

Sermon by David Reed

April 29, 2007 CrossRoads

*Hebrews 12:1-17; James 1:2-4; 2 Peter 1:3-8; Romans 5:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:7-8;15-16*

I ran cross country in High School and college. Once in college (really, only a two year college) our coach had an endurance measuring tool we all despised. It wasn't the 10 miles of intervals on the track (40 laps) but I really hated that one, It wasn't the torturous hill repeats on the steepest  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile hill coach could find, It wasn't the twice a day workouts we did in the early season to get our legs back.

It was the date pace workout we did twice a year – once early in training and than about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the way through the season. It did not have anything to do with how many girls we were dating – or how often (Milton) – We were sent out 5 minutes apart, for a six mile warm up and stretching run that was supposed to take 43 minutes total. When we returned we ran onto the track and when we hit the start/finish line we went all out, as hard as we could - for a mile.

It wasn't the fastest mile we could run because pace was not in consideration. It was a test to see what kind of shape you were really in – what kind of endurance we really had - and it revealed how strong a team we really were.

By the end you felt like your lungs were coming up with the next breath and your legs were having an away from the body experience. It was just a 7 mile, less than one hour day, the shortest training day of all, but we all dreaded it. During the mile all the guys already done stood – well, sat – on the grass at the finish and shouted encouragement to the one or two still on the track.

What it did was important. By it our coach could tell how much we had improved – or not, at what levels we needed to be training so we could get stronger without fatiguing, and he could see where each of our weaknesses were. He then zeroed in on strengthening us individually and as a team. There were always adjustments made to our training after date pace days.

In Hebrews 12:1-17 the writer makes a comparison of our lives of faith with a race.

**1 Do you see what this means - all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running - and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. 2 Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed - that exhilarating finish in and with God - he could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. 3 When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story**

again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!

**4** In this all-out match against sin, others have suffered far worse than you, to say nothing of what Jesus went through - all that bloodshed! **5** So don't feel sorry for yourselves. Or have you forgotten how good parents treat children, and that God regards you as his children? My dear child, don't shrug off God's discipline, but don't be crushed by it either. **6** It's the child he loves that he disciplines; the child he embraces, he also corrects. **7** God is educating you; that's why you must never drop out. He's treating you as dear children. This trouble you're in isn't punishment; it's training, **8** the normal experience of children. Only irresponsible parents leave children to fend for themselves. Would you prefer an irresponsible God? **9** We respect our own parents for training and not spoiling us, so why not embrace God's training so we can truly live? **10** While we were children, our parents did what seemed best to them. But God is doing what is best for us, training us to live God's holy best.

**11** At the time, discipline isn't much fun. It always feels like it's going against the grain. Later, of course, it pays off handsomely, for it's the well-trained who find themselves mature in their relationship with God. **12** So don't sit around on your hands! No more dragging your feet! **13** Clear the path for long-distance runners so no one will trip and fall, so no one will step in a hole and sprain an ankle. Help each other out. And run for it! **14** Work at getting along with each other and with God. Otherwise you'll never get so much as a glimpse of God. **15** Make sure no one gets left out of God's generosity. Keep a sharp eye out for weeds of bitter discontent. A thistle or two gone to seed can ruin a whole garden in no time. **16** Watch out for the Esau syndrome: trading away God's lifelong gift in order to satisfy a short-term appetite. **17** You well know how Esau later regretted that impulsive act and wanted God's blessing - but by then it was too late, tears or no tears.

Endurance was the key to success as cross country runners and it was trainable – meaning by training you could gain more endurance and become stronger.

Our faith journeys are the same. Instead of pounding out miles ours is another training that produces endurance of faith - this training is our struggles, hardship, health, relationships, work, decisions – what happens when living gets in the way of our plans - to gain more strength and endurance of faith as followers of Jesus.

Looking around this last week it seemed it was a good time for us to – run a test, look at our faith pace to evaluate how enduring our faith really is – because, if we look there's a lot of struggle and hardship going in this little fellowship...or should I say there's a lot of strength training in faith going around.

When we are enduring through difficulty, it is so very important that we see the horizon, the reason for struggle and the finish, the goal of what we are going through. If I have this right, and it is consistent with what I have seen in others, read in God's training manual, and experienced in my own life– struggle is the way I grow a stronger and grow a more enduring faith.

