

Session 10: Run So As to Obtain

Perseverance: the long middle of the race

PART 1 · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers the New Testament's master image for the Christian life after Baptism: a race demanding endurance, run inside a cheering communion, sustained by concrete means: prayer, the sacraments, and one another, with the eyes fixed forward on Jesus. Perseverance is neither presumed nor white-knuckled; it is received, daily, on the way.

Catholic Touchstone. The children of the Church "rightly hope for the grace of final perseverance" (CCC 2016), and prayer is the ordinary channel of that grace: the Catechism teaches that prayer and the Christian life are inseparable, and enshrines St. Alphonsus's maxim on prayer and salvation in its own text (CCC 2744). What Session 7 warned about, tonight equips for.

What You Need to Know

The heavy weather is behind the group: the warnings (S7), the diagnosis (S8), and the way back (S9). The last five sessions build the life. Tonight's job is to convert "salvation can be lost" from a lingering anxiety into a runner's focus. The New Testament does exactly this with its athletic imagery, and the imagery is everywhere once you see it: "run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1); "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it" (1 Cor 9:24); Paul at mid-course: "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on... straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:12-14). Note what Paul refuses to claim mid-race, and note the participle: "straining forward" is the word (*epekteinomenos*) St. Gregory of Nyssa built on in *The Life of Moses* (Session 1). The study's oldest voice pays off tonight.

One crown note, leader only. Tonight 1 Corinthians 9:25 puts a wreath on the table: the athletes train "to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable." Crown imagery is now officially in the study's bloodstream, and next session it becomes the subject. Do not connect it to the study's title; that door opens in Session 14.

Teach perseverance as *synergy*, or the group will hear tonight as either presumption's nap or anxiety's treadmill. Jude ends his letter with both truths in one breath: "keep yourselves in the love of God" (v. 21) and glory "to him who is able to keep you from falling" (v. 24). Peter has the same grammar: we "by God's power are guarded through faith" (1 Pet 1:5): guarded by God, through something we exercise. This is Philippians 2:12-13 (the group's very first memory verse) grown up: work out, because God works in. So the practical section matters as much as the doctrine tonight: the means of perseverance are unglamorous and utterly reliable: daily prayer (St. Alphonsus's remedy from Session 7, now with the Catechism's own seal), the sacraments as standing appointments with grace, and the community, "exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today'" (Heb 3:13), "not neglecting to meet together" (Heb 10:24-25). Nobody finishes this race alone; the cloud of witnesses, read with the communion of saints, is not decoration; it is infrastructure.

On certainty: someone will ask tonight whether we can be *sure* we will finish. Give the honest preview and defer the full treatment: the Church distinguishes what is absolutely certain (God's fidelity and promises), what is morally discernible (my present state, by its fruits), and what is hoped and prayed for (my future perseverance). Session 12 is entirely devoted to this, and to the verse on the parking lot list since Session 1. Point at the list; the group should feel the study closing its accounts.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Psalm 95 is tonight's buried treasure, and your group is standing on the X: they read it as homework a month ago, before Session 7. The psalm sings, then pivots: "O that today you would hearken to his voice! Harden not your hearts, as at Meribah," and swears the wilderness generation's oath: "They shall not enter my rest." Tonight the group discovers that Hebrews 3:7-14 quotes their homework psalm at length and squeezes one word for all it holds: **Today**. "Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today'... For we share in Christ, **if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end**" (Heb 3:13-14). The Exodus map, the psalm, and the epistle all say one thing: perseverance is not a heroic future act; it is today, repeated. **Elijah under the broom tree** (1 Kings 19:4-8) gives the race its mercy: the great prophet, mid-course, praying to die, and God's response is not a rebuke but a nap, bread, and a touch: "Arise and eat, else the journey will be too great for you." Sustenance for the road, twice, and forty days' strength from it: Catholic tradition has long heard the Eucharist's shadow there, and your tired runners will hear their own name.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. Polycarp of Smyrna

The Martyrdom of Polycarp, ch. 9 (c. 155)

Ordered to curse Christ or die, the aged bishop, a disciple of St. John himself, answered: "Eighty-six years I have served him, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

Eighty-six years is the whole point. Polycarp's crown was not minted in the stadium that afternoon; it was the last step of a race his own eighty-six years imply began in his youth. The martyrdom is what a finished "today, and today, and today" looks like from the outside.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. Benedict of Nursia

Rule, Prologue (6th century)

Near the end of his Rule's Prologue, St. Benedict writes, in substance, of a race: as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run the path of God's commandments with hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love; and he closes the Prologue asking perseverance in the school of the Lord's service until death.

