



Let's talk about faith tonight. I bet you didn't expect that at church, right? Ok, so I know a lesson about faith might not be super exciting, but I promise it's relevant. Here's the thing, faith is only as good as the thing you put your faith in, and sometimes it doesn't work out. If what you have faith in fails, well then, you aren't left with much, are you?

[Teacher Note: The opening illustration should be something lighthearted about faith or trust in something that failed you.]

We have faith in big things, but we can also have faith in small and insignificant things. When I was in college everyone had an iPod, and yes, these were the ancient days before everyone had smartphones. I however, had a Zune. Before you throw me into the box of shame let me explain why I made this decision. Compared to other phones, the Zune had a much larger screen, better sound quality, built-in radio, and the ability to wirelessly share songs with other Zuners. Also, it was backed by Microsoft, who at the time was one of the largest tech companies in the world. I thought there was no way I was making the wrong choice, so I put my faith and loyalty in the Zune brand and Microsoft. Boy, was I wrong! The Zune turned out to be a huge flop.

It takes a lot for us to have faith in things, and we want that faith to be validated and to last, especially in days such as these. But how do you find enduring faith? One that won't put you to shame, and one that will last even through the toughest of days? That's what we're going to look at tonight.

If you have your Bibles turn to the book of Hebrews, we'll be in chapter twelve, verses one and two. While you are finding that, let me give you a little background on the book. We aren't sure who wrote Hebrews, but we do know why the author wrote it. The author wanted everyone to know that Jesus is a big deal. The author argued that Jesus was a much bigger deal than any of the other religious patriarchs his audience would have been familiar with, in fact, he argues all the other biblical patriarchs pointed forward to Jesus. Jesus is the perfect priest, prophet, king, sacrifice, and revelation of God the father. In other words, without Jesus, faith amounts to nothing. Faith depends upon Jesus.

If faith is dependent upon Jesus, then let's answer this question tonight: how do I develop an enduring faith in Him?

Read Hebrews 12:1-2, 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.

I think if we break this passage down the author is telling us we should take three actions.

The first thing the author tells us is that we should shake off whatever trips up our faith.

I love the New Testament writers; they were sports fans and used analogies that I can understand pretty quickly because I too am a sports fan. Ancient sports competitions were a little different than ours. The runners wanted everyone to know that they were big deals, so they would enter the arena wearing long flowing robes that were brightly colored to get everyone's attention. Here's the problem though, you can't run in a robe, it's just for show. Basically, the athletes would strip off whatever constricted their running form and, honestly, most of them ran naked! Sorry for the mental image I just gave you. The author points to this fact, something his readers would have been familiar with and basically said that in order to run well in the faith we have to be like track and field athletes and get rid of anything that is going to trip us up.

In the previous chapter, the author gave the rundown on a hall of fame list of faith heroes from the Old Testament and briefly described what they accomplished through faith. He said those people who ran well in their lifetime now surround us like a cheering crowd as we run too. Here's the thing about those heroes though, they all faced significant obstacles that had to be overcome or cast off like restricting garments so they could run well. Some had to overcome fear, many were treated as outcasts, others turned down vast wealth and power to do what God wanted them to do. They weren't any smarter, craftier or more special than us, they just had faith in God as they ran and got rid of all the things that tripped them up.