

**Summer *Movies and Faith* Series**  
**Everyday Heroes – The Pursuit of Happiness**  
**July 26, 2020**

**Overarching theme:** In 2020, FUMC will be a **Go** church!

**Instructions:**

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

**Core Point:**

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

**Hebrews:**

Hebrews is well known for what we don't know about it. We don't know with any certainty its author, date, destination, or the place from which it was written. We can say that its author was almost certainly male because of the Greek grammar used in Hebrews 11:32. He was likely a Greek-speaking Jew who was connected in some way to the Pauline mission, but we don't know much more. Some of the most prominent suggestions include Apollos, and Barnabas, but these are only guesses. Experts agree that it probably wasn't Paul because of the letter's significant stylistic and theological differences from the letters we know Paul wrote. In addition, the author of Hebrews doesn't consider himself a direct witness to Christ.

Hebrews calls itself a "message of encouragement", a sermon of sorts. It was a sermon sent as a letter to an audience at some distance. Italy seems to be either the sermon's point of origin or, perhaps more likely, its destination. Although the evidence isn't clear, Rome holds first place among suggestions for the location of the audience. We know the audience had believed for some time. We also know that they went through an earlier time of harassment on account of their faith, a time during which at least some of them lost property. They supported individuals in prison, and it's even possible that some of their leaders were killed.

It's impossible to determine the precise situation facing the audience, but the sermon certainly gives us strong hints. Hebrews clearly means to strengthen both

the confidence of its audience in the saving significance of Christ's death and to move them to endure in faithfulness until the end. – CEB Study Bible

### **Reflect on this Scripture:**

Hebrews 12: 1-3 NRSV

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,<sup>[a]</sup> and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,<sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of<sup>[b]</sup> the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.<sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners,<sup>[c]</sup> so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.*

### **Questions to ponder about the passages:**

What jumps out at you from this passage?

Why do you think the author of Hebrews uses the race metaphor?

If you have ever run a race in the past, did you ever grow tired? What kept you going?

How is Jesus both the 'pioneer' of our faith, and 'perfecter' of our faith?

### **Commentary:**

The "cloud of witnesses" is clearly a special group of spectators in the race of faithfulness described in Hebrews 12. God has already approved their past endurance in their own race of faith (see chapter 11) and their symbolic presence as inspiring examples serves as a strong positive influence on the current runners.

Who are these current runners? Likely they are members of the body of Christ who are becoming exhausted in the midst of their own spiritual marathon. They are in danger of giving up. This race is a metaphor for their journey of faith, and the runners are being encouraged to endure, surrounded by these cheering witnesses in the "cloud."

While this cloud support is vital, in order to persevere, the runners also have to let go of weights (sin) that can impede their journey. In the final analysis however, the only way that they can truly endure to their finish line is by "looking to Jesus." The grammatical sense of this Greek participle implies looking away from everyone and everything else and concentrating on a single object – Jesus. He is not only the focus of their attention but also the one who they "look to" in the sense of guidance and aid. He is both the source (pioneer) and sustainer (perfecter) of the

faith required for this long, long race. – Adapted from The New Interpreter's Bible, vol. XII, pp. 148-149.

**Two weeks ago, Aladdin.** Aladdin is a timeless tale of a diamond-in-the-rough, street-urchin Aladdin, and his journey that began as a nobody on the streets of Agrabah. In the Bible we read of another diamond-in-the-rough, shepherd-boy David, and his journey that began as the 8<sup>th</sup> son of Jesse of Bethlehem. In a world where being first-born was everything, and eighth born was an also-ran, David was, in the eyes of his society, a nobody from nowhere.

Early on in his story, Aladdin unwittingly meets undercover Princess Jasmine going rogue. Dressed in street clothes, she snuck out of her cloistered palace for a day to see what life was like for the ordinary people of her realm. Aladdin is smitten!! But in time he realizes the truth about Jasmine – she's a princess. So she was not only out of his league, she was out of his universe!

And according to royal law Jasmine was required to marry a Prince and Aladdin was clearly the furthest thing from a Prince that Agrabah had to offer.

