

CALVARY YOUTH FELLOWSHIP

CALVARY YOUTH VOICES



PSALM 9:9

The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed,
a refuge in times of trouble.

**table
of
contents**

**IN
THIS
ISSUE**

- 03** LETTER FROM DANIEL
- 06** INTERVIEW WITH SAMUEL & TAMMY
- 14** INTERVIEW WITH CLARICE, DANIEL & RYAN
- 19** LOOKING BACK TO WITNESSES, UP TO JESUS AND FORWARD TO JOY

LETTER FROM DANIEL

Dear Readers,

In this special anniversary issue of the CYV, we celebrate our 49th anniversary as a Youth Fellowship! We thank God for his bountiful blessings over the years and especially for the past YF year. Truly there is much to be thankful for, over the past year we have slowly transitioned back to having physical meetings in church. God willing, we'll soon be able to sing out loud as well as have YF refreshments together as a group.

Seeing how God has provided for us this past year, the passage we will be considering for this issue is Isaiah 30:19b:

"...he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee."



The prophet Isaiah spoke on God's behalf to the people of Jerusalem, giving a message of impending judgment where Israel's corrupt practices will be punished by the empires of Assyria and Babylon. Accompanying this prophetic message of despair though, was a message of hope that God's covenant promises would be fulfilled and the children of Israel would be delivered by a coming Messiah.

How does one respond to such a message? Charles Spurgeon once said, "The great sin of man is his alienation from God. Man will look in all directions sooner than look to God. He will sooner, like Saul, seek the help of a witch or a devil than seek the living God." We see from the Old Testament that this is true even when man faces times of distress and trials. Like King Ahaz whose kingdom Isaiah announced would soon fall, we read in 2 Chronicles 28:22 that rather than repent ***"[i]n the time of his distress, King Ahaz became even more unfaithful to the LORD."***

LETTER FROM DANIEL

When we do seek for God, we realise that He is all-Providing and His hand is consistently outstretched - ready and able to help us in whatever troubles we may be facing and to comfort us under every distress. In Isaiah 30:19b, we read about God's graciousness and His readiness to listen to the cry of the needy. Realizing this, we need to ask ourselves:



**Why do I stray from God so often?
What is the foundation of my faith built on?**

Is it because of a lack of faith and trust in God that we often fall back on trusting our fallible selves? Spurgeon puts it clearly that we should turn to God and trust him "...because thus saith the Lord who can neither lie nor change: "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee."

God is gracious to our cries. We have here 3 assurances that God gives us. First, the promise given by the unchangeable God that he will be gracious to our cries. We are assured through God's nature that He will be gracious and merciful to us. Romans 8:32 says:



"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Secondly, we can find comfort in God's nature as One who abounds in love, grace and mercy, that He will be gracious to those who seek Him in prayer.

LETTER FROM DANIEL

Finally, we are assured of the efficacy of prayer. We frequently forget that God has permitted us to speak directly to Him through prayer and He delights in it. Even more gracious is God's promise that when we do speak to Him, he will hear and answer us. Isaiah 65:24 says:

“And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.”



It is truly a comforting thought that the omnipotent God hears our every word when we call out to Him and answers these prayers. Through the reading of God's word, it is an encouragement for us to accept these assurances and make it a point to trust in God and commit everything to Him in prayer. If we truly believe that God “will be gracious to the voice of [our] cry” and that He will answer our prayers, why then should we trust in ourselves or in other earthly confidences?

As we enter a new YF year, let us make it a point to trust in God before anything else and to commit everything to Him in prayer. In our trials at school, home, work or church, may we cast our cares upon God for He cares for us and stand firm in the Lord through prayer and supplication. Whenever we may find our faith in Christ lacking, let us turn back to His word and find comfort in the promises He has given to us, receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practise it in our lives.

In Christ,
Daniel

*Trust not then where there is no
power, but set all your confidence
upon the Almighty.*

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH OUR GRADUATING BATCH

This YF anniversary, let us hear what our graduating YFers - Samuel, Tammy, Clarice, Daniel and Ryan have to share as they reflect on their time spent in the YF!

INTERVIEW WITH SAMUEL AND TAMMY

Q: Let's start with something more lighthearted, what's the most embarrassing memory you have at YF?