Western monasticism's founding document is a perseverance manual, and its genius is its ordinariness: fixed prayer, shared meals, stability, beginning again. Benedict built civilization out of people who simply did not stop.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. Teresa of Calcutta

Private letters, published as Come Be My Light (2007)

Her published letters revealed what almost no one knew: for roughly the last half century of her life, the saint of the Calcutta gutters served through a nearly unbroken interior darkness, feeling little of the presence of the God she served, and she did not stop: not the daily rising, not the Mass, not the poorest of the poor.

That documented fidelity is the voice. Perseverance, her life teaches in substance, is measured by faithfulness rather than felt success or consolation, which is good news for everyone whose lane looks like laundry, commutes, and Tuesdays.

Catechism Connection

CCC 2016. The children of the Church rightly hope for the grace of final perseverance. The study's recurring paragraph, now in its home session.

CCC 2742-2744. Persevering in prayer: pray without ceasing; prayer is a vital necessity; and the Catechism's own citation of St. Alphonsus on the bond between prayer and salvation. The remedy your group received in Session 7 turns out to be printed in the Catechism.

CCC 1810. The human virtues are acquired by education, deliberate acts, and perseverance ever renewed in repeated efforts, and are purified and elevated by grace. The runner's physiology, in catechism prose.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH · leader only, never read aloud

The crown surfaces. 1 Corinthians 9:25's imperishable wreath is the crown thread's first open appearance. Let it pass tonight without comment beyond the text itself; next session it becomes the subject, and the title verse still waits for Session 14. If anyone asks about the study title again, same smile, same answer.

Psalm 95 payoff. The homework from a month ago detonates tonight in Hebrews 3. Let a participant make the connection if at all possible; ask "where have you read this psalm recently?" before you tell them. Long-range payoffs are the study's signature; savor this one.

St. Gregory of Nyssa payoff. Philippians 3:13's "straining forward" is the word behind Session 1's *epektasis* voice. One sentence when it lands; the group should feel the study's first session shaking hands with its tenth.

St. Alphonsus payoff. When CCC 2744 appears, remind the group where they first heard the maxim (Session 7's exit ramp). CCC 2744 teaches prayer's vital necessity, with St. Alphonsus's maxim cited in its support.

Certainty question: preview only. The full assurance treatment, and the 1 John 5:13 parking-lot debt from Session 1, is Session 12. Point at the list; do not settle it tonight.

Session Goals

1. The group can name the race as the New Testament's image for post-baptismal life, with texts.
2. Participants discover the Psalm 95 / Hebrews 3 connection themselves and can say what "today" does to perseverance.
3. The group can state perseverance's synergy from Jude 21 and 24 in one breath.
4. Every participant leaves with a named, scheduled means of perseverance: a daily prayer, a sacramental rhythm, and a person.
5. The tired runner in the room hears Elijah's broom tree as their own story, mercy included.

Time Note

Plan for 85 minutes. Win 10, Build 50, Send 12, prayer 6. If running long, cut **Build question 2** (Elijah folds into a sentence of your summary) and compress the **Dig Deeper**. Never cut the Psalm 95 discovery or the means-of-perseverance segment; the second is the night's cargo.

PART 2 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

PRAY TOGETHER

Father, you have set a race before us and a cloud of witnesses around us. Lift what weighs us down, steady what has gone weary in us, and fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Teach us to run today, just today, and to trust you with all the other days. Amen.

WIN · Opening Questions

- What is the longest thing you have ever stuck with: a sport, a job, a marriage, an instrument? What actually kept you in it on the ordinary days?
- When your faith has felt like a grind, what did you assume that meant? Were you ever told the grind might be normal?

BUILD · Into the Text

Leader: have someone read Hebrews 12:1-3 aloud, then 1 Corinthians 9:24-25, then Philippians 3:12-14. Ask the group to collect every athletic word they hear.

