



BIBLE STUDY

CHAPTER 2

OVERCOMING DISTRACTIONS



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Introduction

Last week, we explored “The Mary and Martha Principle” and discovered how even good things like service can become distractions from “the one thing necessary” - our relationship with Jesus. This week, we’ll build on that foundation by examining how distractions affect our spiritual journey, using the powerful metaphor of running a race found in Hebrews 12:1-2.

The Christian life is often compared to a marathon rather than a sprint. Success requires not just initial enthusiasm but sustained focus and endurance. Just as athletes remove anything that might slow them down, we too must identify and eliminate the distractions that hinder our spiritual progress. This week, we’ll look at specific examples from the lives of Peter and Abraham to understand how distractions can impede our faith journey and how we can overcome them.

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

TEACHING

THE RACE METAPHOR

The author of Hebrews uses athletic imagery that would have been familiar to his first-century audience. The ancient Greek games were a central part of culture, and the discipline of athletes was widely admired. This metaphor helps us understand several important aspects of the Christian life:

1. **It requires endurance:** The Christian life is not a short sprint but a marathon requiring sustained effort and perseverance.
2. **It has a specific course:** Each believer has a particular “race that is set before us” - a unique calling and purpose designed by God.
3. **It has spectators:** We are “surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” - those faithful believers who have gone before us (described in Hebrews 11).
4. **It demands focus:** Success requires fixing our eyes on the goal - Jesus Himself.

TWO TYPES OF HINDRANCES

The passage identifies two distinct categories of things that impede our progress:

1. **“Every weight”:** The Greek word “ogkon” refers to bulk or mass - anything that creates unnecessary burden. These “weights” are not necessarily sinful in themselves but are things that slow us down. They might include:



- Good activities that aren't the best use of our time and resources
 - Excessive concerns about material possessions
 - Unhealthy relationships that drain rather than energize
 - Overcommitment and busyness
 - Cultural expectations that don't align with biblical priorities
2. **"Sin which clings so closely":** This refers to sinful habits or patterns that entangle us like a runner's flowing robe might wrap around their legs. The Greek term suggests something that "easily entangles" or "cleverly surrounds." These might include:
- Persistent temptations that we struggle with repeatedly
 - Character flaws we've rationalized or accepted
 - Sinful thought patterns we've allowed to take root
 - Addictive behaviors that have gained power over us

The Discipline of "Laying Aside"

The command to "lay aside" these hindrances is active and intentional. Athletes in ancient games would strip down to the bare essentials, removing anything that might slow them down. Similarly, we must:

1. **Identify our hindrances:** Honestly assess what is slowing our spiritual progress.
2. **Make decisive breaks:** The Greek tense suggests a decisive action, not a gradual process.
3. **Accept the temporary discomfort:** Laying aside familiar things, even harmful ones, often involves discomfort.

"Looking to Jesus"

The key to successfully running our race is maintaining proper focus. The Greek word for "looking" (aphorontes) means to fix one's gaze on something while looking away from everything else. It implies both concentration on Jesus and deliberate disregard for distractions.

Jesus is described as both the "founder" (or author/pioneer) and "perfecter" (or finisher/completer) of our faith. This means:

1. He blazed the trail before us, showing us how to live by faith.
2. He empowers our faith journey from beginning to end.
3. He demonstrated the ultimate example of endurance through suffering.

Learning from Peter: Distracted by Fear

Peter provides a powerful example of how distractions can derail even the most committed follower of Christ. In Matthew 14:28-31, we read:

And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he



cried out, “Lord, save me.” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Peter’s experience illustrates several important principles about distractions:

1. **Distractions often arise when we step out in faith:** It was only after Peter began walking on water that the wind became a distraction.
2. **External circumstances become distractions when they capture our focus:** The wind had been there all along, but it only became a problem when Peter shifted his gaze from Jesus to the storm.
3. **Fear is a powerful distraction:** Peter’s fear caused him to doubt what he had already experienced to be true - that he could walk on water with Jesus.
4. **Distractions lead to sinking:** When Peter became distracted, he began to sink. Similarly, our spiritual effectiveness diminishes when we lose focus.
5. **The solution is to cry out to Jesus:** Peter’s immediate response was to call for help, and Jesus “immediately” responded.

Peter’s later life shows how he overcame the distraction of fear. After denying Jesus three times out of fear (Matthew 26:69-75), he was restored by Christ (John 21:15-19) and filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). The once-fearful disciple became so focused on Christ that he eventually died as a martyr, demonstrating that even profound distractions can be overcome through Christ’s power.