I cannot say all of it is from God's own hand but I know from all God's promises and as a believer and follower of Jesus – that God is in every moment of this journey of faith, every step and stumble, each time we endure a test and finish victorious, and every time we come to a weary stop saying – I can't go on...God is there and all of this is to strengthen not tear down.

In Cross-country we knew there were a few keys to success

- There is no substitute for miles.
- You can't do it alone
- You had to believe in training for race day
- Garbage in – Garbage out

In faith training there are also essentials –

- **Faith -**

**2 Peter 1: 2 Grace and peace to you many times over as you deepen in your experience with God and Jesus, our Master. 3 Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God. The best invitation we ever received! 4 We were also given absolutely terrific promises to pass on to you - your tickets to participation in the life of God after you turned your back on a world corrupted by lust.**

**5 So don't lose a minute in building on what you've been given, complementing your basic faith with good character, spiritual understanding, 6 alert discipline, passionate patience, reverent wonder, 7 warm friendliness, and generous love, each dimension fitting into and developing the others. 8 With these qualities active and growing in your lives, no grass will grow under your feet, no day will pass without its reward as you mature in your experience of our Master Jesus.**

**James 1:2 Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. 3 You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. 4 So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.**

- **Fellowship -**

**Romans 15:1 Those of us who are strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter, and not just do what is most convenient for us. Strength is for service, not status. 2 Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?" 3 That's exactly what Jesus did. He didn't make it easy for himself by avoiding people's troubles, but waded right in and helped out. "I took on the troubles of the troubled," is the way Scripture puts it. 4 Even if it was written in Scripture long ago, you can be sure it's written for us. God wants the combination of his steady, constant calling and warm, personal counsel in Scripture to come to characterize us, keeping us alert for whatever he will do next.**

**5** May our dependably steady and warmly personal God develop maturity in you so that you get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us all. **6** Then we'll be a choir - not our voices only, but our very lives singing in harmony in a stunning anthem to the God and Father of our Master Jesus!

- **Prayer –**

Ephesians 6:10 And that about wraps it up. God is strong, and he wants you strong. **11** So take everything the Master has set out for you, well-made weapons of the best materials. And put them to use so you will be able to stand up to everything the Devil throws your way. **12** This is no afternoon athletic contest that we'll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels. **13** Be prepared. You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet. **14** Truth, righteousness, **15** peace, **16** faith, **17** and salvation are more than words. Learn how to apply them. You'll need them throughout your life. God's Word is an indispensable weapon. **18** In the same way, prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long. Pray for your brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other's spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out.

**The riches of perseverance** – As a bunch of distance runners there were a few payoffs. Essentially you could eat as much of the right foods as you wanted. One trip to an invitational we sat down to a night before race carbo-loading at an Italian restaurant. We each ordered a pasta entrée and shared a large pizza between two people. That was 9 pasta dishes and 5 large pizzas on a table with 9 skinny guys and a coach. The people working the restaurant were taking bets that we wouldn't finish it all. We did.

**Spiritual perseverance has a rich reward for us too** - As believers we sit down to a table filled with exactly what we need to not only endure hardship and struggle but grow in it!!!

Strength & Maturity – that keep us moving in the right direction rather than being blown off course

Trust – that God is right beside us and what is happening is helping

Hope -

Peace

Unity = Support

Watch the road - 1 Timothy 4:7-8; 16

**7** Stay clear of silly stories that get dressed up as religion. Exercise daily in God - no spiritual flabbiness, please! **8** Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever. **9** You can count on this. Take it to heart... **16** Keep a firm grasp on both your character and your teaching. Don't be diverted. Just keep at it. Both you and those who hear you will experience salvation.

Of course it is true: Garbage in – Garbage out! Be careful what you read and believe. Be sure it is consistent with God’s training manual and not leading you off another direction

We need each of us to go through these tests to grow faith and endurance – we need Jean and Dave, CE and Fran, Milton and Susu (Kidney), Joyce & I, our family, Joel and Alice, Marta,

To endure in your faith so we will be stronger as a body – ready for what the Lord has in store -

So we will all arrive together at the goal of our faith, the prize, - the salvation of our souls

Imagine hearing “well done my good and faithful servant, enter into life!”

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