



HOW TO RUN LIKE A CHAMPION

Preaching and Teaching Resources

ADRIAN ROGERS





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How to Run Like a Champion

SERMON REFERENCE: Hebrews 12:1-2

LWF SERMON NUMBER: #2413

Living the Christian life is much like running in a race, and Hebrews 12 shows us how to run like a champion.

First, we must remember there is a purpose to pursue.

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...” (Hebrews 12:1). We are in this race until our very last breath. There is no retiring or quitting from this race against ourselves.

There is a person to prepare.

“...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us...” (Hebrews 12:1).

Many of us lag behind because we are weighed down by excess baggage. Remember: we are free to enjoy our hobbies, treasures, and friendships until they keep us from running our race.

Adrian Rogers says, “Good things become bad things when they keep you from the best things.”

If we're not careful, our baggage will cause us to stumble completely. When we find ourselves tripped up by sin, we must confess and repent so we can get back on track.

Third, there is a price to pay.

“...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...” (Hebrews 12:1). No one strolls over the finish line; endurance is necessary in order to run a race well. We must get our hearts and minds right and finish the course.

Fourth, there's a promise to plead.

“...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...” (Hebrews 12:2). The One who first calls us to the race will enable us to finish the race. We must keep our eyes on God, who gives us faith, because He is the One we are running toward.

Finally, there is a prize to possess.

“...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” (Hebrews 12:2). As we run this race, living by faith, we know we are headed toward eternal victory. Because Jesus finished the race on Calvary, He has become our reward. The race will have been worth it when we see Him face-to-face.

Life Application

Are you running with endurance today – setting aside the things that weigh you down and cause you to sin? Are you living a life of faith well, sharing the Gospel with others, so that they may enter the race toward Jesus?



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1) INTRODUCTION

- a) When you think of a runner, what do you think about?
 - i) A person who is looking straight ahead in complete, total concentration.
 - ii) A person whose every inch, every ounce, every nerve, every fiber is pressing toward the goal.
 - iii) A runner who is staying in the lane.
 - (1) He is not moving to the right.
 - (2) He is not moving to the left.
 - iv) A runner who is not running against anyone else.
 - (1) He is running against himself.
 - (2) He is running against the clock, headed toward the finish line.
- b) Hebrews 12:1-2
 - i) According to this Scripture, you are a runner if you are saved.
 - (1) You may not be able to run athletically, but you can run spiritually.
- c) If you are a child of God, you are in the race.
 - i) It matters not how old you are.
 - ii) It matters not how feeble you may be.
 - iii) It matters not how rich or poor you may be.
- d) There is a race for you to run, and God wants you to run like a champion.
- e) Today's message will teach you how to run like a champion.

2) THERE IS A PURPOSE TO PURSUE (HEBREWS 12:1)

- a) The purpose is for us to run.
- b) Hebrews 12:1
 - i) There is a race that is set before us.
 - (1) This is our purpose in life.
 - ii) What does the word "wherefore" represent in this passage?
 - (1) Hebrews 11 tells us about champions who ran the race of faith.
 - (a) These champions succeeded, and their names were included in God's Hall of Champions in this chapter.
 - (2) This is to challenge us to run as they ran.
 - iii) There is a purpose to pursue.
 - (1) The heroes of the past are now in the Glory.
 - (a) They are watching us.
 - (i) They are not criticizing us but cheering us on.
 - 1. In the Apostle Paul's day, there were great stadiums where the people would go to watch different kinds of athletic events and exhibitions.



2. The author of Hebrews said that we are now on the playing field, and the heroes of the past are in the stands.
 - (2) We are to run the race that is set before us.
- c) We are not running in order to get to Heaven.
 - i) Do not think that if you win the race that you are going to Heaven.
 - ii) Heaven is not the goal at the end of the race.
 - iii) Salvation is not the goal at the end of the race.
 - (1) It is the gift that puts you in the race.
- d) There is a course that is set for each of us.
 - i) Hebrews 12:1
 - ii) We all have our own particular race.
 - (1) The Apostle Paul came to the end of his own race.
 - (a) Acts 20:24
 - (2) Everyone has their own race.
 - (a) Everyone's race is different.
 - (b) We should not compare ourselves with one another.
- e) We are not running against one another.
 - i) We are running against sin.
 - ii) We are running against Satan.
 - iii) We are running against self.
- f) We need to get our eyes off of how others are running their race and concentrate on our own race.
 - i) We do not need to try to run somebody else's race.
 - ii) God has a different kind of a race for each of us to run.
- g) If you are not in the race:
 - i) Then you are sinning against yourself.
 - ii) You are sinning against your church.
 - iii) You are a disappointment to angels.
 - iv) You are rebellious against God.
- h) Each of us have a race, and we are not exempt.

