

Stuck

Week of February 14

Running is hard. And yet, anyone who has ever ran long distance knows that the “second wind”—the point when the runner experiences a physical and mental break-through comparable to soaring—is well worth every mile of training leading up to that moment of sheer release. Think about it: a marathon runner puts in hours, days, months, even years of preparation into a goal that in the end is more about enduring than competing. A runner never looks back, but focuses their attention forward at all times—the personal prize at the end of the race.

Using the imagery of running, the apostle Paul says his life of faith has been one of endurance – the struggle to push through under suffering. The perfection we long for isn’t something achieved in this life, but like Paul we must refuse to live in the past and instead focus on what is ahead. Paul’s words still encourage us today: “I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us” (Philippians 3:14). Similarly, the writer of the book of Hebrews encourages Christians facing persecution to “run with endurance the race God has set before us... by keeping our eyes on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:1b, 2a).

Read Hebrews 12:1-4

Verse 1 of Hebrews, chapter 12 says: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.”

1. Who is the “huge crowd of witnesses” referred to in this passage—how would you describe the people in the grand stands? (see Hebrews, ch 11)

What is the weight that slows you down, the sin that trips you up?

Training with extra weight helps build muscle strength. But when it comes time for the race, the weight must be stripped off. The book of James says, “Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing” (James 1:2-4, see also James 1:12 and Romans 5:3-5).

2. Think about how the Lord allows challenges in our life for the sole purpose of building endurance. How is your faith stronger today because of troubles you have had to face in the past?

Do you have the courage to thank the Lord for hardship? If so, write a brief prayer of thanksgiving to Him in the space below. Take a moment to worship Him, because often it is in the midst pain and suffering that our desire to worship Him becomes a true “sacrifice” of praise.

Notice you are to run the race *God* has set before you. You cannot run the race for someone else. You cannot run the race God has laid out for your spouse, your kids, or your friend. You can certainly pray for your loved one, coming alongside to help and encourage. But trying to run another person’s race is not what God is calling you to do. On the other hand, being indifferent to the struggles of our brothers and sisters is also not pleasing to the Lord, according to Hebrews 13:3.

3. How can you discern the difference between running alongside a brother or sister, and attempting to run *for* them?

Issues like control or co-dependency may be rooted at the core of trying to run someone else’s race. When have issues such as these become a “weight that slowed you down” or a “sin that tripped you up”—how have these unhealthy habits caused you to get stuck in the past?

The Lord Jesus Christ is the champion of our faith. He endured the cross for you and me, and in His resurrection power, you and I can find strength to rise up and keep going. Runners talk about hitting a wall – getting stuck – and sometimes wanting to quit when the race gets difficult. The body wants to quit because of the pain, but the mind and spirit has to tell the body to push through.

Our Lord experienced this at the ultimate level. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: "My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine" (Matthew 26:39b). Because of the joy awaiting Him, Jesus pushed through the pain and bore the judgment we deserve. As a result of His obedience, Christ is now "seated in the place of honor beside God's throne" and we have been offered the priceless gift of salvation.

4. The Plain Truth states: "Keep your eyes on Jesus." In the space below, name some practical, faith-filled, proactive ways can we do this.

What has the Lord been saying to you about getting unstuck? Think about what would help you get back on-path, and write down what you are willing to do today to keep your eyes focused on Jesus.

Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of His understanding. He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion. But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:28-31).

One Year Bible Reading

Feb. 14: Exodus 37:1-38:31, Matthew 28:1-20, Psalm 34:11-22, Proverbs 9:9-10
Feb. 15: Exodus 39:1-40:38, Mark 1:1-28, Psalm 35:1-16, Proverbs 9:11-12
Feb. 16: Leviticus 1:1-3:17, Mark 1:29-2:12, Psalm 35:17-28, Proverbs 9:13-18
Feb. 17: Leviticus 4:1-5:19, Mark 2:13-3:6, Psalm 36:1-12, Proverbs 10:1-2
Feb. 18: Leviticus 6:1-7:27, Mark 3:7-30, Psalm 37:1-11, Proverbs 10:3-4
Feb. 19: Leviticus 7:28-9:6, Mark 3:31-4:25, Psalm 37:12-29, Proverbs 10:5
Feb. 20: Leviticus 9:7-10:20, Mark 4:26-5:20, Psalm 37:30-40, Proverbs 10:6-7

STUCK

Text: Hebrews 12:1-4

The Plain Truth:

The greatest source of controversy in any relationship is _____.

1. Focus on your _____.
2. Learn to _____ a good _____.
 - a. Don't _____ below the _____.
 - b. No _____ calling.
 - c. Don't _____ the wounded.
 - d. Never get _____.
3. Go the _____.
 - a. Invest in _____.
 - b. Think about the needs of _____ before _____ needs.
 1. A friend or someone you highly admire. _____
(One personality trait that you like about that person).
 2. Who, to you, exemplifies maturity in Christ?

 3. What couple you know has a strong marriage?
