

Introduction

This is a bit different for me. Normally, I'm the behind-the-scenes one talking about spreadsheets or logistics, not standing up here giving a sermon. So, if you were hoping for a budget update or a Sunday morning checklist, I'm sorry to disappoint — though I do have the latest expense report in my bag if anyone's interested afterward!

Over the last season, God has been stretching me so much – and teaching me about fixing my eyes on Him. It's from that place that I want to speak today.

For those of you who don't know me, I'm the Executive Director of Operations, a member of the Executive team, along with Pastor Steve and Pastor Jeremy.

And before moving back to Canada in 2021, we lived in Trinidad for almost 10 years.

One of our favourite things to do when we lived there was to be out on the water. One day, we took a boat trip with friends and family. We had done it many times before and felt confident — perhaps too confident. We knew there was a chance of rain, but we figured we could make the trip and be back long before it hit. But this time was different.

On the way back, we hit whiteout conditions. Massive waves, sheets of rain, and zero visibility. What should have been a 20-minute ride became 2 hours of uncertainty. The boat had no compass — we had just gotten it repaired and hadn't bothered to reinstall the compass nor the radio. Our cell phones were either soaked or dead. We were lost.

Then, through the haze, we saw what looked like an oil rig — which was not uncommon as the country's main industry is oil and gas, but it could also mean that we were close to Venezuela depending on which rig it was. Without knowing exactly where we were, we dropped anchor, and that oil rig became our fixed point. We watched the storm rage around us, but we held our position as best as we could. We waited, patiently and prayerfully, until eventually, we saw a small clearing in the clouds, and we could faintly see land.

That oil rig — it became our anchor, our place of endurance. We fixed our eyes on it. And we prayed. And eventually, through the whiteout – not just mist and rain, but full-on whiteout conditions - we saw what looked like a clearing. There was a break in the storm, almost like the parting of the Red Sea. It sounds dramatic, but that's what it

looked like in the moment. We followed the clearing slowly and carefully, keeping our eyes fixed on that one safe path — and sure enough, it brought us to land. In that moment, that oil rig was our Jesus — We endured that storm because we had something to hold onto.

That's who Jesus is for us – our anchor in the storm.

But the passage we're looking at today in Hebrews gives us another metaphor to work with — not just a storm, but a race. And not the quick 100-metre dash kind of race. We're talking long-distance, endurance, marathon kind.

So, what does a stormy sea and a long-distance run have in common? Hopefully by the end of our time together, that'll be more than just a riddle.

Now, over the past couple weeks, we've been walking through a series called **Why We're Here**. Both Pastor Jeremy and Pastor Steve helped us zoom out to see the bigger picture – reminding us that our **Vision, Mission**, and **Bedrock Statements** aren't just slogans, but biblical reflections of why God has called Cornerstone into being. And that's more important now than ever, especially as we look toward where God is leading us next as a church.

If you are newer to Cornerstone, this series is a way to see the heart of who we are. If you've been here for a while, it's a fresh reminder of what we're about and why it still matters.

Today, we come to our **Bedrock Statement** from Hebrews 12:2-3, "**Let us fix our eyes on Jesus**", which is our underlying faith belief and conviction that reminds us that through every challenge, every season, every calling — our focus must remain on Christ, the One who leads, perfects, and strengthens our faith. It is what we turn to when we find ourselves feeling confusion, or stress in trying to live out our **Vision, Mission** and **core values**. And as we move forward faithfully in this season of discernment, as we listen and ask God what's next, we need something to hold onto. Fixing our eyes on Jesus – isn't just something we do on our own – it's what we need to do together. It's how we stay united. It's how we stay clear. It's how we don't lose our way.

Background of Hebrews

Now the book of Hebrews is generally believed to be written before the end of the first century, likely sometime between A.D. 60 and 90. And this makes sense based on the tone and appeal to the audience. There is some consensus among Scholars that Hebrews was written to a group of relatively new Jewish Christians who were facing a lot of pressure and persecution because of their faith. Many were tempted to drift back into their old ways — to return to the safety of traditional Judaism and avoid the hardships that came with following Christ.

