE TO REMEMBER THAT OTHERS HAVE ENDURED THE RACE THAT WE FACE.

WE HAVE TO DISCARD OUR DISTRACTIONS.

MY FINAL POINT IS THAT WE NEED TO.

FOCUS ON THE FINISHER OF OUR FEARLESS FAITH.

LET US LOOK AT THE TEXT IN VERSE 2.....

2 looking to Jesus, the founder 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.

THE NEW AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION SAYS

“FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS”.

WE CAN ONLY RUN THE RACE AS WE LOOK AND HAVE OUR EYES FOCUSED ON JESUS CHRIST.

HE IS OUR HOPE
HE IS OUR INSPIRATION
AND OUR EXAMPLE.

HE IS THE AUTHOR,
THE ORIGINATOR,
CREATOR.

AND IT IS JESUS THAT GAVE BIRTH TO THE CHRISTIAN RACE....

BUT HE IS ALSO THE FINISHER.

THAT MEANS HE PERFECTED,
HE COMPLETED AND ACCOMPLISHED THE CHRISTIAN RACE.

PAUL IS TELLING US THAT JESUS IS THE ONE THAT RAN THE COURSE OF LIFE PERFECTLY.

HE FINISHED THE RACE WITHOUT STUMBLING, WITHOUT SIN.

ALWAYS OBEYING GOD, THE FATHER.

WE ARE TO FOCUS ON THE FINISHER OF OUR FAITH TO HELP US FINISH OUR RACE,

TO HELP US TO BE FAITHFUL.

TO HELP US DISCARD OUR DISTRACTIONS.

TO KEEP US ON THE PATH TO THE FINISH LINE.

FOR HE ENDURED THE CROSS SO THAT WE WILL EXPERIENCE THE GLORIOUS DAY OF REDEMPTION.

ONE DAY WE WILL BE IN GLORY, WITH HIM.

TODAY, WE HAVE TO KEEP ON RUNNING.

HE RAN THE RACE AND ENDURED AND NOW HE IS IN GLORY SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER.

HE RAN THE RACE AND HUNG HIS HEAD AND DIED ON THE CROSS.

ONE DAY WE'LL HEAR HIM SAY,

“WELL DONE, WELL DONE MY GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT”

WE JUST HAVE TO KEEP ON RUNNING.

WE HAVE TO KEEP ON RUNNING
FOCUSING ON THE FINISHER OF OUR FEARLESS FAITH

KEEP ON RUNNING.

OTHERS HAVE DONE IT.

KEEP ON RUNNING.

DISCARD THE DISTRACTIONS
AND KEEP ON RUNNING.....

POS

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Fred Fitzgerald Ph.D.