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Encouragement for Today

“Fixing My Eyes”

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Key Verse:

Hebrews 12:1-3, “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. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (NIV)

Devotion:

I love to run. I picked it up when I was a freshman in high school and joined the Cross Country team to improve. I’ve done many 5ks and a marathon since then, and it’s become a habitual stress-reliever for me. The funny thing about running is that it’s a brutal way to exercise, but there’s nothing quite like the runner’s high you experience afterward – after you’ve spent yourself completely.

I ran my first 10k race a few months ago. It had been several years since I’d done any kind of racing, so I was a little nervous about setting a realistic goal to pursue. After some thought, I decided that I wanted to finish within 1 hour, and to not walk at all. So I trained consistently for one month, and made sure to drink lots of fluids the day before the race.

It just so happened that two male friends of mine were doing the race as well, so we met up at the starting line and set out together when the gun went off. In a crowd of 50,000 runners and walkers, the three of us found that it was incredibly difficult to maneuver through them all at a decent pace. We also found it was almost impossible not to become separated from one another. Unintentionally this happened, and one of us got left behind.

A little nervous about not being able to find my way back to my hotel when the race was over, I determined that I was not going to lose my other friend. This would mean something very challenging for me: I would have to keep a steady pace with a male (who was quite a bit faster than me) and I would have to fix my eyes on him at all times to make sure I didn’t lose sight of him. Thankfully he had on a bright blue shirt, so this would not be too difficult if I stayed close in proximity.

For the first half of the race I was the one leading. Around mile 5, I started hurting and my friend passed me. I could feel the lactic acid setting into my muscles. The salty sweat poured down my face, stinging my eyes, making them foggy. The

blue shirt I was set on keeping in sight was getting blurry, but I knew that if I lost it I would lose heart. I would start walking, and my goal for the day would be shot. It was at that point that I realized how desperately I needed to push, to persevere, through the hindering crowd and tell my screaming muscles to be quiet. There was no compromising: I must fix my eyes on my goal – the blue shirt.

It is the same for the Christian life. I believe the author of Hebrews must have enjoyed races. He had a good perspective on what it meant to run the marathon of life. He challenged us to consistently throw off those things that would hinder us in the race of life because there would be many of them. He knew that if we didn't have our focus fixed on something steady, we would easily give up when our faith is challenged beyond our understanding. That's why he said we must fix our eyes on something – some kind of goal. That goal was to be the person of Jesus Christ – His life, His death, His mission to bring people into relationship with Him, and His desire for us to become like Him in every way.

Once we enter a covenant relationship with God, we are no longer individuals. We become identified with our Covenant Partner. We adopt His goals as our goals, and we must not give up in pursuing them. After all, He didn't give up on the mission that God sent Him to earth to accomplish, and He pleads for us to push through the hard stuff and do the same. He endured the greatest hindrance of all, death, and overcame its finality. Be sure to read today's application steps and consider what it means for *you* to fix your eyes on Jesus Christ.

My Prayer for Today:

Dear Heavenly Father, I ask for You to give me a proper perspective of what it means to fix my eyes on You. Reveal to me beautiful spiritual truths found in Your Word. Truths about my role in the mission You came here to accomplish. Truths about loving others, being unified with believers, and what it means to finish strong. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Application Steps:

Do you ever experience difficulty maneuvering through a crowd of believers that don't run at the same spiritual pace as you? Ever get so annoyed with them that you refuse to run with them at all? If so, I challenge you to remember that pushing those individuals (and being willing to be pushed by them) is part of accomplishing the long-term goal of becoming unified in purpose as the Body of Christ.

Evaluate your over *and* under-use of your spiritual arms and legs. Working too hard and not working at all both produce lactic acid build-up that can be dangerous to your overall effectiveness in accomplishing the Lord's work. Train them gradually and moderately. Don't be afraid to push yourself, but make sure you are taking in enough living water so that spiritual and emotional dehydration does not occur when the sweat is really pouring out.

Reflection Points:

Do you fix your eyes on the person of Jesus Christ and the truths of who He is revealed in God's Word?

Are you feeling lots of spiritual lactic-acid build up in your muscles right now that is slowing you down in the race?

Have you come to a place where you realize your deep and intense need to fix your eyes on Jesus in order not to lose heart in this world?

Power Verses:

Proverbs 4:25-26, "Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm."
(NIV)

John 17:24, "Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am, and to see My glory, the glory You have given Me because You loved Me before the creation of the world." (NIV)

Acts 20:24, "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace." (NIV)

Galatians 5:7, "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?" (NIV)

Additional Resources:

Running on Empty by Aaron Chambers

http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/newresources_runningEmpty.htm

The *P31 Woman* Magazine

<http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/subscription.htm>

Persevering in Prayer, ETC Corner

<http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/etcJan06.htm>