

Hebrews 12:1

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, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

This is our verse for the year as Ladawn talked about

It's quite obvious this year that our theme is about running this race of life. And we are going to break down that analogy until you are sick of hearing about it. It provides such a great visual for our everyday life. Running the race of life is so appropriate especially for this time of motherhood.

So let's break down this verse a little.

Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses....

- the hemorrhaging report sites that one of the main reasons that children are leaving the church is because children saw no life-changing or daily impact from being a church-goer than that of their counterpart.

I believe that my most impactful cloud of witnesses is my family. My kids, my husband, and my immediate family. They are also one of the most impactful on me. Good and bad. How I choose to go about my daily life impacts those around me. Christ has called me to be and you to be people showing His love and mercy to those around us. Especially our families. Do you ever feel like it's actually the opposite. Like we can be full on arguing with our spouse or kids and someone knocks on the door.. and we are like "Hello!!" cheerful and loving!

I also know that as the women of the house I can very much determine the mood. Would you agree? The saying goes "if mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy!" So how do we impact our kids on a daily basis with Christ. By walking out a personal relationship with Him. We can't just show up at church and expect others to do that for us. We need to show it to our kids. How it looks to find joy in sorrow, make large decisions that involve Christ, solidifying our marriages because the glue that holds it together is Him, spending time daily with Him. For most of you this is not new. But for many of us, including me, I don't do this all that well. Why? because I live in a world that pulls at me.

So what is that pulls at me?

STUFF: Life... seriously I get it!! I have 3 kids and a husband who all have extra-curricular activities, I run a business, I'm involved in ministry, my husband works a full-time job, we attend church, I renovated this summer and I still want intimate close relationships with those around me. Not to mention cleaning, cooking, and regular house stuff. Some of you can add in medical appointments, or your exercise, or caring for parents, or others' children. LIFE IS BUSY! But here's where we as moms need to take a second and slow down. What race is your family running? a sprint- just quick bursts from here to there but rest in between, a Marathon, steady and long and well-paced, a relay, doing this race with others and teamwork?

I'm sure as I'm talking your going I am not evenly paced. I am pulling everyone else in my family around the track... here's the cool things about being a Christian in this life. We have this unchanging, forever there, never overwhelmed coach. He can look at you from the sidelines and say slow down, speed up, good going, opps not like that. So we can finish this race with perseverance.

what else pulls at me?

SLEEP!!!!!! can I get an amen?! As a mom, its so much easier to just wake up when my kids do! and get that extra sleep then wake up and spend time doing my devos. Its easier to whine and complain in sorrow or conflict... then turn to Him and find comfort and peace. Oh! and how many times have I made decisions and learned the hard way I need to consult Him.

EXPECTATIONS:

This one has been so forcing me to grow this year. I have expectations of myself, and others, including my kids, and Christ actually. I expect of myself, lots of things that are true to be expected of me, but then I have things that the world expects of me.

- a standard of beauty, a standard of cleanliness in my home, a standard way my children should act or where and in what they should succeed in, a standard of health.

These are not all negative things! For example I'll take cleanliness of my home. Its important for me to clean my house right? nobody wants a disgusting bathroom, but if cleaning my house was consistently pulling me away from my devotions, my kids and my Lord, I may have an unrealistic expectation of cleanliness.

Or.. If I Have an unrealistic expectation on my Girls to succeed in gymnastics. Lets say we were at the Gym 3 nights a week which made it impossible for them to attend deeper or as a family to attend church I would have an unbalanced and unrealistic expectation on my girls. This expectation would be hindering us as a family to find a deeper relationship with Christ because there was no time for Him!

Which is the next portion of the verse.

let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

One of the things that happens when your a runner is that you need light weight, breathable clothing, and light comfortable shoes. Why? because carrying extra weight weighs you down. Think of when you were pregnant was it just tiring carry thing that extra weight around? and certain parts of your body were more sore? Were you slower? less effeciant? more irritable?