However, in the course of time, 'diamond in the rough' Aladdin finds himself in the Cave of Wonders, discovers a magic lamp, and encounters an amazing Genie played by Will Smith. The Genie informs Aladdin that he is the recipient of three wishes, one of which Aladdin uses to become a 'Prince', to provide an opportunity for courting his beloved Jasmine. With the help of an impressive Genie-inspired marketing plan, Aladdin becomes fictitious Prince Ali from the made up land of Ababwa:

Well, how does this storyline relate to 'diamond in the rough' Biblical David? Again, in his world, David was least likely to do anything really significant. He couldn't be further down the line of royal succession. And there are no Genies in the Bible! But there is a God who sees potential in David that no one else sees. And because David trusts in God (rather than Saul's Armor), God does remarkable things through David and his 'five smooth stones.' David becomes one of God's **"everyday heroes."**

### **Last week, The Blind Side.**

Each part of the body matters. In this film, Michael Oher was in danger of slipping between the cracks. As the 13<sup>th</sup> child in a dysfunctional family, Michael had tremendous, but largely untapped gifts. In some ways, Leanne Tuohy's was quite the opposite. She had everything (according to the American dream) – a beautiful family, a successful career, and a home that could grace the cover of Southern Living magazine. But even with 'everything', like Michael, Leanne had tremendous, but largely untapped gifts.

It is only when their paths cross that the gifts of God begin to develop in these two. Michael's presence begins to elicit a powerful gift of compassion in Leanne. Leanne in turn sees gifts in Michael that might have gone unnoticed and underappreciated. Her consistent support fans the flame of Michael's protective tendencies to then end that both of them live into a greater sense of their potential as **Everyday Heroes**. Their connection serves to illustrate the powerful truth that "every ligament" matters. Let's read Ephesians 4:16 again: *...the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.*

**This week**, we are considering the impact of the life of Chris Gardner from the 2006 Movie, **Pursuit of Happyness**. The title features an obvious and intentional misspelling from a less than stellar Day Care in San Francisco area of that time. Gardner, played by Will Smith in an Oscar Nominated performance, experiences more downs than ups as he tries to juggle enormous challenges in his life, especially after his girlfriend and mother of Christopher, Jr., leaves for a job in New York. For all of his flaws, Chris is absolutely devoted to his son, played by the real son of Will Smith, Jaden. In this movie, Chris Gardner is a remarkable example of resilience and **perseverance**.

When we think of Scriptures that **challenge everyday heroes to persevere**, the book of Hebrews comes to mind. Hebrews was written to people who were struggling to run their metaphorical race with perseverance. At times they thought of giving up on their journey of faith in Christ. They were experiencing adversity, disappointment, even persecution for their faith, and they saw no end in sight. The road before them seemed long and daunting.

While we are not necessarily experiencing persecution for our faith, we still experience significant adversity and disappointment in this season. Sometimes it feels like there is no end in sight to this pandemic. The road before us can seem long and daunting. Sometimes it is a struggle to persevere, particularly in these days.

The author of Hebrews understands that. He reminds us that we are not alone in this race. He reminds us in chapter 11 that there have been those who have gone before us - people like Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Rahab and others who are in what he calls a great "*cloud of witnesses*." They are like a stadium full of race veterans, runners who overcame adversity and disappointment and by the grace of God, they finished their race. Now they cheer us on!!

Too, these race veterans of chapter 11 were able to lay aside weights and sin that could impede them in their race, and we can, too. Finally, Hebrews reminds us

**that we can specifically look to JESUS**, our example and source of spiritual strength. In a roundabout way, that is what kept Chris going, as he found help and hope at Glide Memorial, a United Methodist related ministry. Ultimately our hope is in the One whose very name, JESUS, means "*the Lord saves.*" The One who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith today and for eternity.

**Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:**

In these passages, what is the main practical lesson?

Briefly review some of the "cloud of witnesses" in Hebrews 11 (Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, etc). Which person is most inspiring for you personally? Why?

Was there a person in your lifetime who inspired you to persevere? What about their life or words inspired you?

What weighs you down these days? Is there something you can let go of by the grace of God and with the help of your group?

How does 'looking to Jesus' make a difference for you? How does his endurance on the cross and subsequent resurrection glory encourage you in your own race?

**Activity of for the life of a disciple:**

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Hebrews 12:1-2  
*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,<sup>[a]</sup> and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of<sup>[b]</sup> the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.*
3. What can you do this week to persevere in your race as an "Everyday Hero?"