1. What does the race imagery, taken seriously, tell us about the shape of the Christian life? And what does Paul, of all people, refuse to claim about himself in Philippians 3:12?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

A race has a start (the group knows exactly where theirs was: the font), a course with length and resistance, a surrounding "so great a cloud of witnesses", read by the Church, with the communion of saints, as the finished encircling the running, a required virtue ("run **with perseverance**"), a focal point ("looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith"), and a prize ahead, not in the pocket: "So run that you may obtain it" (1 Cor 9:24). And the athletes' wreath comparison: theirs perishable, ours "imperishable" (9:25); hold that image, it returns.

Paul, mid-course, refuses the finish-line claim: "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on... straining forward to what lies ahead" (Phil 3:12-13). If the apostle would not declare his race over while still running it, the middle tense of salvation from Session 1 has just been confirmed by its greatest runner. (And "straining forward" is the word St. Gregory of Nyssa built on in The Life of Moses, Session 1's voice: the pressing itself is the saved life.)

2. Read 1 Kings 19:4-8. Elijah, mid-race, sits down under a broom tree and asks to die. What does God do about it, and what does he pointedly not do?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

God does not rebuke, lecture, or replace him. He lets him sleep, sends an angel with bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water, touches him, lets him sleep again, and feeds him again, "for the journey is too great for you" (19:7 in substance). Forty days' strength from that food. Catholic tradition has long heard a shadow of the Eucharist in the bread for the journey, and every exhausted runner should hear the pastoral point: collapse at mile eighteen is not apostasy, and God's first response to a burned-out prophet was food and a nap.

The difference between Elijah under the broom tree and the wilderness generation at Meribah is the difference tonight turns on: weariness inside the journey versus hardening against the voice.

Live discovery. Say: "A month ago, your Take-Home assigned a psalm to read before the warnings session. Now read Hebrews 3:7-14 and tell me: whose homework is the author quoting, and what one word does he squeeze until it changes how perseverance works?"

3. What psalm is Hebrews 3 quoting, what did that psalm remember, and what does the author do with the word "today"?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Psalm 95: your own pre-Session-7 homework, quoted at length in the Greek-scriptural form Hebrews uses: "Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion" (your RSV2CE psalter reads "O that today you would hearken to his voice! Harden not your hearts, as at Meribah"), the wilderness generation, and the oath "They shall never enter my rest." The author then leans his whole weight on one word: "exhort one another every day, **as long as it is called 'today'**... For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end" (Heb 3:13-14).

"Today" changes the size of perseverance. Nobody is asked to be faithful for forty years tonight; everyone is asked to be faithful today, and to help somebody else be. Perseverance is not one heroic act at the far end of life; it is the smallest unit of faithfulness, repeated, inside a community that exhorts daily. The Exodus map's wilderness is crossed one "today" at a time.

4. Read Jude 20-21 and then Jude 24-25. Five verses apart, who does the keeping? Read also 1 Peter 1:5. How do you hold these together without dropping either?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Jude 21: **"keep yourselves** in the love of God." Jude 24: glory "to him who **is able to keep you** from falling." Same letter, same page, both commanded and confessed. 1 Peter 1:5 shows the mechanism: we "by God's power are guarded through faith": God's power does the guarding; faith, which we exercise daily, is the channel.

This is the study's oldest grammar: "work out your own salvation... for God is at work in you" (Phil 2:12-13, Session 1's memory verse, now fully grown). Perseverance is synergy: never our unaided grip, never a grace that grips for us while we sleep. Praying, receiving the sacraments, and staying inside the exhorting community are not works that rival grace; they are how grace is ordinarily received. The runner does not create the air; the runner does have to breathe.

Build, Then Press

Leader: present at full strength; this voice lives inside tired Christians, and it deserves an honest answer. Note the doctrine behind its envy, and grant it fairly: classical Reformed teaching holds that God preserves the regenerate through real means and gives real present assurance grounded in his promise; Session 12 engages that account at full strength. Tonight's voice is the tired heart's version.

