

Title: WHY THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS LIKE RUNNING A RACE

Text: Hebrews 12:1-3

Intro: The Christian life is often compared to everyday things, events, or practices. For example, Paul compared it to: Warfare (**II Tim. 2:3**); Boxing (**I Cor. 9:26**); Farming (**II Tim. 2:6**); Building (**I Cor. 3:10**); and Running (**Heb. 12:1**). In our text today, we will focus on the aspects of a race as they compare to the faithful life in Christ:

I. THE EVENT OF THE RACE (12:1d)

A. Spiritual life is like a race. Sadly, too many people are not even included in the spiritual race and many Christians could not be described as running the race at all. Some are merely jogging, some are just walking, and many more sit watching as spectators.

B. If you are not a Christian, trust in Christ as your Lord and Saviour so you get in the race. You have to enter before you can hope to win. If you are a Christian, run with patience; don't give up.

C. Very few believers run with patience. Most pursue comfort, money, learning, popularity, respect, position, lust of the flesh, or anything except God's will and glory (**I Cor. 9:24-25**).

II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT TO RUN (12:1a)

A. The "*great cloud of witnesses*" are all those faithful men and women of God mentioned in **Heb. 11**. We are to run the race of faith like they did, always trusting, never giving up, no matter what the obstacles, hardships or sacrifice they faced.

B. By nature we are creatures of motivation. We need a reason for doing things and need encouragement while doing them. One of the greatest encouragements to Christians would be the great heroes from the past who lived lives full of faith and trust in God.

C. They knew how to run the race of faith. They opposed Pharaoh; forsook the pleasures and comforts of his palace; passed through the Red Sea; shouted down the walls of Jericho; conquered kingdoms; shut the mouths of lions; quenched the power of fire; received back their dead by resurrection; were tortured, mocked, scourged, imprisoned, stoned, sawn in two; dressed in animal skins and destitute – all these for the sake of their faith in God!

III. THE ENCUMBRANCES THAT HINDER US (12:1b)

A. One of the greatest problems runners face is weight (Illustrate). A weight is simply a mass or load of anything. A weight is not necessarily bad or sinful in itself BUT it slows us down, diverts

our attention, saps our energy, dampens our zeal and joy for the things of God. We cannot win when we are carrying excess weight.

B. A more terrible hindrance to Christian living is **SIN**. Obviously all sin is a hindrance to Christian living. Notice the use of the definite article "**THE sin**" which indicates a particular sin.

C. And if there is one particular sin that hinders the race of faith it is **UNBELIEF** – doubting God. Doubting and living in faith contradict each other. Unbelief entangles the Christian's feet so that he cannot run. It ties him hard so that he trips and stumbles every time he tries to move on for God. When we allow sin in our lives, especially unbelief, it is so easy for Satan to hinder us from running.

IV. THE EXAMPLE WE SHOULD FOLLOW (12:2a)

A. In running, as in most sports, where you are focused is extremely important. Nothing will destroy your timing or slow you down like looking at your feet or the runner coming up from behind or the crowds in the stands. Our Christian spiritual race is similar.

B. Many Christians may not be selfish but they could be filled so much with the cares and priorities of this world that they lose their spiritual focus and balance! We should rather be filled with the Holy Spirit, and when we are, our focus will be on Jesus Christ, because that is where the Spirit's focus is (**John 16:14**).

C. We can focus on the Lord Jesus Christ because He is truly "*the author and finisher of our faith.*" He is the greatest leader and example of our faith. He is the pioneer of our faith and takes the lead of all who live by faith – like all the heroes of faith in **Heb. 11**.

V. THE END OF THE RACE (12:2b)

A. The type of race referred to here is the Marathon, the race that seems to never end. It is not a race you run simply for fun as it is 26 miles or 42 kms. long. At the finish line is a pedestal where crowns, fame and fortune awaits to be rewarded to the winner. Friend, if you do not have something important to hope for at the end of the race, you will not start it and will certainly not finish it.

B. Jesus knew the finish line of His race on earth. What was at the end of the race motivated Jesus to leave heaven and endure on earth. Jesus ran for two future things: (1) the joy set before Him; and (2) the glory of sitting at the right hand of God's throne.

VI. THE EXHORTATION FOR US WHO RUN (12:3)

A. Brethren, when we get weary in our race, when our faith weakens, and we think God has turned His back, when it seems we will never get out of the trial we are in, we should read this verse.

B. We can rejoice that we will soon live together with Him, and that we rejoice that we can live like Him right now (**Gal. 2:20**).