

## Fixing Your Eyes on Jesus

**Introduction:** Today is a very special Sunday worship as we will witness and celebrate the baptism of Merry Baguio, Duncan Lee, & Yanni Wong.

Also, first Sunday in February, 1998 Cornerstone became an independent church; so for those who are good in math, this morning we are celebrating our 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary!

Three weeks ago Pastor Steve started this miniseries, “Start with Why”; in this liminal time – an in-between season - we aim to unpack Cornerstone's key statements of purpose—our Vision, Mission and Bedrock Statements, as well as a framework we use to shape our approach to ministry called the Discipleship Pathway. This morning we are going to look at our bedrock statement.

In the first two messages Pastor Steve had touched on the Vision (Embracing the JESUS who embraces the world) and Mission (Making space for JESUS to shape people together in God’s love) of Cornerstone.

As Pastor Steve reminded us, “Embrace is an evocative way of saying that God has called us to be and become a community of love ... Jesus’ loving embrace encompasses everyone— people from all walks of life, no matter their age, race, colour, nationality, or social status; no matter their religious background; no matter their past ... the way we go about doing that is by making space

for Jesus to shape people together in God’s love”

To make new connections with our neighbours and develop significant friendships, we are going to encourage everyone to make space to establish life rhythms, to explore new service opportunities and forge new partnerships that rally around the primary purpose of serving the community in Jesus’ name.

When we join Jesus in His life-community-cosmic transformation mission ...

**We are not going to a walk in the park; we are not on a boat cruise but a battleship!**

**We are not dealing with friendly companions but fierce oppositions.**

**We wrestle with internal struggles, encounter external testing and trial, and engage in spiritual warfare.**

When we were facing challenging times and trying circumstances, we put ourselves in a position where our weaknesses and limitations are exposed but God’s grace and mercy are magnified.

Allow me to share a few rough and tough moments we’d experienced as a church family:

- Opposition to multicultural/inter-cultural vision.
- Being a mobile congregation for 17 yrs.
- Building project challenges.

- Relational conflicts that threatened church unity.

How about you? What do you do, feel, or think when going through rough time?

Looking back to those trying moments in the past 23 years and in light of the challenging times post-pandemic, it is most appropriate to re-affirm our "Bedrock Statement" which is the underlying faith belief and conviction that provides security and stability as we fulfill God's purposes and partner with Him in His world restoring mission moving forward.

This "Bedrock Statement" is taken directly from scripture:

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1-3. NLT)

This passage reminds us where to turn for strength in times of trial & testing, crisis or

trouble, where and how we can always find hope for tomorrow.

The controlling admonition/exhortation of the author is **"let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us"** – a metaphor of running a marathon, not a sprint, with sustained effort that follows through and goes the distance, in a course with a goal and dogged determination to reaching the finish line. <sup>1</sup>

This word-picture admonition communicates to the athlete what to expect, where to go, what to reject, how to run in this race [**ἀγῶνα (agōna) – struggle, gruelling contest, fight; root word for English word "agony"**]!

This exhortation to run the race is sandwiched by two action-adjectives (i.e., participles), with the second one followed by a command, thus receiving greater emphasis and attention:

***"throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles..."***

***"let us run with perseverance the race..."***

***"fixing our eyes on Jesus ... Consider him..."***

The writer of Hebrews describes Jesus as

- ✓ the perfect revelation of God's mind and message,

<sup>1</sup> George Guthrie, *Hebrews*, p. 406: "The race image: (1) Some things in life must be rejected if we are to run effectively. (2) The Christian life ... is difficult and, therefore, takes sustained

effort. (3) If we are to live for God in a faithful manner, a healthy view of Christ and relationship with him are paramount."

- ✓ the one who represents God and carries out His world-restoring plan,
- ✓ the perfect man who can sympathize and empathize with us when going through times of temptations, loneliness, hardship, adversity, and rejection,
- ✓ he is the one who represents humankind and opens the way for all to be drawn closer to God,
- ✓ the one who is the pioneer-champion of our faith,
- ✓ who is the same yesterday, today, & tomorrow,
- ✓ the Shepherd of the sheep, and model of faith and obedience,
- ✓ the one who has rendered the devil powerless and overcome death,
- ✓ the one who intercedes for us while seated on the right side of our Heavenly Father,
- ✓ and the one who empowers us in our journey of faith and brings us to our future destination.

As we follow Jesus in His steps we will experience opposition, pain, suffering and rejection – as we seek to invade the enemies’ territories by sharing the good news of Jesus and by serving the community in His name, we should anticipate rejection and obstacles. Just as

Jesus was betrayed, mocked, assaulted, scourged, forsaken, rejected, imprisoned, falsely accused and killed, we will experience spiritual warfare and encounter fierce opposition.