S: Okay I got one, this one was quite embarrassing. During YF camp there was this combined game with the mandarin congregation. For the games, we were split into different groups. During the game, I can't remember what it was, there was a spy who would try to help the other group and do suspicious things like search for clues. At one point we had to nominate the spy. Being the group leader, I was so confident that this particular person was the spy and I said "nominate this person, nominate this person" but in the end, this person wasn't the spy! Then I was like 🤦 "Oh boy, what did I just do?" I felt super embarrassed because you let both your team and the person down. Moreover, he was from the Mandarin congregation and he was a lot younger than I. I went "oh boy..."

T: For me I think it's like calling people's names wrongly during group time, you know siblings' names are very similar and you call call their siblings names instead

S: So you called Grace, Joyce and Joyce, Grace?

T: Have I?

S: Have you?

T: I might have actually, I think I called Kaitlin, Kristin, or vice versa...

S: Yeah I think that's quite embarrassing, more paiseh

T: Yeah, you feel bad afterwards

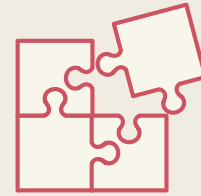
Q: Okay, for our next question, what is your happiest memory at YF?

T: I think for me, all the times we spent fellowshipping with each other is a fond memory I would cherish. A particular one would be during a camp dorm fellowship. After we shared prayer requests we started spontaneously singing hymns, and I think Gwen was also playing the guitar, that's one of the memories I can think of. It's one of the happiest memories, it really shows how sometimes though we have different interests, it is because of the bonds we have in Christ that we can enjoy these together.

S: Aww. Actually I wanna say YF camp but I don't want to talk about it like YF camp is the only thing on my mind. One of them would be a recent group discussion. There was this one discussion where... You know as a YF leader, leading discussion, the first thing is that "I want my members to respond, I don't want to be talking to myself", you want responses and the discussion to keep going and you don't need to keep prompting. So there was a Group Time where all the members were so ready and willing to share. At one point it was like a big dialogue where people were saying "yeah, I agree with you" or "I felt this way", back and forth. The most encouraging part was that they shared some spiritual takeaway and some encouragement from whatever we were discussing and it was very encouraging. Even the quiet or younger ones contributed to the discussion and it was something I recall fondly about.



Q: What's your favourite game from your time at YF? Including the carolling, camp and even card games?



S: Hands down it has to be sardines. Sardines, confirm! Actually, I would say wet games but wet games always got some risk, like you gotta keep watching and ensure people don't run and fall down. Wet games aside, it has to be sardines. The fun part is when there are a few of you in the team and you're trying to find the place where everyone is hiding and you see this person but when you walk back in the same place you don't see them anymore. And then when you open the door and you finally see everyone inside go "Shhhhhh" yeah, that feeling. You know, like what Tammy mentioned, although we're all different ages, different personalities, in this game we all have one common objective and it was really nice and fun to see everyone working towards that. Even the quiet ones they also go "shh shhh shhhhhh".

T: I think for me it's Connect. During the Group Time when we don't have any card games in mind or equipment, Connect is the game that we usually go to. One thing about Connect is I actually get more stressed because I'm bad at vocab but I think everyone enjoys it so actually it's very fun as a whole. There was even once we played connect in the dark.

S: Yeah! Cos one of the lights was spoilt! Then we couldn't switch it on, even though the whole room was dark, we went "let's just go on".

T: Yeah, so we just tried to see each other's hands in the dark.

Q: Can you share about one time that God has shown His grace to you during your time at YF?

T: One thing that I'm thankful for is the initial period when I first joined YF. At that point in time, I was still unsure and I didn't have a lot of knowledge and understanding of God's word. really thank God for His grace for helping me grow, especially during YF sessions where it was not just the messages, but also the post-message discussions that really helped me grow spiritually and in my knowledge of God. I'm very thankful for the older YF'ers and leaders who were very encouraging during times of sharing even though I did not know much at that point in time.



