

Focus Points

An Introduction to Southside's New Discipleship Emphases
(for the week of September 13, 2020)

"You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless, until it rests in You."
St. Augustine

This Week's Scripture: 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, ² 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.

Pastor Phillip's Key Idea

"Our faith will be perfected when we focus on Christ."

Discussing the Scripture

1. The Christian faith we embrace today has been, (guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit), passed down from one generation to the next for two thousand years. Those who have gone before us are a "great cloud of witnesses" who have faithfully focused on the Lord Jesus and followed him throughout their lives. Their testimonies, influence, and encouragement surround us even now.

Who have been those Christians in your life who shared their faith in Christ with you, who sought to influence you for the sake of Christ, and who have encouraged you in your spiritual growth?

Describe how they did this and the difference it has made in your life. How did the way they lived their lives match their words?

2. To run the race set before us, the writer of Hebrews says we must "lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely..." How do we do that? Why is "laying aside" those things so important to running the race of faith well?

If you feel comfortable, share what weight or sin clings closely to you, something that makes running the race difficult for you. Part of what a Life Group does is prays for one another and, as John Wesley put it, "watches over one another in love." Take some time at the end of your meeting to pray about these things together.

3. One reason we are able to lay aside every weight and sin (and turn from them) is because our Lord Jesus Christ has already run the same race. And because he finished his race by dying on the Cross for our sins and triumphing over death in his Resurrection, we are able to follow him today. Our Scripture reminds us that Christ is now seated at the right hand of God. Romans 8:34 teaches us that while he is at God's right hand, Jesus is even now interceding for us as we run the race.

How do the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ empower and encourage you as you run the race of faith?

What difference does it make in your life to know that Jesus Christ is alive today and interceding on your behalf?

4. Because our race of faith is a marathon and not a sprint, we need to know how to persevere (or endure) to the end. What are some insights and practices that help you keep moving forward in your race with Christ? Take some time to describe your experiences in which those insights and practices worked well for you, and perhaps even those times when they did not. What did you learn about God? About yourself?

Next Steps

- Pray about some of the issues that were raised in your time together.
- Who in your life would be a good accountability partner? Ask them to commit to praying for you. Ask them to also check in with you to see how things are going in your race. Maybe you can do the same for them.
- Pray about those "weights and sins" that are clinging to you. How can you, through the power of the Holy Spirit, lay them aside and leave them behind? Spend some time this week reflecting on this. And don't hesitate to cry out to God for help.

Prayer Helps

Sometimes we don't know what to pray about. I have found using the acronym, ACTS, a great help in my own prayer life.

- A – Adoration (Focus on a particular attribute or work of God and praise him for it. Spend some time reflecting on this and how it would impact your life if you lived in light of this praiseworthy truth.)
- C – Confession (What is one "weight or sin" you can confess to God? Ask God to forgive you and to help you turn away from it. Read 1 John 1:9)
- T – Thanksgiving (Spend some time thanking God for the obvious blessings in your life. But also reflect more deeply on how you might cultivate a more grateful attitude toward God. What are some ways you can start paying better attention to God's presence and work in your life?)

- S – Supplication (Here is where you can bring prayer requests for yourself and for others to God. Our God is a loving Father who has your best interest at heart. He wants you to bring the desires of your heart to him, while at the same time, intentionally seeking to align your desires with his.)