Learning from Abraham: Distracted by Impatience

Abraham’s journey of faith illustrates how impatience can distract us from God’s promises. In Genesis 12, God promised Abraham (then called Abram) descendants as numerous as the stars. But as years passed without a child, Abraham and Sarah grew impatient:

Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, “Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.” And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. (Genesis 16:1-2)

This decision to “help God” fulfill His promise led to the birth of Ishmael and created conflict that continues to this day. Abraham’s experience teaches us:

1. **God’s timing often tests our patience:** The 25-year wait between God’s promise and Isaac’s birth was a test of Abraham’s faith.
2. **Cultural solutions can distract from divine promises:** Using a servant as a surrogate mother was culturally acceptable but not God’s plan.
3. **Impatience often leads to lasting consequences:** The conflict between Ishmael and Isaac’s descendants continues thousands of years later.



4. **God remains faithful despite our unfaithfulness:** Despite Abraham's lapse, God fulfilled His promise through Isaac.

Abraham eventually overcame this distraction of impatience. By the time God asked him to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22), Abraham had learned to trust God's timing and promises completely. Hebrews 11:17-19 tells us Abraham reasoned that God could even raise Isaac from the dead if necessary to fulfill His promise.

Application

The examples of Peter, Abraham, and the race metaphor in Hebrews 12 provide several practical applications for overcoming distractions:

1. **Identify your "weights" and "entangling sins":** Take time to honestly assess what is hindering your spiritual progress. Ask trusted friends or mentors for their perspective on blind spots you might have missed.
2. **Develop a strategy for "laying aside":** For each identified hindrance, create a specific plan:
 - For time-consuming activities, establish boundaries or eliminate them entirely
 - For sinful patterns, implement accountability and replacement behaviors
 - For material possessions, practice simplicity and generosity
3. **Fix your eyes on Jesus through spiritual disciplines:** Develop habits that help maintain proper focus:
 - Regular Bible study that centers on Christ
 - Prayer that includes extended time listening to God
 - Worship that focuses on God's character rather than emotional experience
 - Community that encourages Christ-centered living
4. **Learn from failure:** When you become distracted (and we all do), follow Peter's example:
 - Immediately cry out to Jesus
 - Accept His hand of rescue
 - Learn from the experience
 - Continue the journey with renewed focus
5. **Practice patience in waiting for God's promises:** When facing delays in seeing God's promises fulfilled:
 - Review God's faithfulness in Scripture and in your own life
 - Resist cultural "shortcuts" that compromise biblical principles
 - Remain active in your current responsibilities while waiting
 - Remember that God's timing is perfect even when it doesn't match our preferences



Discussion Questions

1. In Hebrews 12:1, the author distinguishes between “weights” and “sin which clings so closely.” What are some examples of each in your life? How can you tell the difference between a “weight” and a sin?
2. What specific distractions are most challenging for you in your spiritual journey? How have these changed throughout different seasons of your life?
3. Peter became distracted by the wind and waves only after he stepped out in faith. Have you experienced increased distractions when attempting something significant for God? How did you respond?
4. Abraham’s impatience led him to try to fulfill God’s promise through human means. Where might you be tempted to “help God” rather than waiting for His timing? What are the potential consequences?
5. The passage instructs us to run “with endurance.” What practices or habits have helped you maintain spiritual endurance during difficult seasons?
6. What does it practically mean to “look to Jesus” in your daily life? How might this focus be different from religious activity or general spiritual interest?
7. Jesus endured the cross “for the joy set before him.” What future joy might help you endure current difficulties and resist present distractions?

Homework/Practical Application

1. **Personal Inventory Exercise:** Create two lists - one of “weights” and one of “entangling sins” in your life. For each item, write down a specific action step for “laying it aside.” Share this with a trusted accountability partner.
2. **Focus Practice:** Choose a verse or short passage about Jesus (such as Colossians 1:15-20 or Hebrews 1:1-4). Read it slowly each morning, meditating on a different aspect of Christ’s character or work each day. Journal how this focused attention affects your day.
3. **Distraction Triggers:** For one week, note the circumstances, emotions, or situations that most often lead to distraction in your spiritual life. Look for patterns and develop a “pre-emptive plan” for maintaining focus when these triggers occur.
4. **Patience Project:** Identify an area where you’re waiting for God to fulfill a promise or answer a prayer. Create a “waiting well” plan that includes:
 - Scripture promises to meditate on
 - Productive activities during the waiting period
 - A commitment not to take shortcuts that violate biblical principles
 - A prayer of surrender to God’s timing
5. **Media Fast:** Choose a form of media that tends to distract you (social media, news, entertainment, etc.) and fast from it for at least three days. Use the time you would



have spent on this media to focus on Jesus through prayer, Scripture, or service. Journal about the experience.

6. **Memorize Hebrews 12:1-2:** Commit these verses to memory as a reminder of the importance of focus and endurance in your spiritual race. # Week 3: Guarding Your Heart - Maintaining Focus in a Distracting World