3) THERE IS A PERSON TO PREPARE (HEBREW 12:1)

- a) If you are going to run the race, then you have to prepare to run the race.
- b) Hebrews 12:1
- c) Lay the weights aside.
 - i) The least weight the better.
 - (1) You will never see someone in the Olympics running a race while wearing an overcoat.
 - ii) The Greek word for "weight" does not mean something that is sinful.
 - (1) It means something that burdens you; something that holds you down.
 - iii) There are some things that are not bad in themselves.
 - (1) For example, there is nothing wrong with an overcoat.
 - (a) You just don't wear an overcoat when you are running a race.



- d) 1 Corinthians 6:12
 - i) When you think of the word “expedience,” another word that comes to mind is “expedition”.
 - (1) An expedition is when you are going somewhere.
 - ii) Paul said, “Something may be lawful for me, but if it’s not expedient, if it doesn’t speed me on my course, then I need to leave it alone.”
 - (1) It may be some recreational habit, an acquaintance, a hobby, too much television, or too much sleep; but if it keeps you from winning the race, then lay it aside.
 - (2) Good things become bad things when they keep us from the best things.
- e) We need to ask ourselves these questions:
 - i) Is there something in my life that is hindering my walk with Christ?
 - ii) Is there something that is holding me back?
 - iii) Is there something that is excess baggage?
 - iv) Is there something that is keeping me from being all that I ought to be for the Lord Jesus Christ?
 - (1) If you want to win the race, then lay it aside.
- f) Hebrews 12:1
 - i) This passage is not talking about good things that may become bad things; it is simply talking about bad things.
 - ii) The word “beset” means “to tangle you up.”
 - (1) A person cannot run a race with a long, flowing robe that is tangling him up or with a rope around his feet.
 - (2) A person needs to be free so that he can run.
 - iii) What is the sin that so easily trips you up?
 - (1) Weights load us down; sin trips us up.
 - (a) Either one can make you a poor runner and keep you from running the race.
- g) The Apostle Paul is talking about faith in Hebrews 11 and 12.
 - i) The race that we are running is the race of faith.
 - ii) The book of Hebrews says that we live by faith; therefore, we run by faith.
 - (1) Hebrews 10:38
 - iii) The reason that we do not have any more faith than we do have is because of sin.
 - (1) Hebrews 3:12
 - (a) Unbelief is not a mental sin; it is a moral sin.
 - (b) It does not come out of the head; it comes out of the heart.
- h) God puts things in a particular sequence in the Bible.
 - i) For example, in 2 Peter 1:2, grace comes before peace.
 - (1) It never says “peace and grace;” it is always “grace and peace.”
 - (a) We will not know peace until we know grace.
 - ii) The Bible also says to believe and be baptized.
 - (1) Mark 16:16
 - (2) It doesn’t say “Be baptized and believe.”
 - (a) To be immersed before giving your heart to Jesus and truly believing is not baptism at all.



- (b) True baptism follows true belief.
- iii) Another order that God has put in the Bible is repentance and faith.
 - (1) If you're having difficulty with faith, then try repentance.
 - (2) There is nothing so condemning and so debilitating to faith as sin in the heart.
 - (a) Hebrews 3:12
- i) The writer of Hebrews is telling us to get rid of the excess weight as we run the race.

4) THERE IS A PRICE TO PAY (HEBREWS 12:1)

- a) Hebrews 12:1
 - i) The word "patience" in this passage literally means "endurance."
 - (1) It means bearing up under some load or challenge.
- b) Are you looking for an easy way, a cheap way, or a lazy way to serve God?
 - i) The business of running this race means that you are going to do it with all of your heart.
 - (1) No one is excluded.
 - (2) We all are to run with endurance.
 - ii) If you are in this race, then you need to pray over it, weep over it, study over it, and work over it.
 - (1) If we possess the race, the race will possess others.
 - iii) This matter of being saved and running the race is a full-time occupation.
 - (1) God does business with those who mean business.
- c) Do you pay a price?
 - i) Do you give up some extra time in the morning to get into the Word of God?
 - ii) Do you pay the price of being ridiculed because you keep your Bible on your desk in the office or bow your head and thank God for His goodness before your meal?
 - iii) Are you willing to be different from the crowd?
- d) When we run this race, we are running against the grain.
 - i) What we believe starts at a different source, it follows a different course, and it will end at a different conclusion.
 - ii) There is a price to pay.
- e) Most people don't like the idea of a price to pay.
 - i) But a disciple is one who follows his Master and obeys his Master.
- f) Many people run and then quit running.
 - i) We are to finish our course.
 - ii) No matter how far ahead you are in any race, you are going to lose if you stop running.
 - iii) Jesus bowed His head on the cross and said, "It is finished."
 - (1) John 19:30
 - iv) The Apostle Paul finished his course.
 - (1) 2 Timothy 4:7
 - v) Don't quit.

