

## ***How to Get Ready for Your Next Pastor***

Hebrews 12:1-3

**12:1) Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us,**

**12:2) keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay before Him endured a cross and despised the shame and has sat down at the right hand of God's throne.**

**12:3) For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, so that you won't grow weary and lost heart.**

**A Church's Most Challenging Situations.** Three situations can be defined as most challenging in the life of any church:

- **A Crisis** – Struggling through difficult times, navigating through a storm, resolving major conflict. A crisis will always test the unity and resilience of a congregation. Some of you here this morning recall that fateful day of June 9, 1999, when the previous sanctuary was destroyed by fire.
- **A Victory** – Following that terrible fire in 1999, this beautiful and functional worship center was completed – a tremendous accomplishment. In the evening service two weeks from today you will remember the fire and recapture the moments of victory in a 20 year anniversary service. When a church enjoys a victorious success, the days following an emotional high can be extremely challenging.
- **A Transition** – Change is difficult for any church or organization. As I've had the privilege of working with churches as a consultant and as an Interim Pastor, the most challenging congregational change is the transition from one pastor to the next.

Do I dare suggest this morning – First Baptist Church of Lafayette, LA – that these days of pastoral transition expose you to one of the most challenging and dangerous threats a church will ever experience? The main focus of Hebrews 12 is the end of verse 3 – ***“so that you won't grow weary and lost heart.”*** In practical terms – so that you don't get tired and quit.

The secret to getting ready for your next pastor requires three looks.

**1. LOOK AHEAD — *The Race Is Forward!*** The author of Hebrews defines the Christian life as a race to be run. However, we can make the connection and application of truth to any life-situation as a race to be run. The challenge for you this morning is to view this pastoral transition journey as a race to be run. Verse 1 answers three questions about this race we will run.

***“Run the race that lies before us.”*** What kind of race is it? “The race that lies before us.” Most of our life-races are marathons instead of sprints. In a sprint, the fastest runner wins and the slowest runner loses. But in a marathon, those who endure to the end finish the race. I must warn you, First Baptist, that this race of pastoral transition will be a marathon, not a sprint. Remember, don't grow weary and lost heart! Remember that even though you don't know at this moment how long you will be without a pastor, God is in control. Remember that God already has your next pastor picked out. Remember that God will meet all of your needs during these days between pastors just as He has always done.

***“Run with endurance.”*** How must we run this race? We must run *“with endurance.”* The Greek word is ***hupomone*** = *“a patient, steadfast waiting for.”* In a sprint, the fastest runners prevail. But in a marathon, the runners with endurance and perseverance, cross the finish line. Talk to any marathon runner and they will tell you, that while it would be great to cross the finish

line first, the goal of a marathon run is to push through the fatigue, the temptation to quit, and to make it to the finish line. This race of transition set before you will require patience, perseverance, endurance. During these days in transition, everybody needs to be faithful and everybody needs to stay committed. The greatest gift you can give your next pastor is that when he comes, the church is moving forward, not backward. That position will only be possible if you embrace endurance, perseverance, patience.

**“Run surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.”** Where do we run this race? “Surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.” As you run, remember that you are not running the race alone. In fact, you are not the first to run the race. As you look ahead, notice immediately that others have not only run the race, but have finished the race. You are surrounded by a *great cloud (nephos) of witnesses*. We use the word “cloud” to describe those white, puffy, marsh mellow shapes in the sky. But the Greeks applied “cloud” to describe the highest seats in the bleachers of a stadium. Literally, these words of encouragement remind us that *“You’re not alone! The grandstands of heaven, all the way up to the clouds – the highest seats in the bleachers – are filled with people who have run this race ahead of you!”* Perhaps the greatest challenge is that you’ve not done a typical pastor search in 61 years!

**2. LOOK WITHIN — Examine Your Own Commitment.** This marathon race you are running is unique. The things that often hinder us are not outside of us but within us. Sometimes, we are our own worst enemy. What stops us short so often is our own hindrances. I want to leave you with a great challenge this morning – each one of you look within and examine your own commitment. As you look within, two actions were essential:

**“Lay aside every weight.”** In the first century, athletes wore weights to help them prepare for the events. No athlete would actually participate wearing the weights because they would slow them down. Even today, runners sometimes train with weights attached to their ankles. But they wouldn’t think of running a race with the weights still attached. When it’s time for the race, the weights come off. In the same way, we must throw off everything that hinders us. I don’t know what may hinder First Baptist from being all that God wants you to be. It could be attitude. It could be control. It could lack of commitment. It could be complacency. It could be an unwillingness to change. Whatever it is, each person must be willing to lay aside everything that hinders. Please, I beg you, take this time of transition to really pray about what may be hindering First Baptist, and begin to lay those things aside **BEFORE** your next pastor comes. And remember, what weighs you down impacts the entire congregation.