The exhausted voice says: **"So it never ends. Decades of white-knuckled effort, and one bad season could still lose everything. How is that good news? At least the 'once saved always saved' folks get to rest. Your system sounds like salvation by stamina, and I do not have it."**

5. Answer the exhausted voice from tonight's texts. Be gentle; it may be your own.

ANSWER · share after the discussion

First, feel its truth: the race is long, and pretending otherwise is cruelty. But look at what tonight actually taught. The unit of perseverance is not decades; it is **today** (Heb 3:13), a size every exhausted person can still carry. The keeping is not yours alone; you are "guarded by God's power" (1 Pet 1:5), and "he who is able to keep you from falling" (Jude 24) is on duty tonight. The course comes with aid stations: bread for the journey when you cannot go on (Elijah's story is in the Bible precisely for mile eighteen), a shipyard when you wreck (Session 9), and runners on every side commanded to exhort *you*, daily. And stamina is precisely not the currency: fidelity is, the kind St. Teresa of Calcutta kept through decades of interior darkness, and faithfulness, unlike stamina, is renewed each morning by asking. That is St. Alphonsus's whole maxim, now with the Catechism's seal (CCC 2744): the one who prays receives; the one who keeps

asking, keeps standing.

And "rest now" is not actually what the alternative offers; it offers a certainty that must wait until the finish line to be verified, which is, on the ground, the same daily walk of faith. The good news was never "you will not have to run." It is "you will not run alone, unfed, or unforgiven, and the One at the finish is the same One carrying you down the course."

DIG DEEPER · Trent on the Gift of Perseverance

The Council of Trent's justification decree devotes a chapter to perseverance, teaching in substance: the gift of persevering to the end can come only from God, who is able to make the one standing stand firm; so let no one promise himself certainty about it with absolute certitude, though all ought to place the firmest hope in God's help; for God, unless men fail his grace, will finish the good work he began, working both the will and the accomplishment.

Read the balance: no presumption, boundless hope, and the finishing explicitly God's work "unless men fail his grace." Session 12 walks this ridge in full; tonight, notice Trent tells the exhausted voice exactly what Jude told it: he is able to keep you.

The Runner's Kit

Leader: make this concrete and personal; go around the circle if the group is willing. Every runner tonight names three things: **a daily prayer** (a fixed minimum that survives bad days: a morning offering, a decade, the perseverance sentence from Session 7); **a sacramental rhythm** (Sunday non-negotiable; a realistic confession cadence; and when the race gets heavy, remember Elijah's bread has a name and an altar); **a person** (who exhorts you "as long as it is called today," and whom you exhort back; names, not vibes). Write them on the Take-Home. A kit you have named is a kit you can check.

SEND · Taking It Out

- Which piece of your runner's kit is currently missing or rusted: the daily prayer, the sacramental rhythm, or the person? What is the first concrete step this week?
- Who in your life is at mile eighteen under a broom tree right now? What would bread and a touch, rather than a lecture, look like from you this week?

Live It This Week

Run today only. Each morning this week, pray: "Lord, faithful today." Do not negotiate with the decades; they arrive one today at a time.

Deploy the kit. Begin the three named pieces immediately: the fixed daily prayer, the calendar entries, the first message to your person.

Feed a runner. Do one concrete broom-tree kindness for a weary Christian: a meal, a ride, a "still praying for you." Aid stations are staffed by runners.

Closing Prayer

PRAY TOGETHER

Lord Jesus, pioneer and perfecter of our faith, you ran this course first and you run it now beside us. Give us the grace of today's faithfulness, bread for the journey when it is too great for us, and companions for the road. Keep us, who cannot keep ourselves, and bring us, with all that cloud of witnesses, home. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our

faith."

Hebrews 12:1b-2a (RSV2CE)

PART 3 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order.

Passage	Where it is used in this session
Hebrews 12:1-3	The race and the cloud of witnesses (Build Q1, memory verse)
1 Corinthians 9:24-25	Run to obtain; the imperishable wreath (Build Q1)
Philippians 3:12-14	Paul mid-course; "straining forward" (Build Q1)
1 Kings 19:4-8	Elijah under the broom tree; bread for the journey (Build Q2)
Hebrews 3:7-14	Live discovery: Psalm 95 quoted; "today" (Build Q3)
Psalms 95	The homework psalm (Build Q3)
Jude 20-21, 24-25	Keep yourselves / him who is able to keep you (Build Q4)
1 Peter 1:5	Guarded by God's power through faith (Build Q4)
Philippians 2:12-13	Session 1 memory verse callback (Q4 answer)
Hebrews 10:24-25	Not neglecting to meet together (leader background, Runner's Kit)
Colossians 1:21-23	"Provided that you continue in the faith" (leader background)
Luke 9:62	Hand to the plow (leader background)
CCC 2744	St. Alphonsus's maxim with the Catechism's seal (Catechism Connection)