5) THERE IS A PROMISE TO PLEAD (HEBREWS 12:2)

- a) Hebrews 12:2



- i) The promise in this passage is that if we look to Jesus, then Jesus will be the author and finisher of our faith.
- ii) “Author” here literally means “example,” “leader” or “the originator.”
 - (a) Jesus is the example of faith and the originator of our faith.
- iii) Faith comes from beholding the Lord Jesus Christ.
- b) All of the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 can cheer us on, but they are not our chief example.
 - i) Our chief example is the One who never sinned and never failed.
 - (1) His name is Jesus.
- c) If you want faith, then not only get the sin out of your heart and life, lay aside the weights, but also fix your eyes upon Jesus Christ.
 - i) Take your eyes off the faults of those for whom Jesus died and put your eyes upon Jesus Christ, and then your faith will grow.
 - ii) He is the goal toward which we run.
 - iii) He is the coach who runs alongside us and gives us courage and strength to run the race.
- d) We ought to be great in our faith, but we should never boast about our great faith.
 - i) It is not so much great faith in God that we need as it is faith in a great God.
- e) “Looking unto Jesus” in Hebrews 12:2 literally means looking away from everything else and looking at Jesus.
 - i) Keep your eyes upon Jesus.
 - ii) Don’t look at your look; don’t put faith in your faith.
 - (1) Put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

6) THERE IS A PRIZE TO POSSESS (HEBREWS 12:2)

- a) When you run, you do so to win a trophy or a prize.
- b) Hebrews 12:2
 - i) The joy that is set before Him is winning the race.
 - ii) Jesus is our example.
 - (1) He is a champion who, when He ran His race, received a crown of joy.
 - (2) This crown, according to this Scripture, gave Him the ability to endure.
 - (a) We will pay the price if we keep the crown in mind.
 - (b) If we keep the crown in mind, then we can bear the cross.
 - (c) But we cannot have the crown if we despise the cross.
 - (3) We are crucified with the Lord Jesus Christ.
- c) 1 Corinthians 9:25
- d) 1 Thessalonians 2:19
 - i) In this Scripture, the Apostle Paul was saying that his crown was going to be those whom he had led to Jesus.
 - (1) This is a crown that doesn’t corrupt.
 - (2) When you die and go to Heaven, are you going to take someone with you or are you going to Heaven alone?
 - (a) It matters not how eloquently we may teach, how faithfully we attend church, or how circumspectly we walk.
 - (i) If we are not trying to bring souls to Jesus, then we are not right with God.



- e) We need to have a passion to see people come to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- f) The crown is the soul winner's crown.
- g) Philippians 3:13-14
 - i) The Apostle Paul wrote this passage late in his ministry, after he had been beaten with rods and stones, survived a shipwreck, and been imprisoned.
- h) All the soul winning we will ever do will be done in this world and in this life.
 - i) All the sacrifices we will ever make for Jesus, we are going to make now.
 - i) We must finish our course.
- j) 1 Corinthians 9:24
 - i) Do you want the prize?
 - ii) You can be an athlete.
 - (1) Even if you are on a sick bed.
 - (2) Even if you are poor.
 - (3) Even if you have a debilitating disease.
 - (4) No matter who you are, where you are, what age you are, or whatever you may have, you can be like the Apostle Paul and say, "I have finished my course."
 - (a) 2 Timothy 4:7
- k) Philippians 1:21
- l) Matthew 25:21

7) CONCLUSION

- a) Salvation is not a gift or a prize at the end of the race.
 - i) It is the gift that puts us in the race.
- b) No matter how young, how old, how rich, or how poor you may be, God has a race for you to run.
 - i) If you run it, then you will say, "It will be worth it all when we see Jesus."
- c) Do you know Jesus personally? If not, you can pray to Him today by asking Him to come into your life.
- d) Call upon Jesus today. Repent (turn) from your sins, and turn to Jesus. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins, and acknowledge Him as Lord of your life.
 - i) Romans 3:23
 - ii) Romans 10:9-10
 - iii) Romans 10:13
 - iv) Acts 16:31
 - v) John 3:16



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When you think of a runner, what do you think about? When a person is, with every inch, every ounce, every nerve, every sinew, running a race? Well, I think this is probably what you think about. There's a young man who is getting his start. Every muscle is tense. He's running now. He's looking straight ahead; complete, total concentration. Every inch, every ounce, every nerve, every fiber, he's pressing to the goal. He's staying in the lane. He's not moving to the right. He's not moving to the left. And he's not running against anybody else. He's running against himself. He's headed toward the finish line.

