

...LORD, INCREASE MY FAITH

STAY IN THE RACE!

January 10th, 2016

Hebrews 12:1-2 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Intro: Nowhere in the Bible are we promised that the Christian life is going to be easy. In fact, often the opposite is true, **John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.** Yes, difficulties will come and trials will cross our paths and often, we will be tempted to quit on God and drop out of the race. That seems to be the idea in the book of Hebrews. These Christians were enduring a terrible time of trial and persecution. In light of that, the writer is attempting to encourage these weary, hurting believers to be faithful to the Lord and to continue to run their race.

The Apostle Paul is comparing the Christian life to a race. He isn't talking about a 100 yard dash. Instead, he is referring to a marathon. A race that requires endurance and preparation. Today, I know that I am in no physical shape to run in a marathon, but I can be in the kind of spiritual shape it takes to run the Christian race.

In a day when runners seem to be dropping out on every hand, there are times when it is easy to be discouraged about your own race. When trials come, there may be the temptation to drop out for a while and let others do the running. This morning, I want to help you stay in the race! I want to share some steps that are given in these verses that will help you and me run this race we are in this morning.

I do not know what you may be facing today as you run your race, but I do know doing the things revealed in these verses will help us all to be runners who are pleasing to the Lord God. As the Lord gives liberty, allow me to share with you these Steps For Staying In The Race. My goal in preaching this message is that

when we reach the end of this race we might say with the Apostle Paul, "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*" 2 Tim. 4:7

I. V. 1a **STEP 1: CONSIDER THE SAINTS**

(As Paul begins this chapter, he draws our attention back to chapter 11, where he mentioned many of the great heroes and heroines of the faith. These people are the great cloud of witnesses that surrounds us as we run the race we have been given. Three truths about these witnesses can give us encouragement as we run our race.)

A. **They Have Run Their Race** - These were people who ran the race they had been given. They did not run perfectly, but they ran. They did not quit until the race was finished. They endured unspeakable pain and suffering, still they ran. Now, they are seated in the grandstands and observe the race we are running tonight. In doing so, they stand as an encouragement and a challenge to the rest of us.

If these people could run their race, then so can we. None of these were extraordinary people, Ill. Elijah - *James 5:17-18 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.* They were merely common men and women who evidenced a profound faith in God. If they could live for the Lord and serve Him, then you and I can as well!

B. **They Have Received Their Reward** - These people ran their race and now they are able to rest in the Father's presence. Because they ran well, they have received their reward. The prize is theirs because they ran and they ran well.

Again, this should give us encouragement to run for the Lord. When the race is over, we will go to be with Him, where we too will receive the rewards earned during the course of our race here on earth - Ill. Paul's expectation - *2 Timothy 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

C. **They Have Revealed That God Is Reliable** - The greatest encouragement that we can derive from these saints is the fact that they are proof positive of the reliability of the Lord. If God took care of them, honored their faith, sustained them, kept them, used them, blessed them, and got glory from their lives, then He will do the same in your life and mine!

When the Bible calls them witnesses, it doesn't necessarily mean that they are watching every move we make. Although that may be the case. It does mean that they are witnesses to the faithfulness of God. What it means is that they ran their race and so can you! And, since God knows no respect of person, He will be with you just as He was with Moses, Abraham, David or any of the others great heroes of the faith. God is absolutely dependable, **Hebrews 13:5 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.**

I. Step 1: Consider The Saints

II. V. 1b-2a STEP 2: CONSIDER SELF

A. We Must Make Proper Preparations - when there is a race to be run, the wise runner must make careful preparations. The same is true in a spiritual race as well. We will never reach our fullest potential for the Lord until we are willing to make the preparations and sacrifices that are necessary for running the race.

1. Lay Aside All Weights - This refers to a runner making sure that all extra weights have been removed from his body. A 300 pound man isn't ready to run a marathon. In the spiritual arena, this refers to anything that hinders our walk with God. It speaks of things that are innocent in and of themselves, but when they slow you down in the Christian race, they are weights and they must go. The list of these things could be endless, but a few are:

- a. Seeking entertainment instead of fellowshiping and communing with God.
- b. Seeking possessions and the things of this world instead of seeking God.
- c. Giving our attention to things like music, television shows, movies, etc that do not focus our minds on the Lord.

In short, this refers to anything that does not build us up in or make us stronger in the Lord. Anything that does not build us up in the Lord, is a weight and a hindrance and should be removed from our life.

2. Lay Aside All Sins - Next, the author encourages his readers to get rid of "besetting sins". This refers to sins which cling to, distract, entangles and trips the Christian runner. The picture is of a man trying to run a race while dressed in the long flowing robes of the day. It would be easy for him to be tripped up and fall out of the race.

There are many sins that could be mentioned at this point, but the idea in this verse is that particular sin which trips you up. You know where you are weak. There are sins that do not tempt you at all, but there are others that are a constant source of temptation. This is what the writer is referring to here. Whatever that sin is, it must be stripped off and avoided at all costs. Else, it will entangle you, trip you and prevent you from finishing your race! **Romans 6:12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.**

B. We Must Run With Patience - Here the picture is of a runner settling in for the long haul. However, it is not a picture of sitting back and waiting to see what will come our way in life. It is an active word that tells speaks of a person who has a spirit in him that stands up and faces the trials of life. He goes forth and runs at trouble. He conquers it and over comes it in the power of the Lord. He is able to face his trials because he knows the Lord has brought it to him for his own good and for God's glory, Rom. 8:28.

