

RUNNING THE RACE

Scripture Reading: Read Hebrews 12

This morning, as I write this, our oldest son is participating at the Christian College National Cross-Country Championships in Cedarville, OH. He races for Houghton College and his school will be one of thirty-nine teams from around the nation challenging each other on the 8,000 meter course. His team's theme verses come from the opening section of Hebrews chapter 12: *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."*

These verses are fitting both in the athletic arena and also in the spiritual realm. In both realms, the participants are cheered on by those who witness the event. In the natural realm, many spectators will line the race course to cheer on the runners. In the Christian life, many runners have gone before us and have passed the baton from generation to generation until it's now our turn to run the race. They have finished their turn and now they're cheering us on to remain faithful.

In both realms, it is critical for runners to let go of any excessive baggage that could slow them down or trip them up. No runner wants to be racing at nationals carrying 30 pound dumbbells. No Christian needs to be carrying extra spiritual weight either. Interestingly, Hebrews makes a distinction between things that hinder and sins that so easily entangle. While there may be an overlap at times in the meaning, often there is a difference. For example, we can be hindered by good things that keep us from the best things. We can be hindered by urgent things that keep us from important things. Neither good nor urgent things are necessarily sinful but both could slow us down in the race of life if we're not careful. Bottom line, whatever weighs us down and impedes our forward progress needs to be addressed.

In both realms, perseverance is required. The Christian life, as we saw in the devotional in Acts 20, is not a quick sprint but more of a marathon. We don't want to be great starters but horrible finishers. We want to run until we finish and when we hit the wall, so to speak, we don't want to give up but press through.

Finally, in both realms, it's important to keep one's eyes on the goal. In the spiritual realm, we fix our eyes on Jesus because he is the author and finisher of our faith. He is also the model we follow and the goal for which we strive.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Again and again in this devotional series, we have seen biblical writers using the analogy of athletics in general and running in particular to teach spiritual truth. What point(s) do you see the Lord repeatedly emphasizing in your life from these athletic analogies? Take the point(s) to the Lord in prayer and commit yourself through the power of the Holy Spirit to begin training in that area today!

Take-a-way: *In the race of life, only runners who keep their eyes on Jesus win.*