S: Okay, so this one I think all of you should know. It was one of the YF camps where there was an “pandemic”, do y'all remember, during the pre-Covid era? During that time, yours truly was the camp master and I was like “What is this food poisoning going on??”. It was so chaotic because one person got it and we had to isolate them. Back then, we were not familiar with what isolation is. But we had to move people out of the rooms, sanitise the rooms, and there was the stress of knowing where the virus came from and there was a BBQ session that night which made it even worse. There were so many things going on but the one thing was that God sent many people to help me out at that point in time. We had to take care of those who were taken ill, allocate new rooms, clean up the rooms. It was very stressful but thank God there were so many people – e.g., the camp comm, close friends who were supporting me... That night I don't know what I was running on, so really, thank God for those who co-laboured and not just in terms of physical support but the mental and emotional support.

Q: How do you feel about leaving YF?

S: I got my tissue box beside me. Okay, let me put my emotions into words, so a bit of the reasons why I don't know how I am able to leave YF. I joined YF way before I was 13, the so-called age for you to join YF. I joined when I was P2-P3? Because my parents were the advisors at that time, I didn't want to stay at home by myself. My mom and I sat behind the meeting room where I did my homework. So, YF has been in my life for more than a decade. This fellowship group, these people that you worship God with, mutually support and encourage, these people you never fail to see every week, for the past 10+ years, you won't be seeing them on a weekly basis anymore. So I would say that I will definitely miss YF. People tell me that we need to move on with life but the YF will always have a place in my heart even after I leave. So how do I feel? I'm not sure how to leave YF.

T: For me, I've not been in YF as long as Sam, I was in YF for 4-5 years. Although the duration wasn't that long compared to many people who grew up in church, YF was one of the first fellowship groups I got to know when I first became a Christian and the people showed me a lot of support and encouragement, which I am really very thankful for.

I will also definitely miss the time in this fellowship group but of course we'll still see the rest of the people in church.

Q: For part B of this question, how do you feel about joining YAF?

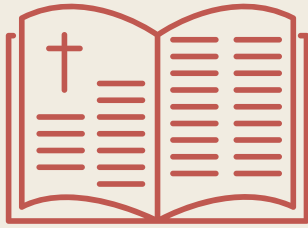
S: One word, bittersweet. On one hand, there are those who were formerly in YF whom I'm close to, in YAF now, and I'm excited to see them. On the other hand, there's still the bittersweet part. Not just the physical transition where YAF starts later and you get more time for dinner, YAF is more chill [editor's note: *cough* retirement village *cough*] and there's a different kind of spiritual support and edification. It's a different level of feeding and learning from the word. It's also a mental and emotional transition. I think YFers that went before me definitely would feel this and it's definitely bittersweet. On the lighter note, it's a new experience where I can fellowship with those whom I didn't get to fellowship with because they went over, but now I can.

T: Actually I don't know how to feel about it. I'm quite neutral, like it's something that is going to happen and knowing that we'll need to be there soon. I'll definitely miss the time in YF, so I feel sad about transitioning but I'm also looking forward to seeing the older brothers and sisters in Christ and looking forward to the transition in fellowship with the YAFers who are going through different stages in life.

Q: Do you have any last words for everyone? (advice, etc...)

T: Be thankful for this group of believers who you can share your struggles and joys of life with. I think the fellowship in YF is something that we're not often very thankful for because we see each other every week. But as I reflect on everything, everything has gone by so quickly. Also remember how God has given you this group of believers and whether you're young or old, remember how important your role is in bearing each other's burdens and grow together in our walk with God.





S: For me the most important thing is to put God and His word at the centre of your lives. Having gone through what the younger ones are going through, this phase where you do foolish things in Secondary school and moving on to JC and poly where the stress level

goes up. Then NS for the guys, and for uni and almost finishing uni, I would say it is this period in our lives where our perspectives and worldview are being shaped. During this period, this is where a lot of things influence us and it is when our thinking, outlook, perspectives, choices, lifestyles, etc are moulded. One huge influence out there is the world. But while that is one huge influence, the biggest influence should be God's word and what it teaches us about living as born-again believers. I say this because I can testify that while going through this whole period, the so-called YF age from 13-23, there were many tough situations, sad, discouraging moments, happy moments, moments I can thank God for, moments of trials and temptations. Even on occasions where I might be ridiculed, it is through all these where I put God first and I can testify that when I did put God first, He did honour and He did bless me for putting Him first. This is the reason why, going through this maze in life, as long as you put God at the centre of your lives, you don't have to worry about what comes in the future. #

I mean a moderate amount of care and concern is necessary but you don't have to be overly anxious. you don't have to fret. I would like to share a verse, Colossians 1:10 *"That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God"*. I would label this verse as the calling for all Christians, to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, be fruitful and increase in knowledge of God.