**“Lay aside the sin that so easily ensnares us.”** The author of Hebrews does not name the sin that so easily entangles us. But since chapter 11 is all about faith — the phrase *by faith* is used twenty-one times in chapter 11 — the strong implication is **our Faith** enables us to persevere and endure through times of crisis and transition. So, the sin that so easily ensnares and entangles Christians could well be **Unbelief**. Time after time after time, the Bible speaks of people and nations and churches who fell short of victory for one reason and one reason only — **lack of faith — unbelief**. The amazing thing about unbelief in the life of a Christian is that it tangles up everything else. The only one who can do anything about your unbelief is **YOU**. So, look within — lay aside everything that hinders you and lay aside the sin of unbelief. Examine your own commitment. Don’t you be First Baptist’s worst enemy.

**3. LOOK UP — Keep Your Eyes on Jesus.** To “Keep your eyes on Jesus” describes an *attitude* of faith and not just a single act.

**Jesus = Perfect Example of Perseverance:**

**He is the source and perfecter of our faith.** He is the originator and finisher of our faith. [Wiersbe, p. 323] He is the pioneer and the goal of our faith. [Hobbs, *Hebrews: Challenges To Bold Discipleship*, p. 123] He is the Alpha and the Omega — the first and the last. [Revelation 1:17]

**He lived the joy set before him.** The amazing thing about Jesus was that for Him the will of God was joy. He literally enjoyed doing the will of the Heavenly Father. I’m convinced that’s why Jesus desired that His joy might be in us and might be completed in us. [John 15:11].

**He endured the Cross — despised the shame.** To be crucified was not only the most painful method of death in the first century, it was also the most shameful - reserved only for the worst of criminals. For the Romans and the Jews to crucify Jesus meant that they thought he was equal to the worst of criminals. In all probability, Jesus was crucified naked, as were all other

criminals. How shameful is that!! But in order for Jesus to be our Savior and our Redeemer, he endured the shame and the pain of the Cross — for us!

***He has sat down at the right hand of the Father.*** Jesus received the same glory after completing His assignment that He possessed when He was sent to Earth. The *right hand* of a King or Ruler is the position of honor. Remember Jesus' disciples arguing about who would have the positions of honor on the right and left of Jesus? Our Lord earned the right to occupy the position of honor because of His endurance.

Notice that the author of Hebrews does not challenge us to look around. If you find yourself looking around, it's tempting to become confused, to lose heart, or to misplace focus. Don't look around – look UP.

**Carry Your Own Bags.** Beverly King was the richest man in Graham, Texas. He owned the hotel, was a major stockholder and a director at the bank, and had numerous other business interests. But he seldom dressed or acted the part. Most of the time he went about town in his work clothes. One day Mr. King was at local car repair shop, when a salesman pulled in with car trouble. The mechanic checked the car, and assured the man he could repair it. However, he would have to order the parts needed and have them delivered the next day. The salesman asked if there was a place to stay in town, and the mechanic pointed to the hotel down the street. It was then that the salesman noticed Mr. King standing off to the side. Thinking he was just a retired town loafer, the salesman asked Mr. King if he would mind carrying his bags to the hotel for him. Mr. King, who had a great sense of humor, played along and said he'd be glad to. As they walked down the street toward the hotel, the salesman said, *"As I came into town I noticed a big house being built on the hill."* Mr. King responded, *"yes, I've seen it."* The salesman said, *"That surprises me. I wouldn't think anybody in this town could afford a house like that. Do you know who it belongs to?"* Mr. King answered, *"Yes, it belongs to me."* The salesman was stunned. *"It belongs to you? How in the world can you afford a house like that?"* Mr. King replied, *"Because — all of these years, I've carried my own bags."* [Told by Paul Powell in **Getting the Lead Out of Leadership**, pp. 103-104]

During these days of transition, each and every one of you must determine to **CARRY YOUR OWN BAGS** – pull your own weight – fulfill your responsibilities. Look ahead – the race is forward. Look within – examine your own commitment. And Look Up – Keep your eyes on Jesus! Embrace these three looks, so that you won't grow weary and lost heart.