



**One truth shared:** When the rigor of our race tempts us to give up and lose heart, we look to Jesus—whose pain was our gain.

*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. 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. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

**Hebrews 12:1-3**

### We Want Peace, But the Truth Divides

It was the 1992 summer Olympics. Great Britain's Derek Redmond readies himself to run the 400-meter semifinal race. As millions watched, many expected Derek to win the gold. The starter pistol fires, and Derek explodes out of the starting blocks and begins his lightning sprint for the finish line.

You and I are running a race, too. But the race we're running is no 400-meter dash; it's a lifelong marathon. And while there's a guaranteed prize at the end of the race we call the Christian life, our Savior guarantees the race won't be easy. It will be a struggle.

The Hebrew Christians knew the feeling. Persecuted by secular powers and rejected even by their families, these Hebrews must have felt like exiles all over again. Some started to slide back into the familiar rhythms of living under the weight of those ceremonial laws. Others were tempted to run down paths that looked easier—but were filled with sins that ensnared them and obstructed their Christian race. These Hebrew Christians were growing weary and losing heart. Giving up was looking good.

And maybe you know the feeling, too. Unlike the Olympics, the race we're running isn't in competition with anyone. But the race the Christian runs is definitely a different race than the rest of the world. In fact, it's much harder. After all, we're running behind Jesus—the same Jesus who said, "I have not come to bring peace, but *division*." Don't get me wrong: Jesus—the Prince of Peace—came to win us peace with God. But when the Son of God spoke, people were and still are divided.

Our world loves the Jesus who lovingly made time for the sexually scandalous—but not the Jesus who scandalizes us with his "outdated" views on sexuality, gender, and marriage. Our peers are quick to compliment a Jesus who calls out self-righteous hypocrisy—but quick to condemn a Jesus who would dare say the sin of hatred, in God's eyes, is tantamount to murder. Our post-modern world, as one pastor put it, "believes the [only] thing we need salvation from is the idea that we need salvation." It's no surprise then when we, like the Hebrew Christians, are forced out of friend circles or kicked from our communities for putting stock in a story about the Son of God entering this broken, messed up, dying world for the very purpose of saving it. We strive, as Christians, to run the race marked out for us; but when we are divided from our communities, we're tempted to give up and lose heart.

But before you do listen again to the author's encouragement: "Look to Jesus—the author and perfecter of our faith." Your God and Savior Jesus ran the perfect race *for you*. His eyes were on *your* prize. *His* pain was *your* gain. Jesus perfectly fulfilled every single one of God's commandments *for you*. He ran the gauntlet—even to the point of shedding of blood—because *you* were his prize. He didn't run away from the pain. He didn't run around it, either. He ran headlong into it—because you were on the other side. He ran to Calvary with the weight of your guilt. His race would have him endure our hell on the cross—all to win *us* the prize of heaven. His dying cry of victory says it all: "It is finished!"

About halfway through Derek Redmond's race, he tore his hamstring and fell to the ground in pain. He tried to limp through the agony to the finish line. And that's when his dad ran out onto the track to carry his son to the finish line. Your Heavenly Father is committed to doing the same for you.

That struggles enter our lives isn't evidence that God doesn't love us: in fact, quite the opposite. God sends or allows it to disciple us. Just like Derek Redmond had to lean into his father to limp to the finish line, our God wants us to solely depend on him, too. After all, the prize of heaven isn't contingent on how well we run our race, but on how Jesus ran his race. He, who began that good work of faith in you, will bring that good work to completion. Jesus is the founder and finisher of your faith—and he's going to see you

through to the end. His love and grace will carry you through all the suffering and the heartache until the day you cross the finish line and fall into his loving arms.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you know exactly what we're going through when we struggle to run our race. In those moments, lead us to lean on you and look to you. We know you will carry us to the finish line. In your name we pray. Amen.

## Foundations Teen Facilitators Guide

### Year C – Proper 15

#### Hard Truth

**One truth shared:** When the rigor of our race tempts us to give up and lose heart, we look to Jesus—whose pain was our gain.

### We Want Peace, But the Truth Divides

*Starting the Discussion:* This first section is intended to be light and easy, to engage and get the conversation going. Have a little fun with these questions.

- In your own words, how would you explain: “No pain? No gain.”
- Would you rather run seven miles once a week? Or one mile once a day? Why?
- A marathon is a 26-mile race. What do you think is the best strategy for running 26 miles straight?

*Connecting:* This section serves as a bridge between the opening conversation and the body of the study/discussion. It should get the group thinking about the topic/text even before they've looked at it.

- If you were running a marathon, what might tempt you to lose heart or give up?
- When do you think Christian teenagers are most tempted to give up running the Christian race?
- Why do you think running the Christian race is so hard?

*Digging In:* Here we want to dig into some texts or the text for the day and see what Scripture says. The questions are meant to be open ended to give a beginning of a scriptural conversation. These are a guide for a spiritual and scriptural conversation.

- Usually, we run away from—not into—situations that might cause us pain—even cause us to bleed. Jesus, however, didn't—even to the point of shedding his blood. What—or who—was the prize at the end of his race?
- The writer paints our relationship with God as that between a tender, loving Father and his children. Does that change the way we see hardships that come into our life? If so, how?

*Conclusion:* Here we want to wrap up the discussion, perhaps circling back to the “connecting question” above.

- How exactly was Jesus' pain *our* gain?
- In what ways is Jesus both the *founder* and the *finisher* of our faith?
- That Jesus will bring the good work of faith that he started in our hearts to completion, what comfort is there as we run with perseverance the race marked out for us?