Now we've seen runners run like that, and that may be what you're thinking about this morning. When a pastor is going to teach you to run like a champion, you say, "Well, I'm out of it because I'm in a wheelchair," or, "I can't run because I'm tied to a sick bed. I can't run because I'm 90 years of age. I can't run because I have twisted limbs. I can't run." Well, you can run, and you should run, and you will run if you'll listen to our Scripture today.

Hebrews chapter 12 verse 1 and 2, "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Well, according to this Scripture, if you're saved, you're a runner. You are in the race. Now, you may not be able to run athletically, but you can certainly run spiritually and that's what we're talking about.

Sports were a big thing in Paul's day, did you know that? In the day of our Lord, sports were a big thing. They had three great games, almost like the Super Bowl today. There were the Olympic Games and they were run at Mount Olympus; therefore, we get the name the Olympic Games. There was also the Pythian Games and these were run at Delphi. And then there were the Isthmian Games and they were run at Corinth. And they staged them through the years so if you were rich or a patron, you could go from one game to the other. The athletes of that day were so admired, again, very much like our day. They had everything laid at their feet if they won the game for their country. Their name was praised. Poetry was written about them. Statutes were carved and chiseled in their honor. They had the rest of their way through life: their room, board, food; all of that was paid for. The emperor would praise the runner that brought glory and fame to him and to his country.

Well, times haven't changed a whole lot, have they? It won't be long till football season gets here. A man said to his wife, "Now, before the football season starts is there anything you want to say to me?" We love sports. But many of us are saying, "You know, pastor, I can't run," and that's true. Our youth, our vigor leaves us. We've not like that young man.

I remember the first time I realized that I couldn't run like I used to run. I had always, around Thanksgiving or New Year's Day or something like that, would get the boys in the church and the young men out and say, "Let's play football. Let's play touch football," because that was the only sport, football, that I had any expertise in. I'd say, "Let's play football." I loved to get the young deacons out and knock them around, and I loved to outrun those fellows, and they'd say, "Boy, look at the preacher. Look at the preacher! Man." And I, that felt so good I said, "Man, I'm really out here showing off."



And then I can remember the day like it was yesterday. I had a bunch out there by the church in Merritt Island. I was 33 years of age and we were playing football, and Larry Freshour got the ball. And he was about as far away as from here to the front row, and I said to myself, "Self, run him down and tag him." And you know, the closer I got the further away he was. The last time I saw him he was clean out of sight and I realized I'm not going to run this man down. He is younger than I am, and my legs are not what they used to be. And at 33 I said to myself, "You're no longer a boy; you're a man. You're a man. You cannot outrun the youngsters. You're now a man." But, friend, in this life, no matter if your mind makes contracts that your body can't fulfill, in this life if you're a child of God, you're in the race. I don't care how old you are. I don't care how feeble you are. I care not how rich, how poor you are. There is a race for you to run and God wants you to be like a champion! So we're going to think here about how to run like a champion. And let me teach you some things from this passage of Scripture.

First of all, there is a **purpose to pursue**, and that purpose is for you to run. Look, if you will, in Hebrews 12 verse 1, "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Now there's a race that's set before us and that is our purpose in life.

Now notice he begins with the word wherefore. Well, what is that wherefore there for? What does it represent? Well, in chapter 11 we have been preaching Sunday after Sunday after Sunday about champions, champions who ran and they ran the race of faith and they succeeded and they got their name put in God's Hall of Champions, God's Hall of Heroes here in Hebrews chapter 11. Now is He doing that just to entertain us, or even to inspire us? No, to challenge us, that as they ran we are to run. There is a purpose to pursue.

Now here they are, rank upon rank, these heroes of the past. They're up there in the glory. People say, "Pastor, do you think people in Heaven know what we're doing down here?" I do. I think that they know what we're doing down here. I think they're watching us and they're not criticizing us. They're here to cheer us on. Sidlow Baxter said, "I believe they are praying for us." He said, "They're one with Jesus, and He ever lives to make intercession, so why should they not even be praying for us as they watch us run the race?" We're compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.

