

Running the Race

INTRODUCTION:

1. Read Hebrews 12:1-17, where the Christian's life is compared to a race.
2. Let's consider six points we can glean from this text.

BODY:

- I. This race is no sprint; it's a marathon, and so ENDURANCE is absolutely essential.
 - A. The latter part of v. 3 tells us what concerns the Lord—"lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls" (NASV—"so that you will not grow weary and lose heart").
 1. That's why He gives the admonition: "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (v. 1).
 2. And this one: "Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees" (v. 12, ESV).
 3. As we go through the rest of the lessons, we'll see some things to lift us and strengthen us.
- II. We won't endure, if we try to run with the weight of sin.
 - A. "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us" (v. 1).
 1. If you're running any distance, you don't really want to carry any extra weight, do you?
 2. Even your clothing, you won't to make sure it's comfortable, that it's not impeding your progress in any way.
 - B. Pursing holiness (v. 14)—that's what this race is all about, and we can't do that and hold on to sin at the same time.
 1. And we can't lay aside sin if we don't clear from our path any stumbling blocks—anything that might lead us into sin, anything that might injure our souls.
 2. Doesn't this explain the admonition in v. 13? "Make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed."
- III. It always helps to have a crowd behind you, and we most certainly do.
 - A. Those in the "stands" include people Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Isaac, and all the other men and women of faith discussed in Hebrews 11.
 1. These are the people he's talking about when he says we're "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" (v. 1).

B. They know what it's like...

1. To do right when no one else seems interested (Noah).
2. To have to pleasure of sin tugging at you (Moses).
3. What it's like to be asked to do something when you don't understand why (Abraham).
4. What it's like to believe in a promise that almost seems too incredible to believe (Abraham and Sarah).

C. And they're all saying the same thing: "You can do it, too!"

IV. As much encouragement as these "fans" offer, our biggest source of encouragement is our Savior, Jesus Christ.

A. Read carefully vv. 2-3.

1. Just think for a minute about all He had to endure, and yet "for the joy that was set before Him" He did endure.
2. "The author and finisher of our faith" (v. 2).
 - a. Loosely translated, He's the reason we started the race, and He's the reason we'll finish it.
3. He's waiting for us at the finish line, sitting at the right hand of God, and if we endure, we'll get to sit with Him.

V. The "hostility from sinners" (v. 3), the suffering we endure for righteousness' sake (vv. 4-11)—it's all part of the training regimen.

A. And it will make us stronger, because it gives us opportunity after opportunity to exercise our faith.

1. "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (v. 11, ESV).

VI. The prize for this race—it's eternal, so let's make sure we don't give it up for something that's NOT.

A. Esau sold his birthright for one morsel of food (16).

1. It would be far more tragic to sell our souls for something that doesn't last. We have eternal joy set before us, so let's don't trade it for temporary joy.
 - a. Popularity, the pleasures of sin, etc.
2. Make that mistake, and we'll have eternity to regret it.