Q: If you could go back in time, would you change anything about what you've done at YF?

S: More wet games, just kidding hahahaha. I would have reached out to those who are quieter. You know those YF'ers who are newcomers, there are extroverts but there are also those who are quieter, perhaps neglected. While we easily minister to those who are more outgoing, it is those who are quieter, who may not reach out to you, who would need more ministering to.

It is those YF'ers who you see when everyone is fellowshipping, they stand around quietly. It's these people whom we need to minister to. Not to say that we ignore those who are more outspoken, but it's these quieter people who also need to be ministered to. If I could go back in time, I would have reached out to these people more.

T: Maybe being part of YF earlier? But as I look back, all things happen in God's plan and I am already very thankful to God for putting me here at YF. It is because it is not something that I would expect before being saved. One thing I would consider doing more is using this to share as a testimony to newcomers or those who didn't grow up in christian families. I think that's something that I'm still mindful of.

Q: For Samuel, did serving as a musician become different for you when you started pursuing your piano major?



S: Definitely, so one important skill that any musician must have is listening. Hearing is taking it in but listening is processing and you think about it, critique what you hear, whether it sounds good or bad. Before I started pursuing piano as my major, it was more of ensuring that my notes were secure, more of what felt good when I played the piano, but this might not be the best way to accompany or help people sing. So as I listen more, as a church musician, it is not about performing but being one who aids those who are singing to sing better. So now I also listen to the singing, to be aware of how I can contribute to the singing and definitely improving in my technical skill also helps with playing more confidently and bringing out different moods and emotions. I am also undertaking research on accompanying congregational singing and how a church pianist can incorporate a variety of techniques that are both suitable and appropriate. So this definitely shapes the way I serve as a musician.

Q: Did you face any challenges when you entered YF?

S: Actually, yes, I entered YF in primary school, so you imagine this primary school boy and people who are in uni or going to work already and obviously you'll be intimidated. So many people who are so much older, not even in your age range. See these people who have gone through a longer period in life, more mature in the faith.. When I officially reached the YF age I was quite reclusive and was even a bit afraid of the rest, like "what are they going to ask me..." not sure if you'll believe me but i was actually much quieter in the past during YF, so these are the challenges, unfamiliarity...

T: Personally, a lot of you know that I'm someone who is more reserved and initially, YF seemed like a daunting place. You see people who already know each other and grew up together, so I would say that I was afraid and it was a challenge for me at that point in time. But thank God that my leaders back then constantly checked in on me to text me outside of YF, asking me to come to YF and were very encouraging in asking for prayer requests. It really encouraged me in seeing how these people can show so much love. I think it's a bit different compared to peers who joined earlier but for me I'm very thankful for this community of believers and coming from a non-Christian family, you don't have a lot of people around you who say that they'll pray for you. Sometimes they might not fully understand the difficulties that Christians face in their walk, so the many friendships formed in YF definitely encouraged me in my walk with God, knowing that there's people around who care and pray for you, and face similar struggles. In terms of the whole experience, it helped me to love others in the same way that Christ loved us and helped me to encourage others better, to be patient in reaching out to others in YF.



INTERVIEW WITH RYAN, CLARICE AND DANIEL

Q: What's your most embarrassing/happiest moment in YF?

R: My time in the YF has always been quite normal, it's always, you know, a message, then a discussion. The past few years have also been quite muted, right?

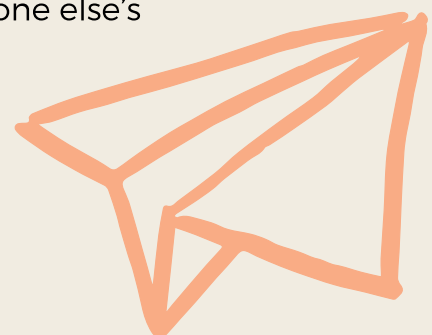
C: YF camp final nights where everyone just stays up and does random things, be it play games, chit chat or someone starts playing music and everyone starts singing along. It sort of has the camp vibes. That's the first thing that popped into my mind, but that was so long ago leh, so sad.

