

## Hearing is Believing

We're all familiar with the various hazard signs posted along our roadways. *Children Playing, Deer Crossing, Slippery When Wet*, and so on.

Lately, a new type of hazard sign has begun to show up in certain urban settings. Smartphone Signs.

It is a precautionary measure, an attempt to alert motorists about smartphone users.

The problem has become very pronounced in large cities. In Japan, for example, people who cannot tear themselves away from the internet have been given a disparaging nickname: *NETTO-HAIJIN*

When loosely translated into English, it means, "*Internet Human Wrecks*".

Thousands of people are injured every year, and more than a few are killed, simply because they become so absorbed with staring at their phone screens that they lose track of where they are walking.

In certain European cities, they have gone so far as to install ground-level traffic lights. LED lights are embedded on the surface of the sidewalk.

If a pedestrian fails to look up from their phone at an intersection, the hope is that maybe this will catch their eye.

And then most recently in Salzburg Austria, the city has begun wrapping lampposts with airbags, in hopes of preventing smartphone users from cracking their skulls—which happens much more often than you would think.

So what does this have to do with our time together this morning? Well, if I calculate correctly, we are a little over 60 hours away from the start of a brand-new year.

And so I thought it might be a good time for me to offer up a simple reminder. A reminder to do something that I'm confident you did during 2024.

But if you're anything like me, there is always room for improvement. Especially in this department. So rest assured, I'm not here to lecture anybody. I'm in need of this reminder as well.

And so with that thought in mind, let's read our text for this morning, taken from **Hebrews chapter 12**.

**Hebrews 12:2a**

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...

The way I see it, as intense as some people are with their smart phones, what if we were like that in our spiritual life? To try and stay focused on Jesus with similar intensity.

"*Looking unto Jesus*". That's a worthy goal for 2025.

I like the way this verse is phrased in the *NIV*. It says, "*Fixing our eyes on Jesus*." That's not speaking of a casual glance. It's a prolonged, intense stare.

I'm talking about making a habit out of looking unto Jesus. And just like every habit that is worth developing, this will not happen automatically.

In fact, this particular habit will be extra difficult to come by. Because the average American's life is overflowing with all kinds of things that can pry their eyes off of Jesus.

So I warn you in advance, it's going to take some work to pull this off. But you will be well repaid for the effort, if you will accept the challenge.

"*Fixing our eyes on Jesus*."

Remember that phrase, because we'll be looking at it again in a few minutes.

So let's put a human face on this sermon, shall we? Because it's hard to follow a sermon if you only deal with abstract concepts. I like to have an example to look at, if at all possible.

And it occurs to me that there was one time where the Apostle Peter had a hard time keeping his eyes on Jesus.

**Matthew 14:25-29**

**25** Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.

**26** And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.

27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.”

28 And Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.”

29 So He said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.

So far so good. But then Peter got his eyes off of Jesus and gave all his attention to his difficult circumstances. And suddenly he got this sinking feeling.

**Matthew 14:30a**

But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out...

Now I’m not in a position to judge Peter here. Because I know from experience how the storms of life can grab my attention and get me looking away from Jesus in the midst of a crisis. Just like Peter did.

But let’s give credit where credit is due. At least he tried. He had enough faith in Jesus’ word to step out of the boat. So let’s talk about faith for a moment. Even if it isn’t perfect faith.

Faith plays such an important part in living for the Lord. Where does it come from? And can I get my faith to grow bigger than it has been in the past?

To answer to that question, I’d like us to turn to **Luke 17:5**, where the disciples had that very thing on their minds.

**Luke 17:5**

And the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.”

Now if I had been one of those Apostles on that occasion, I would have been pretty disappointed with what happened next. Because Jesus didn’t do anything. He just kept on talking.

And I would have been remembering of all those times when Jesus would lay His hands on folks and make them better.

And that’s how I would have expected Him to increase my faith. Lay His hands on me, a quick prayer, and then it happens. That’s how I would have envisioned it.

I’m reminded of an army commander in the Old Testament. He was a heathen man with leprosy. And that pretty much meant there was no hope for him. But he was actually given hope, because he had heard of a prophet in Israel, and this prophet could heal people.

And so he decides to take the plunge and go see this man of God. It was a 70 or 80 mile trip, and on the way in his mind he already had it all worked out. He could just imagine how things would go down once he got there.

So he arrives in Israel, and parks his chariot in front of the prophet’s house. He’s all primed and ready to experience a miracle.

But there’s just one problem: things aren’t exactly lining up with how he envisioned it. Let me read you what happened. The name of the general was Naaman. And the prophet’s name was Elisha.

