

Week 2 of “Living By Faith” Sermon Series

“Faith That Runs the Marathon”

Transcribed using turboscribe.ai

Sermon Preached: Sunday 17th August 2025

Preacher: Pastor Jason Sander

Location: St Peter's Lutheran Church, Loxton

Sermon Text: [Hebrews 11:29-12:2](#)

You may be seated. My friends, grace, mercy and peace to you in the name of our Lord and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Let me pray.

Father God, we give you thanks for your word, which reveals to us your love, your grace, your forgiveness. Lord, as we gather round your word, may your Holy Spirit work in our hearts to sustain the faith that you have planted in us to strengthen our trust in you, transforming us into the likeness of your Son Jesus. Come Holy Spirit and may the words that I speak be pleasing to you for your people gathered here this morning, Lord.

Amen. Most of you here would know that I'm not a long-distance runner. If you don't, you can probably tell from the physique that I'm not a long-distance runner.

But, you know, give me a short sprint and I might give it my best effort, probably a few injuries along the way, but a marathon, well, that's a completely different story. Marathon, it's long, it's grueling. I think it requires something far beyond that burst of energy for a 50-metre or 100-metre run.

It requires perseverance. It requires endurance. We think of that image.

We come to what the Rite of the Hebrews tells us, what the life of faith is like. The life of faith, it's not a sprint, but it's a marathon. It's not about starting with enthusiasm and burning out quickly.

It's about running steadily, running through the highs and the lows of life until we reach that finish line. We're continuing our series, Living by Faith, and last week we looked at the beginning of Chapter 11, the idea that faith is a gift and it says, faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. That's what the ancients were commended of.

We explored that faith is not something that we dig out from inside ourselves. Faith is not a matter of feelings or special character, having a positive outlook. Faith is a gift from God.

It's his work in us, not our work for him. Faith leads us to trust in God. Faith leads us to serve God, to love God and to love others.

That's why we can say with confidence that even when we feel weak, even when our faith feels shaky, we still have that gift because God himself has given it to us in Jesus Christ. And so it's here that through Chapter 11 of Hebrews, and you can follow along and sort of flip through if you want to on your devices or if you have a Bible, you'll see that the writer gives these examples of these Old Testament characters which might be called the heroes of faith

as such. Abraham and Sarah, the very first family of God in Genesis 12, were told about them and how they live by faith.

And we go through all these different names. Today we heard about Israel crossing the Red Sea, taking that step of leaving Egypt and heading towards the vision of what God was promising, of a new land, a new hope. And by faith they went.

Obviously they did some grumbling along the way and things didn't go perfect, but in faith they crossed that sea. We have this list of other peoples who saw great victories, who had bouts of strength, who did wonderful things for God's kingdom and it was by their faith that they were able to have these victories. But then there's also those who suffered, who were tortured, who were mocked, who were imprisoned, who were even put to death because of their faith.

Some experienced triumph, others only tragedy, but both alike were people of faith. People to be commended for their faith, the writer of Hebrews says in verse 30. Yet none of these received what was promised.

What was promised? Well, looking towards Christ. The death and resurrection of Christ, life in him. They waited, they did not see, and by faith they trusted in God.

Faith is not about the results, it's not about whether life turns out the way we want it to. It's about trusting in God's promises, whether in joy or in suffering. The thing is though is people, we love those stories of miracles, of victories, those triumphs, but not so much the stories of loss, of grief.

Yet the gift of faith holds us steady through both. A few years ago I was talking with a friend who had run a marathon and told me about something runners call hitting the wall, and we use that term in other circumstances, but they have this term called hitting the wall and it usually happens around the 30 kilometre mark. Your legs feel like lead, your chest is tight and your body screams out, you're finished, you're done, you can't do any more, you've got nothing left.

Here's the thing, what they said is that runners who pushed through discovered that their body actually has reserves of strength. What feels like the end is not the end and the more fuel in the tank and that there is more fuel in the tank than what they actually realised. And those hidden reserves carry them further than they thought possible.

Now obviously if I was to run a marathon my reserve tanks would run out pretty quickly, probably after the 50 metre mark, but these are trained professional people. The marathon really tests, it's a real big test of perseverance. Now think about that professional marathon runner, our life of faith can feel like that too.

There's times when we hit that wall, when grief is too much to bear, when doubts crowd our minds, when our prayers echo back unanswered, and we wonder what is going on, because most we feel like we've got nothing left to give. But you know, just like that marathon runner, my friend, we're not left empty. And the truth is that faith isn't something we have to generate from our own strength, it's God's gift to us, it's always there.

When we feel like we can't take another step, we hold on, we cling to Jesus and see that what we cannot muster on our own, he can. It's a faith that trusts in what God can do. And so the writer to the Hebrews, he directs our eyes to others to find assurance.

It comes in at that great therefore, 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. Who are these witnesses? Well, they're the people of faith in Hebrews 11 that we just talked about and heard about. See, in a marathon, it's the people on the sidelines who usually cheer the runners on to keep them going.