You ought to see those great stadiums that they had in those days. You think a football stadium is big? They had stadiums that were six times the size of a football field. And the people would come and watch the different kinds of exhibitions. There would be foot races. There would be relay races. There would be distance races. There would be sprints. There would be the javelin, the discus, all of these things very much like a modern track meet. And Paul picks up the figure. I believe Paul wrote Hebrews. He may not have written it, but I think he did write Hebrews. We know it's the inspired Word of God. But the writer said we're very much like that. We are now on the playing field, and these heroes of the past are up there in the stands, and we have a purpose to pursue. We are to run the race that is set before us.

Now listen to me. We're not running in order to get to Heaven. God forbid that you should ever think that, that somehow if you win the race, you're going to Heaven. Heaven is not the goal at the end of the race. Salvation is not the goal at the end of the race; it is the gift that puts you in the race. But there is a course set for Adrian and a course set for you. Look at the Scripture again, Hebrew 12:1, "Let us lay aside every weight which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

Now each of us have our own particular race. The apostle Paul came to the end of his race. He said in Acts 20 verse 24, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, that I might



finish my course, that I might finish my course." You have a course to run. You have a race. Your race is not the same as my race and your wife or your neighbor, whomever, we don't need to compare ourselves with one another. We are not running against one another. We're running against sin, against Satan, against self, and we have a race to run. So I need to get my eyes off of you how you're running your race and concentrate on my race. You know, there are people who say, "You know, if I had the talent of thus and such a person, this is what I would do. If I had the money that he has, this is what I would do." And you start trying to run somebody else's race.

Two boys were sitting on the front porch, I'm told. One was a very big, brawny fellow. The other was a very small, fragile guy. The little man said to the big man, "Do you know what I would do if I were as big and strong as you are?" He said, "What would you do, little brother?" He said, "If I were as big and strong as you are, with the muscles that you have and the strength that you have, I'd go out in those woods and find the biggest bear I could find and wrestle that bear, if I were as strong as you are." The big man looked at the little man and said, "Have you ever thought about this fact: there are some little bears out in the woods?" Now maybe God has a little bear for you to wrestle. Maybe God has a different kind of a race for you to run. But there is a purpose to pursue. Now let me tell you something; if you're not in the race, you're sinning against yourself, you're sinning against your church, you are a disappointment to angels, and you're rebellious against your God. You have a race and you're not exempt. We're to run the race. There is a purpose to pursue.

But now here's something else. Not only is there a purpose to pursue, but there is **a person to prepare**. I mean, if you're going to run the race, you've got to get ready to run the race. Look at it again in Hebrews 12 verse 1, "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race that is set before us."

Now how do you prepare yourself? Well, first of all, if you're going to run a race, you've got to lay the weights aside. You notice our athlete. Notice how he ran? He ran in briefs. He ran in a very light shirt. He ran with track shoes on. The least weight the better. One thing I don't think you'll ever see and that is someone in the Olympics running a race wearing an overcoat. It's not going to happen. They get down as light as they possibly can and still maintain some modicum of modesty. You have to lay aside every weight.

Now the Greek word weight does not mean something that's sinful. It just means something that burdens you, something that holds you down. There're some things that are not bad in themselves. Nothing wrong with an overcoat. You just don't wear an overcoat when you're running a race. Listen to what Paul said in First Corinthians chapter 6 verse 12, "And things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient." Now what does that word expedient mean? Well, when you think of expedience, you think of another word, expedition. An expedition is you're going somewhere. Paul said, "Something may be lawful for me, but if it's not expedient; that is, if it doesn't speed me on my course, if it doesn't boost me on my way, then I need to leave it alone." Friend, it may be some recreational habit you have. It may be some cottage in the woods. It may be some acquaintance. It may be some hobby that you have. It may be too much television or sleep, or whatever it is. If it is keeping you from winning the race, you lay it aside. Good things become bad things when they keep you from the best things. And so he says, "Get down, strip down, lay aside every weight."

Now I'm not here to tell you what it is that may be holding you back, but ask yourself this question all during this message: is there something in my life that's hindering my walk with Christ? Is there something that's holding me back? Is there something that is excess baggage? Is there something that is keeping me from being all that I ought to be for the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, if you want to win the race, then lay it aside. "Lay aside every weight," now watch this, "and the sin which doth so easily beset us." Now he's not talking



about good things that may be bad things. He's just talking about bad things. The word beset means to tangle you up. Can you imagine a person trying to run a race with a long flowing robe that's tangling him up, or some rope around his feet, or something that has enmeshed him? No, he wants to be free so that he can run.