Then and Now

As a church, Cornerstone has faced its own mix of storms, pressures, uncertainties, and opposition in our journey as a church community:

- When Pastor Andrew, our founding pastor shared the vision of a multicultural church, critics said it would divide the Chinese church. But we trusted God's faithfulness, and that trust carried the vision forward.
- When we dreamed of building our own community centre, critics and obstacles surfaced. Yet we hoped in God's promise and that propelled us forward.
- During COVID, we had to pivot through confusion and hardship, yet we obeyed God's call to stay connected.
- More recently, just before Easter, when our stage curtain broke the night before baptizing 12 people, we could have panicked. But we trusted in God, and we pressed on.

And just as we've seen storms in the past, we know more will come. As we continue this season of discernment, we can anticipate new kinds of resistance:

- It can be hard to stay united when we're such a beautifully diverse community, with different backgrounds, perspectives, and expectations.
- It's easy to get excited about all the good ideas – and then lose sight of the main thing God is calling us to.
- And sometimes, it's just, the quiet weariness that can creep in when we've been waiting, praying, and not seeing clear answers yet.

The pressures and challenges may look different from the first century, but the call remains the same: **Fix our eyes on Jesus.**

What does It Mean to Fix Our Eyes on Jesus?

We fix our eyes on Jesus by first learning **who** Jesus is, **what** He has done, and **why** he's worth our full attention.

Now, let's take a closer look at our passage:

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, ² 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. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Hebrews 12:2-3 NIV

We can learn so much from these few verses, but it would take a lot more time than the 20 mins we have today. So, I'll just highlight a couple of points that speak to us not just personally, but in this season of discernment.

1. Jesus Clears the Path – and Walks It With Us

In Hebrews Jesus is called the "**pioneer and perfecter**" — or the author and finisher — of our faith. This means He's not **only** the One who starts our faith journey, but **the One** who brings it to completion — just as Philippians 1:6 echoes, when Paul says, "**He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**"

As the **pioneer**, Jesus cleared the path of faith ahead of us (just as he did for us on that boat that day). Bible Scholar F.F. Bruce describes him as the "trailblazer"¹ — the one who cleared the way through betrayal, suffering, and ultimately, the cross. As the **perfecter**, every step He took was in obedience and confidence that the Father's will was good.

In Roman Culture, crucifixion wasn't just a form of execution — it was public humiliation. It was reserved for slaves and criminals; it was designed to shame². Jesus was mocked, beaten, stripped, and treated as valueless.

¹ Bruce, F.F., The Epistle to the Hebrews, 337

² Guthrie, G., The NIV Application Commentary Hebrews, p. 399

Yet, Hebrews says He "**scorned the shame**" - meaning He looked beyond it, choosing to honor the Father instead.

Following Jesus sometimes leads us into hard places too. It means saying yes to God when everything in us wants to say no. It might mean forgiving someone who hurt you, staying faithful when life feels dry, or doing what's right when it's unpopular.

Obedience takes courage. And it can come with quiet costs: strained relationships, internal tension, unseen sacrifices. But Jesus shows us it's worth it. He didn't just talk about obedience – He lived it, all the way through suffering, so we could follow Him with the strength he provides.

And it didn't stop at suffering. Hebrews 12:3 says, "**consider Him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**"

Jesus didn't just endure the pain — He endured the people. He endured abandonment, rejection, public misunderstanding, false accusations, and violence — and yet He didn't give up. He didn't turn inward or retaliate. He kept walking.

