

### Running the Race Set Before Us

#### Hebrews 12:1-11

Hebrews 12:1-11 - *“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,<sup>2</sup> 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 has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.<sup>3</sup> For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.<sup>4</sup> You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.<sup>5</sup> And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;<sup>6</sup> For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.”<sup>7</sup> If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?<sup>8</sup> But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?<sup>10</sup> For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.<sup>11</sup> Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

#### Background Notes

Hebrews 11 listed a great number of Old Testament believers who were examples and models of how to live by faith. These heroes of faith are the “great crowd of witnesses” that are mentioned in Hebrews 12:1: *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.”*

Does verse 1 mean that the champions of faith – a great crowd of them - are looking down at us from Heaven to see how we’re doing? Knowing that Abraham and Moses and Isaiah and the others are watching from the balcony of Heaven and checking up on us would certainly motivate us to run well in *“the race that is set before us”*!

But that’s not exactly the idea here. The indication in verse 1 is not that these heroes of faith are witnesses **of us** - but rather that they are witnesses **to us!** Their lives, particularly the events and exploits mentioned in Hebrews 11, are **a witness to us of what it means to live by faith.** Therefore, let us follow their example.

It’s important to remember that some of the readers of this epistle were not walking by faith. In fact, some were tempted to turn back to Judaism. After all, there was more outward glory and grandeur associated with Judaism and the Temple worship. Not only that, there was certainly more safety in Judaism. Christianity was now illegal, and the Roman persecutions of Christians had begun.

But the writer to the Hebrews warned his readers that turning back would be sin: “*You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin*” (v4). The sin mentioned here would primarily be the sin of turning away from Christ and going back to Judaism. The true believer is expected to endure, even to the point of “*bloodshed,*” or even martyrdom.

These verses indicate that living by faith is like running a marathon race. We are expected to endure. We’re expected to keep on running the race all the way to the end.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Committed believers do not get side tracked.

The Christian life and living by faith is like running a marathon race. The Christian life is not a “cake walk.” It’s not a sprint or dash. It’s not even a mile run or a 5K. It’s a **marathon** - 26.2 long miles. I once ran a 7.6- mile race and that was long enough for me! But it wasn’t long enough to give me the feel of what it means to run a marathon. Our son David has run several marathons, including the Chicago Marathon, and several 50-mile ultra-marathons. He is extremely disciplined in his training and in running the race.

In running a marathon, you need to be disciplined. You need to train long and well, you need to pace yourself, you need to endure even when you’re weary and hurting, and you can’t get side tracked. There must be commitment over the long haul.

This is true in the Christian life as well. In verses 1-2 there are three factors that are necessary to avoid getting side tracked.

#### **a. Lay aside every weight.**

“...let us lay aside every weight.” Have you ever held a long distance running shoe in your hand? It’s very light. Running shirts and shorts are very lightweight. A successful marathon runner carries no extra weight.

In the Christian life, the things that weigh us down are not necessarily sins. “Weights” can be **anything that slows us down or holds us back** – anything that takes us away from being streamlined for the Lord. “Weights” might be innocent pastimes like sports or hobbies, or too much time spent in leisure reading, or watching TV or other entertainment.

In reference to living by faith, here’s a question we all can ask ourselves about everything we do: Is it a **weight** or is it a **wing**? If it’s a wing, it will help you - but if it’s a weight, it will hold you back - and even drag you down.

#### **b. Keep your limbs free.**

“...and the sin that so easily ensnares us...” Runners don’t wear a lot of long flowing clothing that could entangle their legs and trip them up. In the same way, Christians who are living by faith must keep their lives free from sin. If we’re going to finish the race, we can’t let sin entangle our feet and trip us up.

We must be careful and disciplined so we avoid the sin that can “so easily ensnare us.” We must be freed up from the entangling situations that we get into because of sin. In the context of the book of Hebrews, the author was most likely thinking of the sin of unbelief, but this point could certainly be applied to **any sin** - and sin in general.

Is there a sin in your life that is threatening to entangle you? Do whatever it takes to get free from that entanglement, so it doesn't hold you back from finishing the race!

### **c. Keep your eyes on Jesus.**

“...*fixing our eyes on Jesus...*” Just as a runner must keep looking ahead, so we must keep our eyes focused on Jesus, the “Author and Finisher of our faith.” The thought here is that Jesus is the perfect Runner, so we must keep our eyes on Him! He is our Leader, and we're to follow Him. If we're looking to Him, we won't get side tracked!

Jesus gave us the supreme example of what it means to endure. He endured the cross; He finished the race; and He is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Let's keep our eyes on Jesus! Let's not get distracted or sidetracked! Committed believers do not get side tracked.

## **2. Committed believers do not despise discipline.**

In verse 5-11, the word “*chastening*” means discipline – and discipline means training. Discipline is not just the idea of getting a spanking for doing the wrong thing - although it can include that idea. True discipline means **training!** Just as discipline and training are required for success in running a marathon, training in the Christian life is required. It can involve and include all kinds of things to help us grow and endure in the life of faith.

The writer to the Hebrews wanted to explain why God did not make the Christian life easy. He needed to explain that, like running a marathon race, the Christian life is **not** easy! God was using persecution and suffering and hard times and public ridicule as training in the lives of those 1<sup>st</sup> century believers.

This concept is still true today. Financial loss, job loss, sickness, ridicule and persecution for being a Christian – God uses these things (and more) as a means of discipline. Have you been through God's training program? Discipline teaches us to patiently endure. It helps us to grow stronger in our life of faith, and continue to run the race set before us.

Verse 5-6 quote Proverbs 3:11-12: don't despise the Lord's discipline! Do you question and rebel against God's discipline in your life? When your parents disciplined you, was it because they hated you? No, it was because they loved you! And it worked!

And that's the point of these verses. If our parents' discipline worked, even though they were imperfect humans, how much more will God's discipline work the right results in our lives! God is our perfect Heavenly Father, not just an imperfect human parent. Look at verses 9-10 again: “*Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we*

*paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness."*

I think we can all agree with verse 11: *"No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful."* Training is tough. It hurts. Persecution and suffering are not easy to take. Being humbled is painful. But God allows it because He loves us (v6)! And notice the reward of discipline: *"... it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness"* (v11).

I'm sure I would not be teaching the Word of God to you if there had been no discipline and training of God in my life. Training isn't easy to take, but it helps to remember verse 6: *"...whom the Lord loves, He disciplines."* God disciplines us because He loves us, and He wants us to grow! When we get to Heaven, we will never regret the painful discipline from God that we experienced here on earth. God's discipline helped us to grow in strength and endurance. God's "training for the marathon" enabled us to keep going, and to finish the race well! Committed believers do not despise discipline.

## Practical Application

### Consider Jesus, for a "second wind"!

Is "getting a second wind" a familiar term? Many times exhausted runners will experience a spurt of renewed energy and strength that enables them to continue running and to finish the race. That's sometimes called "getting a second wind."

In the same way, it's entirely possible to become exhausted when you're running the marathon race of the Christian life. Perhaps the strong winds of adversity or grief have worn you down. Perhaps you've become physically weary and spiritually discouraged, and you feel like giving up the race. Are you experiencing discouragement and weariness right now? You need a second wind!

What's the solution? *"...consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself"* (v3). The more we think of what the Lord endured at the hands of sinners - even to the point of death - the more we will be motivated to endure. How could we not be motivated to carry out the dying wish of a person who gave his or her life for us? Well - Jesus did just that! **Remembering what Jesus endured for us** is like getting a second wind in running.

Are you weary? Are you discouraged? Do you feel like quitting the race? Consider Jesus to get a "second wind"!