Now what is the sin that doth so easily trip us up? You see, weights load us down; sin trips us up. And either one can make you a poor runner and keep you from running the race. "The sin that doth so easily beset us."

Now what Paul is talking about in chapters 11 and 12 is faith. The whole race that we're running is the race of faith. The Book of Hebrews says we live by faith; therefore, we run by faith. Now, most of us say, "I wish I had better faith. I wish I had stronger faith." Do you know the reason that you don't have any more faith than you have? Sin. You say, "Now wait a minute, pastor. No, I'm." No, friend, the Bible says in Hebrews 3:12, "Beware, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief." Unbelief is not a mental sin; it is a moral sin. It doesn't come out of the head; it comes out of the heart. "Beware, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief."

Have you ever noticed how God puts things in sequence in the Bible? For example, in the Bible it says in Second Peter 1 verse 2, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you." It never says peace and grace; always grace and peace. Why? You'll not know peace until you know grace, Amen? Have you ever notice the Bible says, "Believe and be baptized." Mark 16:16. It doesn't say be baptized and believe. If you were immersed or sprinkled before you gave your heart to Jesus and truly believed, you haven't been baptized at all. True baptism follows true belief. You say, "Pastor, what are you heading at?" I'm going to tell you another order that God has put in the Bible. Not only grace and peace, not only belief and baptism, but repentance and faith, always in that order, repentance and faith. If you're having difficulty with faith, try repentance. There's nothing so damning, so debilitating, so stultifying to faith as sin in the heart. "Beware, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief." The writer here is talking about running a race, and he says, "Get rid of that excess weight and, 'Lay aside every sin that doth so easily beset us.'"

There is **a price to pay**, also. Not only a person to prepare, but a price to pay. Look, if you will, again in Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 1, "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us," now watch this, "and run with patience the race that is set before us." Now that word patience doesn't mean the ability to thread a needle. That word patience literally means endurance. It means bearing up under, you see, under some load, some challenge. Are you looking for an easy way, a cheap way, a lazy way to serve God? All honey and no bees, a life of ease. You just want to just say, "Oh, I'm so happy in Jesus." Listen again to your pastor now. This business of running this race means that you're going to be at it with all of your heart.

Notice the young man running, how intense he was. You may be on a sick bed hearing this later on television, or you may be here with some aid to help you to walk. There are some here this morning in wheelchairs. But none is excluded. We are to run. We are to run with endurance. If you're in this race, you need to pray over it, you need to weep over it, you need to study over it, you need to work over it. And if we possess it, it must possess others. What I'm trying to say is this matter of being saved and running the race is a full-time occupation. God does business with those that mean business.

Do you pay a price, I mean, some extra time in the morning to get into the Word of God? Do you pay the price of being ridiculed because you keep your Bible on your desk in the office, and bow your head and thank God for His gracious goodness to you when He gives you a meal? Are you willing to be different



from the crowd? You're going to find out that when you're running this race, you're running right against the grain. Don't get the idea that there's the broad road and the narrow road and the narrow road runs alongside the broad road, and over here a bunch of people going this way, and over here you're going this way: no, no. Here's the broad way and here you are right in the middle of it going the other way. What we have, what we believe starts at a different source; it follows a different course; it is ending at a different conclusion, and there is a price to pay. Very frankly, modern Americans don't like that idea of a price to pay. We say, "Well, pastor, I'm saved by grace, and so I'm just going to just float on into Heaven on flowery beds of ease." No. A disciple is one who follows his master, who obeys his master, and there is a price to pay.

So many people run and then they quit running. Some of you used to run, but you don't run anymore. You say, "Well, the church is doing fine now. It's time for me to pull back the throttle." It is never time for you to pull back the throttle. You say, "Well, I don't need to give now like I used to give." No, you're right. You need to give more. Listen, my friends. You are to finish your course. I don't care how far ahead you are in any race; if you stop running, you're going to lose the race. I don't care how far ahead you are. You are to finish your course. In John chapter 19 verse 30, Jesus bowed His head on the cross and said, "It is finished." The apostle Paul said in Acts 20:24, "I have finished my course." And I'll tell you something for the man, Adrian. When I take my last breath, my race will be over, not until then, and I want to finish, I want to go across that line with a burst of energy, I mean, with every part of my body pumping for the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to finish that way. Don't you want to finish that way? Don't quit. Don't slack up. I don't care how far ahead you are; if you stop running, you're going to lose. There's a price to pay.

