

## Hebrews 12:1-2 “Running the race of faith”

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### I. Introduction

The 12<sup>th</sup> chapter starts with a glance back as well as one forward both through an illustration of a foot race. The word for *race* here is where we get our English word for “*agony*” which describes anything but a passive stroll. **This race will require self-discipline, determination and perseverance.** But in context to this letter which is written not just to believers but to those who are intellectually convinced but have yet to become spiritually committed to Christ the first step is that they need to get into the race by faith. Some of the Hebrew speaking church were just pretenders Paul had address people like this before in his letters like 1 Corinthians 9:24-25 where he wrote, “*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.*” The exhortation has to do with true faith that properly motivates as in athletic events if you don’t have the proper motivation you will have little or no desire to win. I think many in the professing church today are suffering no desire to win, they are content to be spectators in the stands of the church simply waiting for the spiritual contest to end so they can enter into the celebration as winners. This is why Paul continued on in 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 saying, “*Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”* The “**competition of the Christian**” is **different in two important ways:**

1. ***First, we DON’T compete against other believers, some how trying to outdo each other in works or church pursuits so as to receive more recognition. Our race is not of works but of faith. We compete only by faith not with each other but against the enemy of our souls and his world system and even our own flesh all which does everything it can to defeat our faith.***
2. ***Second, our success is not because of our superior strength or training instead our strength comes from the Holy Spirit and our training of daily dying to our self centeredness.***

The writer mentions three truths that can help the believer run a successful race of faith:

#### A. Vs. 1a **Right motivation**

- B. Vs. 1b **Right training:** The writer mentions three things that will enable to run faster:

- a. ***Shedding the pounds:*** “*Let us lay aside every weight..*”
- b. ***Right equipment, “less is more”:*** “*and the sin which so easily ensnares us..*”
- c. ***The race is a marathon not a sprint:*** “*and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*”

#### C. Vs. 2 **Right Coaching**

## II. VS. 1a RIGHT MOTIVATION

Vs. 1a The writer mentions our **right motivation** to continue our race; namely the cloud of witnesses that were mentioned in 11:4-40. The phrase “*surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses*” can cause some to try to place these saints of the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter in the stands above us as we run our race. ***A cheering section of spectators rooting for us as we make our way around the course set before us.*** While this may appeal to us it DOESN'T fit the picture at hand for three reasons:

1. ***These are not mere spectators they are those who have only just finished the race themselves.***
2. ***They do not rest in the defined stands but instead they gather around the course set before us so numerous as to be unable to define their beginning or end.***
3. ***Their testimony is not the indistinguishable applause or roar of an entertained crowd. But the specific exhortation of those that know the race we are presently on because they have just finished it themselves and have themselves gathered around the course to shout words of exhortation, encouragement and instruction to us.***

The Greek word for cloud is **NOT** the detached defined cloud that we here in Montana are familiar with but rather the great mass of clouds that covers the sky with out definition or distinction. There only distinction is that they are known as “**witnesses**” and the Greek word is “*martus*” which means “*one who testifies to what they have seen and heard.*” The word doesn't include the meaning that this was their assessment of themselves but that is what others regarded them as. They can testify of the effective way of faith to reaching the prize and goal of salvation and victory. These are NOT people who just watch others run but are instead our fellow “**teammates**” who know first hand how to run the race we are currently running and to do so effectively through the long haul. These men and women all ran our same race and are examples of people who kept running no matter the cost, they through faith never gave up. We can glean much about our own race by reading about theirs and the encouragement is that the writer is saying through their life of faith; “***Run like they did! You can make it if you run by faith the race the way that did. These people had less equipment and light by which to run their race of faith, if they can do it so can you!***” These heroes of our faith are not “***spectating fans in the stands***” ***and we are not trying to impress them with our effort!*** They are there for us as witnesses of faith in the Living God whom they trusted to the end, they are our examples not our onlookers! They are **NOT** looking “**DOWN**” on us, we are looking **UP** at them and their lives as living examples to follow. There is a reason that we go on the internet and look up people who have successful completed projects that we are in the midst of doing... *it's because we can watch them and become encouraged to trust that if we follow the course prescribed we too will finish.* We trust in the same God who “***stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword and out of weakness were made strong.***” Since God accomplished all of that through those before us of faith then He can do so now!