D: This was back in the old building, where we used to have a trolley for fellowship hall tables. There was one night during YF camp where the boys in my batch were all fooling around. We got on the trolley and started pushing each other around. For some reason we decided to push it too quickly, we ended up hitting the drainage pipe that goes from level 2 to level 1. We saw that it broke, there was a hole, but there was no water coming out. So we decided "ah, it's probably fine lah." After this, a week passed, when we came back to church Dn Kenny said "eh do you all know what happened or not? You guys need to apologise to Dn Jeffrey. Because of you guys, the water pipe broke and the whole level 1 was flooded during the week" so we had to go apologise to him.

N: Would you call this your happiest memory too though?

D: Noo

C: I think you just need his story, you don't need anyone else's



Q: What's your favourite game from your time at YF?

D&C: Bomberman

C: Wah now I got to think of another one. Hmm all those treasure hunt games where we had to run around to the various levels to unlock a plastic bad with a lock on it

D: Sardines also!

R: Connect. It's simple to play, everyone can get involved, and it usually involves a lot of shouting as well. It can get quite heated.

**Q; How do you feel about leaving YF and joining the YAF?**

R: I'll definitely miss the atmosphere and everyone. I think it will definitely be quite a big change of pace, where we were once the oldest and leading everyone, but now we are going to become the youngest.

C: Sounds good eh

R: I mean, in a way it is good? I guess it's what everyone would say bittersweet right? Sad for what you are leaving behind, but in a way it would be good to have people to look up to, like during discussion. But also because it's a set time, everyone knows it's the year you turn 24, so the expectation has always been there for me.

C: I think Ryan put it well. It's bittersweet lah. I mean, it's not like it's a surprise that we are gonna leave? And you would already have it in your mind that "oh I'm leaving in one year's time, what do I wanna do in that one year?" I mean, yeah it will be sad, because you're leaving everyone here, but I guess it's also nice to have a change of pace and to move up and learn about God's word from a different perspective since the YAF takes and uses topics in a different way.

D: I'm a bit scared about the change of pace, like what Ryan said about not being a leader anymore and not serving in multiple committees, I'm scared it might lead to some sense of complacency? The question is what are you gonna fill up that time with now? So a bit of fear now.

Q: If you could go back in time, would you change anything about what you would have done in YF?

C: For me, the only thing I can think about is, during my A-leves period, I disappeared from the YF for about a quarter of the year, to study in school with friends yadda yadda yadda. I don't know what was happening in my brain lah. It was like "I will skip YF to go study with my friends". In my mind, I think that's one thing I would change, but then again, I feel like I also wouldn't change that because from that experience, in uni I decided that "ok, I won't put off God's work and going into Church just for my studies". Yeah but maybe that's one thing that I would change.

N: It has taught you some valuable life lessons

C: Yeah. Changed perspective when I went into uni I guess, but who knows?

D: To go more often when I was one of the youngest in the YF? I think in my second year in YF, I didn't go for almost the whole year because I was involved in NDP, so I think if I could turn back time, I wouldn't go NDP at all because it was a waste of time in the end lah. I would have enjoyed being in the YF also.

R: For me, I would say I probably wouldn't change anything? But then again, I joined the YF when I was in NS? Maybe I could have been more committed or maybe start leading and serving earlier? But then again, I was serving in NS, maybe it was good to hold off? I'm not sure. I guess in my second year it would have been alright, I had more time, so I could have taken on the extra load. But then again, I think for about a quarter of the year, I didn't attend YF as well because of NDP, maybe that might have been disruptive anyway.



Q: To Ryan, since you joined the YF much later, would you say your YF experience has been different from the rest of your batch?

R: I guess yeah, in some ways I would say it was different, maybe in terms of maybe, not having attended as many camps or carolling as the rest? I think I have only attended one or two camps or carolling after I started Uni, and in two of those years, I had to go on reservist. In that sense, I wouldn't have had the same experience as the others? And also not having the experience of joining YF as a sec one/two? Perhaps I could have learnt more, like from previous batches of leaders and presidents. But overall, I think I would have grown in similar ways through attending messages, discussions.