**2 Kings 5: 9-11 NLT**

9 So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and waited at the door of Elisha’s house.

10 But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: “Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of your leprosy.”

11 But Naaman became angry and stalked away. “I thought he would certainly come out to meet me!” he said. “I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the Lord his God and heal me!”

Now I have to pause to make an observation here. I have met a lot of folks who have it all figured out. You know, how this Christian life works.

They have all of these pre-conceived ideas, but they aren’t really based on the Bible.

But they heard a preacher on TV say this or that. Or maybe their grandma always said this or that. And so they approach the Christian life based on a lot of hearsay, but not on the Bible.

And so when it doesn’t work out the way they envisioned, they walk away from the faith and say, “***It didn’t work for me.***”

What didn't work? The Bible? Or your pre-conceived ideas about things? Because there's a big difference.

Anyway, Naaman's friends calmed him down and just spoke a little common sense into his life.

**2 Kings 5:13-14 NLT**

**13** But his officers tried to reason with him and said, "Sir, if the prophet had told you to do something very difficult, wouldn't you have done it? So you should certainly obey him when he says simply, 'Go and wash and be cured!'"

**14** So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him. And his skin became as healthy as the skin of a young child, and he was healed!

The moral of the story? When it comes to dealing with God, you're better off if you just set your pre-conceived ideas aside and let the Bible be your guide.

Now let's get back to the disciples and their request for more faith, and see if we can find something to apply in our own lives.

So when they made this request: **Lord, "Increase our faith,"** what did He do?

He just kept talking to them. Which is precisely the point. Hearing Jesus talk is how our faith grows.

Paul put it this way in Romans— "**Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.**" As we involve ourselves with the Scriptures, eventually we will start to hear from God. Because hearing from God is where faith comes from.

**"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word..."**

Now I'm going to say something here that could easily be misunderstood. It could even throw you for a loop, if you miss the point. So listen closely, and don't misunderstand what I'm saying.

***Just reading the Bible isn't enough. It never has been.***

But on the other hand, when a little piece of the Bible gets ahold of your heart, faith is ignited.

That's what Paul is saying. Faith happens when you hear from God. And the only guaranteed way to hear from God is to be thoroughly involved with your Bible. And that involves more than just reading it.

Let me illustrate this with a quote from the longest chapter in the Bible, **Psalm 119.**

**Psalm 119:37**

Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way.

He begins by asking God to help him stop focusing on things that are useless. Not necessarily sinful. Just things that aren't worth spending a great deal of time on.

And then later on in the Psalm, he tell us what his worthless thoughts got replaced with.

**Psalm 119:148**

My eyes are awake through the *night* watches, that I may meditate on Your word.

Instead of letting his mind wander aimlessly, He's meditating on the Bible. And this practice—above all others—will keep your faith functional. Meditation on the Word is indispensable.

And I wonder—did you notice this little detail? The Psalmist was staying up late to get it done. **My eyes are awake through the *night* watches, that I may meditate on Your word.**

Now it really doesn't matter if a person stays up late, or gets up early. But one way or another, you've got to carve out the time to meditate on the Bible.

So how do you go about doing that? One way to meditate on the Bible is to recite a verse or a phrase over and over again either verbally or mentally, and just bask in the meaning of the words.

Meditation also involves asking questions about what you are reading. Sometimes it's like you're wrestling with the words, until you understand them clearly.

Another thing to do is to look for statements that can become the basis for your own prayers. Like the one we've been looking at today. **"Lord, increase**

**our faith.**” Don’t just read the words. Make it your own prayer.

Meditation isn’t rocket science. But it does require a firm commitment to allocate the time to do it.

And so this is why I said that just reading the Bible isn’t enough. Don’t stop with just reading. Take the next step and meditate on what you read.

Engage your mind by analyzing what you read in your Bible. Being fully engaged with your mind is what opens the door to your heart. And that’s how your faith grows.

Speaking of faith, let’s look back to the disciples making that request. I want you to observe for yourself exactly what Jesus did in response.

**Luke 17:6**

So the Lord said, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.

He’s saying in essence, “**When you have just a little faith, God responds and does things.**” Big things happen in response to a little faith. And so the key is to use the faith you have, even if it’s just a little faith.

In other words, it doesn’t take gigantic faith to see God move. Faith the size of a mustard seed will get some results.

Not Moses-sized faith. Not Abraham-sized faith. Not David-sized faith. Oh, those guys were amazing. They were something special. Wouldn’t it be great to have faith like theirs?

But you and me—we’re just ordinary people. That’s why it’s just a little faith with us. But evidently, a little faith is enough to see things happen.

Your faith might be small, but if you look close enough, it’s there. It’s not perfect faith. But it’s faith enough for God to work with.