But Jesus did not quit but remained faithful and honoured by God, as He sits on the right hand of the throne of His Father. When living out our faith in obedience the vision and mission God entrusted to us, we will face the challenges that come along the way, and we must **FIX OUR EYES ON JESUS**

Now let’s goes back to the main exhortation again:

**“let us run with perseverance the race...”**

The author’s accent of this action-adjective is on “with perseverance” – literally it is “with perseverance running marked before us the race ...”

This means that there’s careful planning, preparation, training, and discipline before the race as well as sustained until it’s completed – everything is about developing a robust rhythm and Jesus-shaped way of living on a daily basis.

As NT scholar Jon Laansma writes, “the runner breaks down every phase of the race from start to finish, crafting a stride and step and training every fiber of the body to move in precisely the correct way until it is instinct and reflex. It is in this way that the competitor strips away the sin of life, which means, everything that slows, distracts,

discourages, or potentially disqualifies in the singular pursuit of the way of Jesus.”<sup>2</sup>

So based on this passage let me suggest THREE practical applications to running this race/marathon.

1. Beware of distractions: “ ... let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles” (Hebrews 12:1).

This requires a personal, decisive decision to put aside anything that trips up, ensnares, or distracts the runner [Christ-follower] from doing what is at hand, i.e., running the race. The word picture here refers to superfluous clothes and anything that handicaps the runner, even the good things if they are not the best for achieving the goal.



This is a photo taken in 2001 when I started half marathon training: my training regiment was to gradually increase distance by doing walk & run ... and shaving my hairs off! But that is not what the author of Hebrews means when he writes, “throw off

everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles”!

“Certain possessions, hobbies, patterns of life, or even people can occupy us in a way so as to cool our hearts to Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

There are certain people or things that are not bad or sinful in and of themselves but should be evaluated in light of their impact on our running the race.

2. Make wise and discerning choices: “Fixing our eyes on Jesus” indicates the runner is aware of rival distractions or attractions – he deliberately and wisely looks away from other things that can derail his progress.<sup>4</sup> “Consider him [Jesus’ perseverance]” underlines the point that one must make wise choices that would enable him/her to accomplish the mission. finishing the race – choices that are based on criteria such as:

- ✓ **Faithfulness, not speed.**
- ✓ **Obedience, not convenience.**
- ✓ **Generosity, not hoarding.**
- ✓ **Sacrifice, not comfort.**
- ✓ **People, not project.**

<sup>2</sup> Jon Laansma, *Hebrews*, p. 300.

<sup>3</sup> George Guthrie, *Hebrews*, p. 411.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, p. 228.

3. Pursue the ultimate prize – keep moving forward to the finish line. “For **the joy** set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and **sat down at the right hand of the throne of God** ...<sup>3</sup> endured such opposition from sinners ...” (Hebrews 12:2-3.) Running this agonizing race with endurance/perseverance means we will

- not be content with short-term gain,
- not be fooled by quick successes,
- not be driven by immediate gratification,
- not quit in the midst of discomfort and difficulty,
- not be intimidated by fierce opposition.

While running this marathon and surrounded by the the cloud of witnesses and their affirming cheers (Heb. 11; 12:1a), Christians are admonished here to look beyond their present struggles and be encouraged by God’s delight that His will has been carried out;<sup>5</sup> those who persevere will receive Christ’s commendations (“Well done, good and faithful servant!”) and the “crown of righteousness” as He awaits at the finish line.

### Conclusion:

Jesus is the key and the convergent point of the Old and New Testament, the main plot, the unifying theme, and the protagonist or main character in God’s love story.

I love the word-pictures Len Sweet and Frank Viola use to describe the significance of Jesus:

“The entire Scriptures ... are unified by a common narrative ... telling story of God’s interactions, intersections, and interventions with humanity through the life of Jesus ... **the thread** that holds all Scripture together. He is **the prism** that breaks forth its multifaceted colors ... **the lens** that puts all of it into focus, **the switch** that sheds light on its dimly lit quarters, and **the key** that unlocks its meaning and richness ...”<sup>6</sup>

As we journey as a church in the last 20+ years and will continue in advancing the mission, we will – we must - fix our eyes on Jesus: look at him intently, watch him, not Satan or any opposition, not the crowd, not the circumstances, not ourselves.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, p. 229.

<sup>6</sup> Len Sweet & Frank Viola, *Jesus: A Theography*, p. x-xiv; *emphasis ours*.