Q: You guys have served quite long as leaders, were there any times where you felt burnt out/tired/underappreciated?

D: I think for me, I fortunately can say I haven't felt burnt out or tired, I think it's more of panicking when I realised I haven't done something. But then it's usually that I underestimated the urgency of the tasks and I thought I could complete them in time. Underappreciated, sure, but most of the time I deal with it very quickly by asking myself if I am doing it for man's praise or God's glory. The thought of being unappreciated doesn't make sense anymore, it is no longer logical. I think most of the time, as a leader who just started out, I felt more useless than any of those other things, like being a useless co-leader

C: I think in terms of burnt out/tired, I think I also never really felt that? But I would say that there were times when I wasn't as dedicated to being a leader. But I think that is also just because after a while, you sort of get pulled into different ministries and then you're a bit more stretched. Then your focus also changes over time. So if something major is coming up in a different area of service, then your service in YF gets put on the back burner sometimes. Hence, I feel that there were times where I under-served, but I don't think I was burnt out/tired. In terms of being under-appreciated, I think I also haven't really felt that because to me, even though we are leaders, at the end of the day we are still servants serving the youths of the church. So as a servant, I don't really expect to be appreciated.

R: I agree with Daniel with the one about being useless. As a new leader sometimes I also didn't know how to do certain things, like how bs should be run, or maybe not being able to contribute as much to the bible studies or the discussions. Being tired, possibly? Not like burnt out kind of tired, I mean it's just like after so many events I just do feel tired. Like how one year there was junior camp, and then YF camp right after. Otherwise, yeah, I think leading has been a positive experience.

Q: Do you have any last words, pieces of advice for everyone?

D: Challenge yourself to commit time to God. but if you think you are “younger Daniel”: think before you speak

C: Don't be afraid to serve, because this is the period of time that you can serve and no one will judge you for doing things wrong, and people will be willing to teach you and give you advice.

R: Can't really think of any general things

N: To future game masters maybe?

C: Plan more night games!



LOOKING BACK TO WITNESSES, UP TO JESUS AND FORWARD TO JOY

John Piper - DesiringGod.org

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 11: 39-12:2)

Some Christians come to the end of their lives so suddenly that they do not have a single moment to say anything. No final words. No memorable sayings. All they leave behind is a lifetime of deeds and words. And we have to put the pieces together and interpret what their life meant. That's the way it was with someone last Tuesday morning. Death came so suddenly, there was not time for one word of parting testimony.

But it was different with the apostle Paul. As he approached the end of his life, he saw it coming. He had time to tell us what he thought of his life. Here's what he said:

*"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept
the faith."*

(2 Timothy 4:7)

LOOKING BACK TO WITNESSES, UP TO JESUS AND FORWARD TO JOY

John Piper - DesiringGod.org


The Christian Life as a Race and a Fight

So at the end of his life Paul said, "All my life has been like a fight and like a race. Keeping faith has been a struggle. Trusting God's promises (Romans 4:20) and living by faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:20), resting in the easy yoke of Jesus (Matthew 11:28), being anxious for nothing (Philippians 4:6) has been like a war all my life. Nothing has been easier (Matthew 11:30) and nothing has been harder (Matthew 7:14) than to stay satisfied with God and with all that he is for me in Jesus (John 6:35). Day and night, by every means graciously bestowed upon me (1 Corinthians 15:10), I have fought the good fight and run the race of perseverance."

And before he died, Paul made it clear that the view of his own life should be the kind of Christian life everybody is called to live. In 1 Timothy 6:12 he says, **"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called..."** And to explain, he said in verse 11, **"Flee [the love of money]—flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness."** Note the two words: "flee" and "follow after"—flee the love of money and all the evils that grow out of it, and pursue faith and love and patience. These are the words of war: Flee! Pursue!

Paul knows nothing of mere professing or lifeless Christianity.

*Paul simply does not recognize a Christianity that is not running
a race and fighting a fight.*



Nor does the author of the letter to the Hebrews. That's why the main point for this sharing is the imperative of Hebrews 12:1, **"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us"**.