And do let’s move forward with our small, imperfect faith. And the way you do that is to start praying about all kinds of things.

**Philippians 4:6**

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

Don’t reserve your prayers for just the really big things. Pray about the small things too. Use your small faith on small things. Doesn’t that make sense? That’s what he says here.

**In everything...let your requests be made known to God.**

And by the way, your faith is going to improve. Jesus isn’t done working on you yet.

And so we see that Jesus was increasing the disciples’ faith by continuing to speak to them. And He will speak to you as well. He will speak to you in a specific way from the Word.

“**How does He do that?**” someone asks. He speaks to you in your heart. It’s like He’ll give you a nudge to believe Him for something specific. Like maybe to have some added boldness in your witness or testimony. Or to trust Him for wisdom to talk something over with your boss. Or your spouse. Or lots of other things.

But I promise you this much: the Lord wants to speak to your heart. He wants you to hear Him speak to your life through the Scriptures. And in the process of hearing Him, that’s how your faith will grow.

It’s not going to happen by having some super-spiritual experience. So don’t expect to go see your favorite evangelist and have them lay their hands on you and pray for your faith to grow.

That’s not what Jesus did. They asked for more faith, and He spoke to them. He wasn’t ignoring their request by continuing to talk. He was answering that request, because that’s how He works.

**Romans 10:17**

So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

You need to get the sequence right. Paul lists things in reverse order here. You start out with the Word. From the Word comes hearing. And the end result is faith.

Having the Lord speak to your heart through the Bible is the one true source of faith.

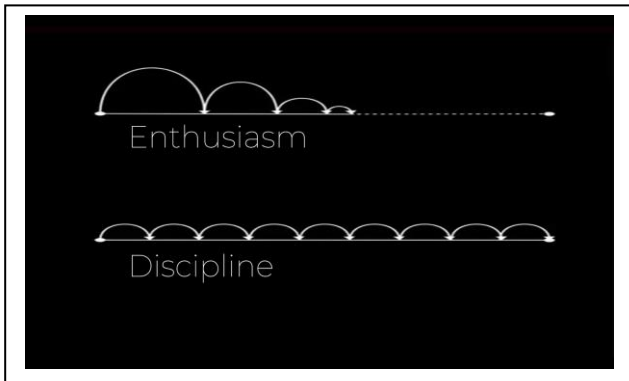
And the trick is consistency. One way or another, do it every day.

I know how it is. Sometimes we hear a message and we get all inspired and want to jump into a Bible reading program. Like 10 chapters a day, or read through the Bible in a year.

Which is great if you can do it. But more often than not we bite off more than we can chew, and we fall behind, and we get discouraged, and we quit altogether.

On the other hand if we keep things doable—if we are realistic with our aspirations—the chances of continuing on with a commitment to get in our Bible is much more likely.

Enthusiasm to do something big is a wonderful thing if you can keep going. But discipline in a smaller commitment is usually much more efficient.



So yes, it means a commitment. Every day, without fail. Even when you don't feel like it. Especially if you don't feel like it. You do this thing, because you want the Lord to speak to your heart. He's got to speak to your heart. Because you need your faith to grow.

Alright then, I think I feel a resolution coming on. After all, this is a New Year's sermon.

Let me set the table by reading the verse that precedes our text in **Hebrews 12**.

**Hebrews 12:1**

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and

let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

There is a race set before you this morning, and it goes by the name of **2025**. And you will need endurance to run that race. And where, pray tell, will that endurance come from? Paul gives us the answer right here.

Tell you what: Let me read the last part of verse 2 and the first part of verse 2 together..

**Hebrews 12:1b-2a**

Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.

Keeping our eyes on Jesus is the key to running the race with endurance. Being focused on Him is how we will persevere.

We are faced with a new year that is brimming full with promise. A year that is full of potential for personal spiritual growth. And I believe that for each one of us there will be significant opportunities to make a real difference in the lives of others. Helping them to look unto Jesus just like we are. To know Him as a living Lord who imparts to us a living faith.

I know we did it in 2024—looking unto Jesus. Let's do it even more in 2025. Looking unto Jesus, the Author and the Finisher of our faith.

Looking unto Jesus through the primary means that God has graciously provided. This year, let's consistently read and meditate on the Word of God.

And so if by chance you are in need of a resolution for the coming year, allow me to make a suggestion:

**WordWalk**

We keep it short and simple so it is eminently doable. 2 chapters a day. Just about anybody can do that.

You've got the time. New calendars are on the back table this morning. Or on our website, whichever you prefer. Accept the challenge, and watch what the Lord will do.

Looking unto Jesus in 2025. I can't wait to see what happens.