## III. Vs. 1b Right Training

Vs. 1b The next thing the writer mentions is that the race we are on requires **right training** and he makes his readers aware of ***three things that effect the way you run by either being a hindrance or will stop your race altogether:***

- ***Shedding the pounds:*** “*Let us lay aside every weight..*” The word in the Greek for “*every weight*” is a word that means “*bulk or mass*” and can be in other circumstances harmless but in a race of faith slows us down. Our excess pounds of flesh divert our attention and energy as well as saps our endurance which can lead to a lack of enthusiasm. ***We can not win when we are carrying excess weight.*** It can be a certain habit that on its own there is nothing wrong with it but the problem is not the habit or the extra weight it is what having it does, slow us down. Speed and endurance are both equally effected by excess weight.
- ***Right equipment, “less is more”:*** “*and the sin which so easily ensnares us..*”

Another hindrance is found in the phrase “so easily ensnares us..” The Greek word implies these snares as “*quickly, effectively and cleverly*” encircling the runner. Much like a long flowing robe would on a runner would soon cause the runner to fall. Too much clothing is an obstacle that those that run a race soon discover. Fancy sweatsuits may look cool as you approach the race but they will only hinder your run once you begin. There are far too many believers concerned more about how they “LOOK” on the race than how well they are running! I believe that as it relates to this letter the “LOOK” that many of these people in this letter were wearing was the robes of religious righteousness. They needed to strip the rags of religion and strip down to running in Jesus’ righteousness instead. Paul wrote this in Galatians 2:20 when he said, “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*” He again warned them in Galatians 3:3 “*Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?*” Unfortunately, there are some on the track with us that are not content with just not running their race effectively they have decided that they want to hinder those running and lay down on the course to keep others from winning the race. The context here is “THE sin” and not a long list “SINS” thus the passage would be “THE sin of unbelief”. It was this sin that was keeping the unsaved reader from coming to faith in Jesus as High Priest.

- ***The race is a marathon not a sprint:*** “*and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*” The final thing mentioned about training is to make certain that the runner realizes that they are in a marathon not a sprint. If all you have done in your Christian life is thrived on the enthusiasm of lively Christian entertainment put forth on Sunday, you may soon find yourself discouraged as you have only been equipped for a sprint all the while you are on a long distance road that will require the exercise of moment by moment faith. They start off way ahead on Sunday after the worship concert and the dynamic pep talk only to quit by Monday. Some realize this and head back to mid week for another quick sprint lesson on how to run fast for a short distance instead of training for the marathon they are really on. Every Coach worth his or her salt will tell their athletes “How you practice is how you will perform!” Is it any wonder that the Church isn’t performing well when most of the Coaches have become super stars and are encouraging no or little practice? There is nothing more discouraging for a professing Christian than to run a 100-yard dash and think they have completed the race only to find out that have just begun!

### III. Vs. 2 Right Coach

Vs. 2a The last point the writer makes about our race of faith has to do with our Coach whom he identifies as “Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith”. With this description of our Coach the writer started with the exhortation to his readers to “*look unto Jesus*”. The Greek word for “looking” means to “*turn one’s eyes or mind away from other things and fix them unto Jesus*”. This exhortation describes a running technique letting the runner know that they can run faster if the distractions from the stadium are minimized by their fixed gaze upon Jesus. If the runner takes their eyes off of Jesus, their stride and gate will slow down and be less efficient. The warning is to avoid becoming preoccupied with themselves by paying too much attention to what they are doing instead of keeping their eyes fixed upon what our Coach Jesus has done. We can also get our eyes onto the other Christians on the road with us and start trying to either emulate them or criticize them both of which can slow us down. The point is that Jesus our Coach doesn’t want us to focus on anyone but Him so we won’t stumble!

Next our Coach Jesus is described in reference to our faith as: Both the “*author*” and “*finisher*” of our faith. The word “author” is misleading in the English as in the Greek the word is a compound that means “*to lead*” and “*the first*”. Thus the idea is that Jesus

*is the chief leader and alone has furnished the example of how to run the race.* All those who encircled our course have learned to run from fixing their eyes upon Him. He alone is the perfect example of faith and those runners described in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter learned to follow His example. He is also the “*finisher*” of our faith and the Greek has it as “*to carry completely to the finish perfectly.*” He alone has carried the race through to completion, He has said so in John 19:30 with those words “*It is finished!*” Since Jesus is our chief example of how to finish our race of faith perfectly we are told two things that we can glean from examining His race.

1. ***Who FOR the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross?*** The normal interpretation of this passage says that, “*Jesus endured the cross in order that He might obtain certain joy which was placed before Him as a reward for His sufferings.*” But the problem with this interpretation is the wrongful interpretation of the word “**FOR**” which in the Greek at this time meant “*instead of*”. That coupled with the Greek word “*set*” which means “*lying before*” means that the “**JOY**” was ***the full glory that Jesus had in His preincarnate state with God the Father before the world began and in exchange for this He accepted the cross and shame that went with it.*** The idea is that ***we can see the heroic nature of Jesus has He renounced the JOY already in His possession in exchange for shame and death upon the cross.*** This coincides with Paul’s statement in Philippians 2:6-8 where we read that Jesus, “*who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*” What this tells us is that: ***We are to run our race in His never ending love for us!***
2. “***And has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.***” The words “*has sat down*” are in the perfect tense in the Greek which indicate that after His work of providing a salvation that it was forever finished and Jesus demonstrated this by sitting down and remaining seated. The reason for this is that He never again needs to repeat His sacrifice for sinner as it was “once for all”. Further more His seated position is one of preeminence at the right hand of the Father. What this says to us is that: ***We are to run our race with the knowledge that once we have finished we will have forever received His victory as our own!***