When we have unrealistic expectations and we are doing things that are not in line with our life calling that Jesus has for us we tend to drift away from Him. We rationalize. We say, well I went to bed late last night. I'll do my devos during naptime...My kids love gymnastics and I don't want them to be mad at me for taking them out of a class they do so well in, and I already paid for it... next year we'll scale back....and we fall in to sin as we make less and less time for Jesus in our lives.

Thats what sin does. It weighs us down. It makes us less of the person we should be. We need to get rid of what weighs us down before we can even begin our race. This is why spending time in Gods word daily is so important. If your married here. How many of you would say you wish you would've dealt and learned some things about christ and yourself before you got married and it would've been an easier road? ME!! If i had dealt with somethings going in to it we would could have avoided many things!

So...As we confess sin we can be more free to do what God has called us to. Spending time in confession to Him can be scary to enter into. I often feel as I sit down and start to confess, I feel embaressed. But, as I list off and think about the things that I've done that I need forgiveness for I start to feel "lighter." People who have attended a set free retreat attest to literally feeling physically lighter! As you confess you take away the power of sin.

Have you ever felt that feeling of when someone is trying to out you for something that would be embarrassing or hurtful but you've already confessed it to them. It holds no power and in fact you can almost be proud then and say "They already know!- no big deal!" God so wants to forgive you and take away the power that sin holds over your life. Because Sin literally weighs us down. He can't give us lighter clothing if we refuse to take off our winter jacket and boots to do this life.

Now, I just want to take a side step here for a second. Some of the weight that we carry is because of the sin of this world and not because you were sinful. If you had an abusive childhood, or were in an abusive situation, or had trauma in your life we also need to get that weight off. We need to throw that off to and get Gods perspective and healing in those areas. I want to encourage you to go for a personal ministry session or talk to your table leader or one of us about walking it out with you.

So were going to spend a little time in confession! and streamlining our lives.

Spend some time in thanksgiving thanking God for his power over Sin

Bring to his feet the things in your life that feel out of control.

Confess anything that comes to mind and surrender to His will

Ask God if there are any steps you need to take in the next week?

Ok... So now that we've taken care of the things that may be holding us back we can be free to be more of who we were meant to be.

This is my favourite part!

\$20 bill exercise

romans 5:8... while we were still sinners.

You were all designed for a purpose. You only have to be you for God to love you. Our world is shouting out against this and it breaks my heart. He gave you specific traits and characteristics to be and do exactly what he has in store for you.

Proverbs 4:25-27

So back to the race analogy. We sometimes tend to veer in to others lanes don't we? For two reasons.

One we compare. We think I can't plan a birthday party like that! I will never look like her! I'm not patient like that!

see how we're not maintaining our lane? We think we cant because someone else does better and sets an expectation out for us. But what if I'm never meant to do those things because I was meant for something far greater. Here where my lane veering comes in... In those who are more spiritual than me. I feel often like I will never know the bible like that, never pray like that, because I listen to that voice that compares me to them. and not the voice (Gods voice) that is encouraging me to just move forward.

The Other lane veering that we do is judgement.

We judge other moms don't we? she should... she doesn't... she never....get your kids under control for heavens sake! Breast vs. bottle, cry it out vs co sleeping. I will be the first one to admit that there have been many times in my life i have known how to raise other peoples kids better then they have... (sarcasm) And I especially knew before I had kids... am I right? now Caveat... sometimes we need to say things but please make sure it is covered in prayer and you are coming from a caring spot (and maybe only when asked.) :) something I have to work on is keeping my trap shut... foot in mouth syndrome if you know what I mean. eh 4:29

We need to start focusing on our own families... building ourselves up and knowing what we are called to do and what God made us for! This is not always an easy journey but Its worth it. A family that has a long distance truck driver in it will look different than two stay/work from home parents? And a introvert and an extrovert will probably have some different qualities that impact their parenting.

So heres a list of attributes that describe character traits. Read through it and pick to that you feel describe you. Write them down.

As you think about those read Psalm 139

There could never be a more beautiful you! -song

Then spend some time in prayer asking God why he made you like that.

Is there anything that he wants you to do with that charcter trait in the next week? month? year?