We face opposition too – sometimes personally:

- Maybe you've been called narrow-minded or old-fashioned because you try to live by what the bible says.
- Maybe you've felt lonely when you're the only one in your family or friend group trying to follow Jesus.
- At work, there may be pressure to stay quiet about your values – or to compromise on things that matter.
- Doing the right thing can sometimes bring a whole new level to "FOMO" (sorry kids). In other words, doing the right thing can sometimes mean missing out or facing quiet disappointment no one else sees.

As a church, we may face opposition as we try to live out our mission:

- We might wrestle with the reality that not everyone will get why we care so much about being an intercultural community. It's part of our calling – but the intention can be misunderstood or even questioned.
- Discernment is rarely easy. We won't all agree on every next step.

- And when we talk about growing ministries or changing how we use space, it can stir up discomfort. Change, even when it's good, can feel disruptive.

These things are not small – they're real. But when Hebrews tells us to "consider Him," it's not minimizing our struggle — it's reminding us that He understands.

And it gives us perspective. When we reflect on what Jesus endured, it doesn't make our suffering meaningless — it helps put it in its place. It reminds us that we are not alone.

He calls us to run this race with our eyes not on ourselves nor our circumstances — but fixed on Him, our guide and our goal. He gives us not only the route but also the endurance to run. He doesn't leave us to figure it out on our own. So, we fix our eyes, not on our stress, not on the fog – but on Him.

2. Jesus Endured for Joy – and so can we

Hebrews 12:2 continues: ***"For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame."***

What motivated Jesus to endure the agony of the cross? The cross itself wasn't joyful and Golgotha shows us the horror and weight of it. Jesus saw past the suffering. He saw what the cross would accomplish. He saw US. HIS people. He saw redemption, restoration, and reunion with us. That gave him the strength to keep going - to endure the unimaginable. It wasn't joy *in* the cross – it was joy *beyond* the cross.

And that same joy is offered to us. The joy of being faithful, even when it's hard. It's the joy of remembering the days when we were a mobile church — when every Sunday meant packing the truck, unloading it into the community centre, setting up chairs, sound gear, signage, and then doing it all over again in reverse — because we believed it was worth it. It's the joy of thinking back to the building campaign, when so many stretched their faith and their finances to make the Cornerstone Centre a reality. Not because it was easy — but because we knew what it could become: a place of welcome, ministry, and mission.

It's the joy of seeing 12 people get baptized last Easter, or a newcomer finally feel like they belong. It's the joy of watching someone take a courageous next step in their walk with Jesus — maybe joining a small group, or serving in children's ministry, or finding

healing through Grief Share. It's the joy of seeing a family show up week after week, even when life is messy.

Especially in this season of discernment, that joy reminds us why we're listening so carefully, why we're seeking God's direction. We're not just planning programs – we're planting seeds of faith that will bless those who come after us. The joy of **making space for others**. That's what fuels us.

Practical application:

So how do we live this out – not just as individuals, but as a church in this season?

"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, fixing our eyes on Jesus." (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Chapter 12 begins with the word, "therefore", it connects us to all of chapter 11 – the great cloud of witnesses, many people call them the "Hall of Faith" – a great long list of men and women like Adam and Eve, Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, etc., - their lives weren't perfect, but they trusted God even when things didn't make sense. It draws an image of them cheering us on, but not necessarily as spectators. As bible scholar F.F. Bruce puts it, "it is not so much they look at us as we look to them – for encouragement"³.

I love that visual of a cloud of witnesses, and I think we can also see that cloud when we look at some of the faithful people who helped build Cornerstone:

- Those who packed and unpacked the truck every single Sunday when we were a mobile church — rain, snow, or shine.
- The families who gave sacrificially during the building campaign, not knowing if they'd ever benefit from it themselves.
- The prayer warriors who kept interceding behind the scenes when few others saw or even knew.

They're a part of our cloud. And now, we're in the race they've handed off to us, many still running with us.

³ Bruce, F.F., The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 333

So how can we keep running? Will we become part of the great cloud of witnesses one day because of the choices we made today? How do we live it out?