This merely teaches us that the Christian runner has endurance. He has a little grit. He stands strong in the Lord and runs his race, **1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.**

Notice the wording "*the race that is set before us.*" We each have our own race to run. This challenges us to remember some things.

1. **We each have our own race to run!** That is, you cannot run in my lane and I cannot run in yours! I am convinced that the cause of Christ has been hindered by many who refuse to run in their own lane and they end up hindering everyone around them.

2. **We are not in competition, but we are on the same team!** My job isn't to outrun you, my job is to run for Jesus, the race that He has planned for me to the best of my ability.

3. **Our course has been individually designed!** The race you are running has been prepared just for you. The best thing we can do is run our race to the best of our God-given ability.

C. We Must Guard Our Priorities - Notice that verse 2a tells us that we are to run "*looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.*" Plainly put, that means we are to use Jesus as our focal point while we run the race we have been given by God. You see, He ran His race, and He ran it well. He finished the course

that was laid out for Him and now He stands as the supreme champion in the race of life. In fact, He is the race judge,

The race judge was the man who called the race. He decided who was disqualified and who was running well.

- * While we run, we must not look at the other runners. Doing so will cause distraction and defeat.
- * We must not look at circumstances. Doing so will result in distraction and defeat.
- * Our eyes are to be on the One who started us on this race, and the One who will greet us at the end of it.
- * Our primary duty while we run is to look to Him. Anything less will spell disaster for the Christian runner.

I. Step 1: Consider The Saints

II. Step 2: Consider Self

III. V. 2b-3 STEP 3: CONSIDER THE SAVIOUR

(As we run this race and look to Jesus, the author goes onto tell us several things about His race that we are to look to that will help us as we run the race we have been assigned.)

A. **Consider His Race** - His was a hard race that began in poverty and ended in pain on a cross. His was a race that lead Him around a track lined with hatred, bitterness, opposition and the desire to see Him dead. His was a race that set the perfect example of how a race should be run. His was a race in which He never faltered. He never lost sight of the goal and He never quit running until the goal had been achieved. When you feel like quitting, just look to Jesus and consider the race He ran for you and me. Then, run, Christian run!

B. **Consider His Reasons** - The Bible tells us here that Jesus ran "*for the joy that was set before Him*" Where is the joy in going to a cross? Where is the joy in dying like a common criminal? Where is the joy in being rejected by people you love? For Jesus, the joy was in what would happen when He finished His race. For Him, the joy was the day of redemption that would bring about the following:

1. The salvation of all believers
2. The day when He would be in Heaven with the redeemed of the ages.

3. The day when He would reclaim the glory He had shared with the Father from eternity past.

4. The day when there would be a new heavens and a new earth where all the redeemed would be worshipping the Father.

5. The day when salvation would be ultimately completed, sin forever destroyed, Satan forever banished and perfect righteousness would rule in every heart.

That's why Jesus ran! He was able to look past the cross. He was able to despise the shame. He was able to think beyond everything He would be called upon to face in this world and He was able to see you. He ran His race for us. We are what motivated the heart of the Savior to go to that cross and die.

We need to come to the place where we are able to look beyond the situations and circumstances of life and envision that day when we too will be home with the Savior. Oh, what a day that will be!! Glory to God, that will give you a second wind to be able to run your race with patience!

C. **Consider His Reward** - Jesus ran well and when He finished, He sat down with the Father in His throne! You see, Jesus knew where He was headed! That made it a little easier to run the race.

The same is true for you and me tonight. When we are able to get a heavenly vision, it makes the race more bearable. Hey, it's all a matter of perspective anyway!

D. **Consider His Resolve** - Verse 3 tells us that Jesus endured must to finish His race. Hey folks, He suffered more than you or I can grasp. A short list of things includes:

1. He was born to an unwed mother - Mt. 1:18-19
2. He was born in a stable - Lk. 2:7
3. Born to poor parents - Luke 2:24
4. His life was threatened as a baby - Matt. 2:13ff
5. His birth was the cause of terrible suffering - Mt. 2:16ff

6. He was moved as a baby - Matt. 2:13ff
7. He was raised in a despicable town - Nazareth - Luke 2:39
8. His father died when He was young - Mt. 13:53-58
9. He had to support His family - Mt. 13:55-58
10. He had no home and no place to lay His head - Mt. 8:20; Luke 9:58
11. He was hated and opposed by others - Mark 14:1-2
12. He was charged with insanity - Mark 3:21
13. He was charged with demon possession - Mark 3:22
14. He opposed by His family - Mark 3:21-22
15. He was rejected, hated and opposed by the audiences who came to hear Him speak - Matt. 13:53-58; Luke 4:28-29.
16. He was betrayed by a close friend - Mark 14:10-11; 18
17. He was left alone, rejected and forsaken by all of His friends - Mark 14:50.
18. He was tried before the high court of the land and tried with treason - John 18:33.
19. He was executed as a common criminal by means of crucifixion - John 19:16ff.

Have any of you ever suffered to that degree? Probably not! That is why we are told to compare our sufferings with His when we feel like giving up. He endured until the end so that we might be saved. He stands as our example. Therefore, let us run with patience the race that is set before us! You see, Jesus has already been around the track, That is why He is able to help us as we run - **Hebrews 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.**

Conc: How is your race progressing? Do you need encouragement this morning? Have you even lately considered getting out of the race? Let me challenge you to get your eyes back on Jesus. Stop looking at the other runners. Stop looking at the

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circumstances through which you are running. Look to Him today, get rid of those weights, strip off the besetting sins and make up your mind to run a patient race.

Let's **STAY IN THE RACE!**