

Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne (Hebrews 12:1-2 NLT).

*The Message* offers a fresh perspective on this familiar passage:

Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God (Hebrews 12:1-2 MSG).

As we begin the Lenten journey in preparation for Easter, we commit to an honest examination of our lives but not to morbid introspection. We let go of hindrances but not our status as beloved children of God. In all things, we refuse to lose sight of where we're headed—an exhilarating new life with Christ. At all times, we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and the joy before us.

The practice for this week—which you will continue and build on throughout the study—is to set aside time each day to listen to God through Scripture and prayerful reflection. The invitation is to cultivate a humble spirit of hope and expectation

that God will meet you in this practice if you are willing to trust him. Author and pastor N. T. Wright writes:

Whenever God does something new, he involves people—often unlikely people, frequently surprised and alarmed people. He asks them to trust him in a new way, to put aside their natural reactions, to listen humbly for a fresh word and to act on it without knowing exactly how it's going to work out. That's what he's asking all of us to do this Lent: Reading the Bible without knowing in advance what God is going to say takes humility . . . we may have to put our initial reactions on hold and be prepared to hear new words, to think new thoughts, and to live them out?

At the beginning or end of each day this week, set aside fifteen to twenty minutes to read and prayerfully reflect on the Daily Scripture Readings (see page 29). The readings for each day are taken from the *Book of Common Prayer Daily Office* and include morning and evening psalms as well as selections from the Old Testament, New Testament epistles, and the Gospels.

- \* Each day, begin with a brief time of silence (one to two minutes).
- \* In God's loving presence, reflect for a few moments on these questions: *Where in my life am I falling short, feeling defeated, or growing cold to God? What new thing do I hope God might do in me?*
- \* Ask the Lord to speak to you through what you are about to read. Read the Scripture passages for the day slowly