LOOKING BACK TO WITNESSES, UP TO JESUS AND FORWARD TO JOY

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Battling the Tendency to Coast

The situation seems to be that the Hebrew Christians had gotten tired. A lot of time had passed since they were first fired-up for Jesus. Hebrews 10:32–33 says, **"But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions . . . whilst ye became companions of them that were so used."** Hebrews 5:12 says, "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one to teach you again". They have begun to coast and, as Hebrews 2:3 says, **"neglect so great salvation."** The situation is very serious and the writer suggests that some are showing that **their faith is merely external** and they have **"tasted the...powers of the world to come" in vain** (Hebrews 6:5).

We have been around a long time. And we realized how easy it is in an old church to get tired and begin to become too comfortable. Or to get diverted with mere maintenance ministries. Or to get careless in spiritual vigilance. Or to quench the Holy Spirit with passionless, dead, dutiful religious exercises. I don't think that has happened to us. But how real a danger it is! And the book of Hebrews was written to keep it from happening.

And so the writer says (in Hebrews 3:12), **"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."**

And in Hebrews 12:12–14 he says, **"...lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord"**— there it is: Run the race! Fight the fight! Pursue peace! Pursue holiness!

LOOKING BACK TO WITNESSES, UP TO JESUS AND FORWARD TO JOY

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Hebrews 12:1 is a trumpet call (or the warning gun that the final laps are starting) to regard our life as a race to be run with passion, zeal, energy, and discipline. When he says, "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us", he meant 'get serious about the race!'

Test Yourself

Test yourself. Are you running or are you merely coasting? You can get back in the race today! Now! How? Verse 1 says by "**lay aside every weight...and the sin which doth so easily beset us**". That means getting things out of your life that make you more worldly-minded and putting things in your life that make you more heavenly-minded. It means praying without ceasing, hiding God's Word in your heart and meditating on it day and night, exhorting one another every day, taking up your cross daily, reckoning yourself dead to sin, putting to death the deeds of the body, plucking out the eye of lust, fleeing fornication, cutting off the hand of covetousness, yielding your members as instruments of righteousness, presenting your bodies as living sacrifices, putting on the armor of God, resisting the devil, and taking every thought captive to obey Christ.

The great danger of every aging church and every aging denomination, and every one of us, is that we might begin to coast instead of run, and fiddle around instead of fight. To this the writer of Hebrews, and I, and God say to you this morning, there is a better way to come to the end of life, namely, running the race and fighting the fight.

Three Motivations for the Race

Here, I direct you to three motivations for this Christian race. God does not call us to mere meaningless, exhausting drills like laps around a field that get us nowhere. He calls us to a race that has a great goal and all kinds of powerful incentives along the way. The three motivations in this text are given: **Looking back to the witnesses, up to Jesus, and forward to joy.**

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1. Looking Back to Witnesses

The first motivation to run the race of faith and fight the fight for holiness and love is found in verse 1: **"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses"**. As we run the race, there is a big, dense crowd of saints pressing in on the track. These saints are the people described in chapter 11 and all the other Christians which have finished the race before us. They finish the race, circle around, and press into the crowd along the route where we are running.

How is this supposed to motivate us?

"It Can Be Done. It Can Be Done."

First, the point of calling all these saints from chapter 11 "witnesses" is not so much to say that they are watching us (they may be in some limited way), but to say that they are near enough for us to watch them while we run. We are running the race and we look at the crowd and realize that every one of them who have finished the race, and we feel, 'It can be done. It can be done'.

We look and we see the **examples of faith and perseverance under every imaginable circumstances**: there's David who committed adultery and murder, and he finished; there's John Mark the quitter, and he finished; and Mary the prostitute, and she finished; and William Carey, plodder, and he finished; and Jonathan Edwards who got kicked out of his church, and he finished; and Job who suffered so much, and he finished; and Stephen who was martyred, and he finished; and Mary Slessor and Amy Carmichael and St. Paul who served as single people all their lives, and they finished.

By the power and faith that got them through, I'm going to finish the race too! That's the first way these witnesses motivate us.