Next, there's **a promise to plead**. I thank God for this. This is the good part. Look in Hebrews 12 verse 2, "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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." You say, "Pastor, I don't see the promise there." The promise is if we will look to Jesus, Jesus will be the Author and Finisher of our faith. He is the Author of our faith. The word author there literally means in the Greek language, example or leader or the originator. Jesus is the Example of faith, but He's also the Originator of our faith. Faith comes from beholding the Lord Jesus Christ, looking at the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, all of these other heroes of the faith that we mentioned there in Hebrews chapter 11, they can cheer us on, but they're not really our chief example. Our chief example is one who never sinned, who never failed. His name is Jesus. And if you want faith, not only get the sin out of your heart and life, not only lay aside the weights, but fix your eyes upon Jesus Christ.

I spoke to our New Members Breakfast, the Discovery Class. I told them, "If you come to Bellevue Baptist Church looking for something to criticize, you can find it, starting with the man in the pulpit. But if you come looking for a blessing, you can find a blessing." It all depends on what you come looking for what you're going to see.

But I'm going to tell you something else. You can find fault with Adrian Rogers, or these other fellows. You can find fault with them, but nobody's going to find fault with the Lord Jesus Christ. If you do, you're insane. Looking unto Jesus! Take your eyes off the faults of those for whom Jesus died and put your eyes upon Jesus Christ and, I'm telling you, your faith will grow! The more you behold the Lord Jesus Christ you're going to find out that He is the Author and the Finisher! He's the one who originates the grace. He's the one that fires the gun. He's the goal toward which we run, and He is the coach who runs alongside of us and gives us courage and gives us strength to run the race. It is Jesus all the way; looking to Jesus! Keep your eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ and your faith will grow.



You know, it's really not a compliment to us to call ourselves a great person of faith. Now you ought to be great in your faith, but don't boast about your great faith. I've often used this illustration: I have a wife, a lovely wife, a beautiful wife. I love her with all of my heart. Someone may ask me this question, "Adrian, when you're out of town, who keeps an eye on Joyce for you?" "Well, what do you mean?" "Well, how do you know she doesn't have a boyfriend?" "I'm not worried about that." "How do you know she's not misusing your money?" "I'm not worried about that." "You mean you don't have somebody to watch her every minute while you're gone to make sure that she's behaving?" "No, not at all." "Wow, what a great man of faith." I say, "No, what a great wife, what a great wife." You see, friend, I can't boast that I have faith in Joyce. I can boast in Joyce that I have faith in. It is not so much great faith in God that we need as it is faith in a great God. What a wonderful Savior we have in the Lord Jesus Christ! Look to Jesus! Hebrews 12:1, "Lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us." Fix your eyes upon the Lord Jesus Christ! This word, look to Jesus, literally means looking away from everything else and looking at Jesus.

The youngster who was running the race was not looking up and around and looking over his shoulder. He was looking straight ahead. Keep your eyes upon Jesus. Don't even look at your look. Don't put faith in faith. Put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Next, not only is there a promise to plead, and I'm telling you this promise is that if you'll put your eyes upon Jesus, you're going to find He's going to be the Author and Finisher of your faith, but there's **a prize to possess**. When you run, you run to win for a trophy, a prize. Look, if you will, here in Hebrews 12 verse 2, "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him." What is the joy that is set before Him? It's winning the race. "Endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus is our example. He is a champion who, when He ran His race, received a crown of joy. And it was that crown, according to this Scripture, that gave Him the ability to endure.

Remember I said there's a price to pay? Well, you'll pay the price if you'll keep the crown in mind. And if you keep the crown in mind, you can bear the cross. But you cannot have the crown if you despise the cross. We're crucified with the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, I remind you that in the Olympic Games if a man won the Olympics, his name was proclaimed, his family was announced, his country was called out, friends admired him and would cover his path with flowers. He was presented with costly gifts. Poets with national reputations wrote hymns about this young man. You can see why back in this day people wanted to win in the Olympic or the Isthmian Games because of the crown that they would receive. I think of that verse that Paul said in First Corinthians 9 verse 25, "They for a corruptible crown."

I have a few trophies that back in my olden days that I won. We had a championship team. I got a gold football. And I lettered in sports so I got a letter sweater with PB on it: Palm Beach. Should have stood for Poor Boy. I got a silver cup. Somebody broke in the house and got the gold football. I don't know who has that, but it's gone. The old sweater, the moths had a camp meeting in it. It's gone. There are no more letters on that letter sweater. I don't know where that is. The trophy, I haven't got the foggiest where it is. What happened to it I don't know. I had a football. It was a great game we won and I was captain of the team and got the football. I made a mistake of letting some boys play with it. It's gone. It's gone. Friend, "They for a corruptible crown;" we for an incorruptible.

