

**The Perseverance of Faith (Hebrews 11:39-12:13)**  
**Living by Faith pt. 4**  
Pastor Tim Peck

**THE BIG IDEA**

True faith will persevere over a lifetime. To persevere in our faith, we need the encouragement of the crowd, we need to let go of whatever holds us back, we need to look past the struggle to the goal, we need to receive hardship as loving instruction, and we need to stay on the course.

**OPENING**

- Have you ever competed in a sport? What was this experience like for you?
- Can you think of a person from church history who you admire? What makes you admire this person?

**DIGGING DEEPER**

- Read Hebrews 11:39-40. The verb translated “made perfect” in v. 40 can mean “to successfully complete an activity.”<sup>1</sup> According to Pastor Tim, this implies that the race in Hebrews 12:1-2 is pictured as a relay race, with the men and women of faith in chapter 11 running an earlier leg of the race. They have now passed the baton to us to run the next leg. How does this understanding of the race impact how you understand these verses?
- The cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 12:1 are the people of faith who have gone before us. According to Pastor Tim, this also includes examples from church history and people we have known personally who left behind an example of faith after they died. Who have been your examples of faith?
- Re-read 12:1. According to Bible scholar Mary Healy, *“Like disciplined athletes who shed all excess body weight as well as unnecessary clothing...we do well to remove any bulk or burden that might impede our progress. In light of Hebrews 10:32–34, this could include an excessive attachment to possessions or worldly security or the esteem of others. They especially include any sin that clings to us, or ‘entangles’ or ‘obstructs’ us, like an obstacle on the racetrack that could trip us up and hinder us*

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<sup>1</sup>J. P. Louw and E. Nida, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* (United Bible Societies), 68.22

*from reaching the finish line.*"<sup>2</sup> Can you think of anything that is currently tripping you up in your race of faith?

- Hebrews 12:5-11 pictures our hardships in life as God's fatherly discipline. Based on how your father (or father figures) disciplined you, is this an easy or a difficult idea for you to accept? The word "discipline" describes a parent or a teacher's instruction or teaching in a child's life. Verse 5 describes the temptation to "make light" of God's discipline, and the temptation to "lose heart" when we experience God's discipline. Are you most tempted to "make light" or "lose heart" when you go through hardships?
- Hebrews 12:12-13 picture the end of the race, with the runner exhausted and nearly ready to give up. According to Tom Long, "*At the beginning of this chapter, the Preacher roused his congregation with the exciting picture of a footrace. Banners were flying, the stadium was filled with spectators, and the members of the congregation were urged to respond like trained athletes: stripping off the weights and running like greyhounds toward the tape (12:1). But now, after wrestling once more with the vexing problem of suffering and pain (12:3–11), the Preacher advances a somewhat different image: the Christian as a runner with a limp.*"<sup>3</sup> Is your current experience more like the beginning or ending of the race?

## PUTTING IT TO WORK

- Spend 15 minutes in silence while you're alone, asking God to search your heart and show you anything that may be hindering you from persevering in your faith. Write down what God shows you and keep this list close for the rest of the week. Ask God to show you how to let go of the things on your list.
- Read Matthew chapters 5-7 this week, seeking to "consider" Jesus. What do you notice about his priorities?

## PRAYER REQUESTS

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<sup>2</sup>Mary Healy, *Hebrews* (Baker Books), p. 259.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas G. Long, *Hebrews, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), p. 134