But what Hebrews are saying is, is the people who have run the race, those who run the race, who bear witness to God's faithfulness, they're the ones that cheer us on, the ones that have experienced it. They cheer us on saying, yeah God can be trusted, keep going, he won't let you down, you'll get there. You know, even maybe people in your own life who have been a great witness of faith here in the now, not just Bible characters who we can definitely look to and find encouragement, but maybe people like a parent, a grandparent, a friend, a teacher, maybe someone in this very congregation.

You know, I have to give thanks to God for people I come across in ministry who give me great encouragement in God's faithfulness and witness to him. Many people, many of you here, that encouragement to run the race, to persevere amid hardship, amid doubts, just clinging on to Christ and his faith. It's often those quiet ones, the ones we don't see, the ones we cling to Christ and trust in him.

I thank God for you and those people who have that faith and speak it and live it. My point is we're not running alone. We have people to support us and we can also support others in the marathon or living by faith too.

And so the writer of the Hebrews says, so let us throw off everything that hinders them, the sin that so easily entangles. So as we're running this race and we're part of it as a community and personally, we throw off the things that are going to hinder us. Can you imagine a marathon runner carrying a backpack with a water bottle or a water bladder with just encased items like maybe another pair of shoes or some socks if they get wet, a rain jacket if it rains, a towel to wipe off the sweat.

It doesn't happen, does it? Marathon runner doesn't carry a backpack, they strip down to the essentials, the lightest clothing, they remove any hindrance, any unnecessary weight. So it makes us think about the writer of the Hebrews saying, in this life of faith, let go of what drags you down. Let go of what drags you down.

What might that mean? The dictionary says a hindrance is something that delays progress, things that distract us or take us off course. If we reflect on our lives at the moment, could we identify things that distract us or take us off course? Maybe there's some stresses that we have put on ourselves that make our lives more challenging, too many commitments, too many financial burdens trying to impress other people, unhealthy relationships, things that distract us from the race. The writer says let go of these things.

They say throw off the sin that entangles us, that trap us, that cause us to trip up and injure ourselves. I think of how sea life unfortunately gets entangled in rubbish and plastic things

like those drink holder things you find, birds and sea life getting caught up in that. That's the image that the writer to the Hebrews gives you.

Don't get entangled in this stuff, that can slow you down, that can cause you to stumble, to stop. So we need to pay attention to that stuff that can trap us and trip us, those things that lead us to think, I don't need God or God can't be trusted or I can do it on my own, because that's what sin also means, it's turning away from God and thinking we can do it on our own strength. And so to put off this sin that entangles us, it means looking to Christ.

It means repenting, that means turning back to Him, admitting I can't do this race on my own, I need you Jesus to help me. And so we look to the one who is the champion, the one who died for us so that we can participate. Are there any hindrances that you need to throw off at this time? In the 2014 Boston Marathon, as the finish line loomed, one exhaust a runner succumbed to exhaustion and collapsed, just metres from the end.

Rather than just passing by, four fellow runners stopped, one wrapped an arm around them and others joined in and together they carried this person across the finish line. The crowd erupted in cheers at this extraordinary act of compassion, solidarity. The writer Hebrews says, and let us run with perseverance, the race marked out for us.

Perseverance may seem to come from inner strength or resolve, but in the life of faith, comes from the Holy Spirit who sustains the faith He has given us, trusting in God's faithfulness in Christ. But perseverance also means that the church, the body of Christ, is cheering us on too, carrying us through the tough times, helping us to persevere. And so led by the Spirit, we pick up our brothers and sisters in Christ, we help them to keep going.

But when we also struggle, we allow them to help us, to carry us. Often we find that harder to receive help, but greater giving it. Sometimes we struggle to allow others to support us, to help us persevere.

There's someone that you can help in their faith journey at this time. Do you need to allow others to help you? The writer of the Hebrews finishes off by saying, look to Jesus, who is the pioneer and the perfecter of faith. Faith is not about looking within, it's about looking to Jesus.

He is the one who begins faith in us. He is that pioneer. He's also the one who completes it.

He's the perfecter. He's the one who endured the cross, despised its shame and now sits the right hands at the throne of God. That means that the race is already won.

That the victory is certain and the faith he has given you will carry you to the finish because it is his work from start to finish. And so when our faith feels weak, we don't need to despair. Faith doesn't rest on how strong we may feel, it rests on Christ who is strong for you.

You may feel like your faith is small, but remember that Jesus said even faith the size of a mustard seed is enough. Faith that clings to him. Where are your eyes fixed at the moment? What helps you keep your focus on Jesus when life is difficult? Friends, as we go through

this journey called faith, as we run that marathon, we run with the community around us, we run with the Lord and Jesus who has already won the race and hasn't had the victory.

When we cross that line we all receive that medal finished, well done, good and faithful servant. That's the prize that we keep our eyes on in the ups and in the downs of faith. You're struggling at this time with what you may feel like a weak faith, remember, faith that you have is strong because it's what God has given to you in Christ.

There may be circumstances that maybe make your trust waver. We pray for you at this time that trust may increase in the promises of God and his faithfulness. But let us look to those in the faith who have gone before us and their faithfulness, but ultimately who fixed our eyes on Jesus, who died for us, who rose again and gives us life here and now and into the future.

To him be praise and glory forevermore. Amen. So my friends, may the peace of God which passes all our understanding, may it guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.