LOOKING BACK TO WITNESSES, UP TO JESUS AND FORWARD TO JOY

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"Something Better"

The second way is found in Heb 11:39–40. The "Wherefore" at the beginning of 12:1 points us back to this motivation in 11:39–40. **"And these all [the people mentioned in chapter 11], having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us..."**

This is the motivation—the "better thing" that comes to us because the saints of old did NOT receive what was promised. And what is this "better thing"? What is better for us because they did not get what was promised? The answer is the last phrase of verse 40: **"...that they without us should not be made perfect"**.

In other words, the final perfect salvation for all the saints who have gone before—the resurrection of the body, the reign of Jesus on the new earth, the restoration of all things—will not happen without all the runners finishing the race. They finish the race, get a ribbon, but not the gold cup, then circle around and crowd in on the sidelines of the marathon route to wait for us. This is because God says: no one gets the glory of final perfection until all have finished the race. They will not be made perfect without us.

So run the race—fight and persevere in faith, love, and obedience; labor to finish the Great Commission and reach all the unreached peoples—knowing that the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before will not be perfected until the church on earth finishes its appointed course. When all the runners have crossed the line, then will the joy be even greater because we will be glorified all together in one great consummation of the Kingdom.

So lay aside the weights and sins and RUN!

The second motivation to run is . . .



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2. Looking Up to Jesus

It might be very easy to hear the command, "Run the race! Fight the fight!" and conclude that obeying that command and finishing the race and making it to glory depends decisively on us.

But that would be a great mistake! We have the responsibility to obey. But the writer points us to Jesus. Verse 2: ***"Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith"***.

I see Jesus as the pioneer and perfecter of our faith in three ways.

1. He has given a foundation of our faith from start to finish. He pioneered by enduring the cross and despising the shame; and he perfected it by sitting triumphantly at the right hand of the throne of God (v. 2; cf. 2:10). Our redemption, the foundation of our faith, is complete.
2. He has given a perfect model for faith from start to finish. He trusted his Father from beginning to end in his earthly race.
3. He is the giver and sustainer of our faith from start to finish. Hebrews 13:21, "Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ..." And "without faith it is impossible to please [God]" (11:6). So the God who began a good work in us is also going to complete it—through Jesus Christ, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

So don't even begin to think that the completion of our race will contribute to your glory because it depends on your strength. **We run with the ability that God supplies, so that in all things, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ** (1 Peter 4:11). So look to Jesus, take heart, trust him, and run.

The final motivation here is . . .

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3. Looking Forward to Joy

When we look to Jesus, one of the things we see (according to verse 2) is that his pioneering and perfecting work of redemption was sustained by the joy that was set before him. Verse 2: "Looking to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, **who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross**".

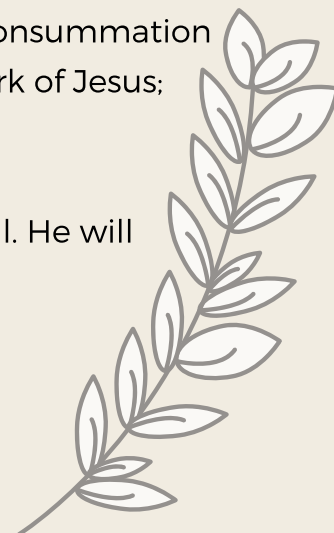
What God wants us to do when we look to Jesus, is to be like him. He endured the cross for the joy set before him; we should endure the hardships of our marathon of faith for the joy set before us.

An Illustration of How This Works

I close with one simple illustration of how this works, from Hebrews 10:34–36, "**For ye had compassion in my bonds, and took joyfully [note the word!] the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.**"—that is, for the joy set before you. So the key to laying aside weights, like love for possessions, and running through the tough experiences of life—it is to press on with strength and courage and hope and to have our eyes fixed on the indescribable, unending joy at the end of the race.

The joy of all the saints raised and glorified with us in one great consummation of the Kingdom; the joy of faith and holiness perfected by the work of Jesus; the joy of being with Jesus, the greatest person in the universe.

So let us run the race, and fight the fight of faith, for God is faithful. He will finish his saving work in our lives.





LOOKING UNTO JESUS

the author and finisher of our faith

;WHO FOR THE JOY THAT

WAS SET BEFORE HIM

*endured the cross,
despising the shame*

AND IS SET DOWN AT THE

RIGHT HAND OF

the throne of God

Hebrews 12:2