1. Throw off What Entangles

Hebrews 12:1 says, “**Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.**” It’s a twofold call to run well: remove the things that weigh us down **and** the sin that trips us up. Picture a runner stripping off a heavy jacket before a race — not because it’s evil, but because it slows them down.

“Certain possessions, hobbies, patterns of life, or even people can occupy us in a way so as to cool our hearts to Christ. There are certain people or things that are not bad or sinful in and of themselves but should be evaluated in light of their effect on our running the race”⁴. Some hindrances might be good things but just in the wrong place.

Others are clearly sin — pride, envy, bitterness, fear.

Ask yourself what’s slowing you down? what’s tangling your feet?

The Holy Spirit is faithful to show us what’s holding us back.

For some of us, it may mean moving from observing to participating. If you’ve been around Cornerstone and have admired the vision or appreciated the community but haven’t yet jumped in — this is the moment. Join us. Step off the fence. Serve. Give. Be part of the mission. There’s room in the race for you, and there’s joy in running it together.

2. Run with Perseverance, Even When It’s Hard

This isn’t a sprint. It’s a marathon. And marathons require more than adrenaline — they require endurance. Keep moving forward, even when things get difficult, just as Jesus endured the cross.

Perseverance isn’t about speed — it’s about being faithful. Staying in the race, even when the road is long, uphill, or foggy. Sometimes, you may feel like you’re barely jogging — or even limping. But if your eyes are fixed on Jesus, you’re still moving in the right direction.

⁴ Guthrie, G, Hebrews, p. 411

So let us run with endurance — not just on our own merit, but with courage, with steadiness, and with our eyes locked on Jesus like a laser beam.

Jesus is not just watching from the finish line. He's right there along the race, giving you bottles of water, and a towel as you run. He's the author and finisher of your faith. He's invested in your race.

- If you're new to faith and not sure what to expect — Jesus is your starting point.
- If you're stuck in doubt or discouraged by slow growth — Jesus is not finished with you.
- If you're tempted to give up — He hasn't, and He won't.

Cornerstone, this time of discerning our next chapter as a church is part of the race. There will be moments when it feels foggy, like we're not sure what lies ahead. There may be disagreement, fatigue, even moments of doubt. But perseverance doesn't mean speed – it means staying faithful, steady, and prayerful.

Which brings me to the third and final practical point.

3. Re-anchor Daily

Life pulls us in a hundred different directions. Work, school, family, full calendars, your notifications — all of it is shouting for your attention. And if we're not intentional, our eyes start drifting. Not always in big dramatic ways, but in those small daily distractions that slowly pull our focus off Jesus.

That's why fixing our eyes on Him isn't just a **one-time decision** — it's a **daily rhythm**. A daily choice. Like a runner who keeps checking the path ahead and adjusting their pace — we need regular moments to realign, refocus, re-anchor.

It might be opening Scripture even if it's just for a few verses. Whispering a prayer while you're in the car. Taking five minutes of silence before you pick up your phone. Sitting with Jesus before you race into the next thing.

The storms will come. Distractions will multiply. Opposition will wear us down.

And that's why we look back too – to remember. We've been here before. During the building of Cornerstone Centre, we faced significant financial gaps and uncertainty.

There were times when we didn't know how the vision would become reality. But we trusted. We prayed. We fixed our eyes on Jesus — and He brought us through.

So, we shouldn't be surprised if this season brings its own challenges. There will be financial pressures. There may be limited resources. There will likely be more questions than answers. But just like before, the God who provided then is the same God who walks with us now.

If we've trained our eyes to find Him in the fog — we'll have something solid to hold onto. We won't get it right all the time, but we just need a heart that keeps coming back to Jesus that says: *"Here I am again. I need you. Help me see you today."*

So, keep running. Keep returning. The One we look to has already won. And He's not just calling us forward — He's running with us.

So, what do we do when the storms come, and the race seems long? **We Fix our Eyes on Jesus.**