**Reflections 17-23 August – Who’s running with you?**

**Bible study on Hebrews 11:29–12:2**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Lord, we are not alone in our ‘race for life’.
Many have run with you and now it is our turn.
You help us start the race
and you will be there to greet us at the finishing line.
Help us to trust you every step of the way.
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

Hebrews 11: 29-12: 2

29By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

30By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days.

31By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%2011&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30204d)]

32And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, 33who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. 35Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. 36Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37They were put to death by stoning;[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%2011&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30210e)] they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— 38the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.39These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, 40since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

**12**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. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

 **Bible notes**This passage continues the theme introduced earlier in chapter 11, reviewing the courage and commitment of the heroes of the Old Testament. There are some surprising inclusions such as the prostitute Rahab of Jericho (Joshua 2) alongside judges and kings.

The writer also recalls the Maccabean period (160 BC) when the Jews suffered terribly under Antiochus Epiphanes, who tried to wipe out their religion. In this narrative of horror, the writer highlights the faith of those who suffered and their amazing endurance and contrasts them with an unworthy world (v.38). The writer sees Christ’s life, death and resurrection as a turning point in history, when God’s will could be perfectly known. Those who lived before Christ will achieve perfection in God’s good time, along with those who know Christ, as we journey together towards God’s promised future. This journey is presented in dramatic terms as a race. This image would have been familiar in the New Testament world, where most towns had a stadium and victorious athletes won fame. The opportunity to identify with elite runners would have been appealing to many for whom this ambition was out of reach.

The writer encourages the recipients of the letter to imagine the crowd roaring for them, but doubles down on this by suggesting that these supporters are the same people of faith who have just been listed. They are witnesses to God’s power, victorious runners in their own right and therefore even better able to offer encouragement to those weighed down by sin.

The exploration of this image ends by inviting hearers to imagine the goal of the race – not the emperor’s box, but Jesus enthroned in glory. Like the men and women of faith described here, Jesus has also suffered humiliation and pain on the journey towards joy. Now, as God’s Son, he brings all this human experience to God’s throne and transforms it into inspiration for the race that lies ahead.

 **Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

Has anyone run a marathon or a long-distance race? Some long-distance runners talk about ‘hitting the wall’, a sudden loss of energy when runners feel they can’t go on. What do we do when we ‘hit the wall’ in our Christian life? The Hebrews passage gives us some good encouragement to keep going. We have the example of the ‘cloud of witnesses’ – people who have run the race before us – to cheer us on, like spectators do at a marathon or park run.

Park runs also have volunteers called ‘tail walkers’, who encourage the stragglers to get to the finishing line. We might think of Jesus, who the writer to the Hebrews calls ‘the pioneer and perfecter of our faith’ as an excellent ‘tail walker’. Not only that, but it is he who starts us off on the run, encourages us all along the way and is there to cheer us as we cross the finishing line.

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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| A group of people clapping hands  AI-generated content may be incorrect. |   |

**Questions**

* Who are your cheerleaders?
* Whose race can you cheer on at the moment – what can you do practically?
* What helps to keep your mind on the finishing line?

**Prayer**

Lord Jesus, pioneer and perfecter of our faith,
we praise you because: **you run with us.**
Through all the bumps in the road, when the climbs are steep
and when the potholes are many: **you run with us.**
When we are tired, jaded and disillusioned: **you run with us.**
When the finishing line is near and the race is nearly done: **you run with us.**
And so we praise you, because every step of the way: **you run with us.**
**Amen**

Send a card of encouragement to someone you know, or a thank you card to someone who has encouraged you in your Christian journey. They may not even know how much their words or actions meant to you!