Jesus, running the race, had the joy that was set before Him and He endured the cross. He despised the shame. There is a prize to possess. Here's what Paul said to those in Thessalonica, First Thessalonians 2 verse 19, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ



at His coming?" You know what Paul was saying? "When Jesus comes, my crown is going to those that I've led to Him." Now that's a crown that doesn't corrupt. When you die and go to Heaven, are you going to take somebody with you, or are you going to Heaven alone? "Must I go in empty-handed, must I meet my Savior so; without one soul with which to greet Him, must I empty-handed go?"

Now I don't want to hurt your feelings. I'm not mad at you, but I'm concerned because most of the people in our church are not active soul winners. That's tragic. You say, "But, Pastor, I give my money." I don't care how much money you give. If you're not endeavoring to bring souls to Christ, you're not right with God. You say, "Well, I teach." I don't care how eloquently you teach. If you're not trying to bring souls to Jesus, you're not right with God. You say, "Well, I attend faithfully." I don't care how much you attend. If you're not trying to bring souls to Jesus Christ, you are not right with God. Well, you say, "I live a clean, moral life." I don't care how circumspectly you walk. If you're not endeavoring to bring souls to Jesus Christ, you are not right with God. Andrew Murray said, "There are two classes of Christians: soul winners and backsliders." You're one or the other.

If you don't have a passion to see people come to the Lord Jesus Christ, I wonder if you know the Jesus that I know. Now we cannot win people every time we try because that's the work of the Holy Spirit, and, also, they must yield their hearts to Jesus Christ, and you cannot control what they do. But I am telling you, my dear brother, my dear sister, there is a crown. It's the soul winner's crown. I want to be standing at the feet of Jesus, and this may sound syrupy or sentimental, and it may not be just this way, but I'd like for somebody to take me by the hand and say, "Adrian, lets go meet Jesus. I want to tell Him you're the one that led me to Him." It won't be just like that, but I want a crown. I want the soul winner's crown. I want the victor's crown.

Notice, again, Philippians 3, what Paul says in verses 13 and 14, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended," that is, I haven't finished yet. I haven't just left nothing else to do, "I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do," now notice this is the way a runner runs, "this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Now when did Paul say this? Late in his ministry.

Here's the apostle Paul writing and saying, "I am running a race." Now certainly, you wouldn't look at him as a physical specimen. He had weak eyes, most likely. He had been beaten with rods and stones, left for death. He'd been pickled in the Mediterranean. He had vegetated in jails. I see little old Paul out there and that bald pate, that sunken chest, those knobby, wobbly knees, and he is saying, "I'm running. I'm running. I see the goal. I'm pressing toward the goal. I'm not there yet, but I am running." That's the reason he said over there in the Book of Acts chapter 20 and verse 24, "I have finished my course."

In a few years, most of you will be gone and out of here. And some of you younger ones are going to die untimely deaths. But I'm talking about people. You're 40, 50, 60, 70; you're going to be gone. All the soul winning you're ever going to have you're going to have in this world, in this life. All of the sacrifices you're going to ever make for Jesus you're going to make now. Finish your course. Friend, finish your course. There is a prize to possess. Listen to what Paul said in First Corinthians 9 verse 24, "Know ye not that they who run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain." Do you want the prize? That's the reason why I said look, you can be an athlete. You're on a sick bed? You can be an athlete. No money? You can be an athlete. Debilitating disease? You can be an athlete. No matter who you are, where you are, what age you are, whatever you have you can be like the apostle Paul and say, "I've finished my course."



There's old Paul. He's in that Mamertine Prison ready to die and Paul said, you know, he said, "It's heads or tails for me." Philippians 1:21, "For me to live is Christ; to die is gain." "Heads I win; tails I win. It makes no difference." About that time, the jail door rattles. The jailer says, "Get up Paul, let's go." Already Paul's perhaps heard that executioner sharpening his ax outside his cell door. "I hate to tell you Paul, but this is your day. They're going to take off your head." "Oh, that's all right, brother, you're just doing your job. Let's go." Paul starts out of that prison. They're walking along and the guard says, "Are you humming a song?" "Oh, I didn't know you could hear me. I'm sorry. I was just humming a little song that Jim Whitmire taught me. "It will be worth it all when we see Jesus." "But, Paul, aren't you afraid?" "No, brother, I die daily. I've done this many times, not physically, but my life has been given to the Lord a long time ago." They bring him there down by the Tiber River that's going to drink up his blood. They put his head on the executioner's block. The ax is gleaming in the air. "We always give a prisoner some last words, Paul. Do you have any last words?" "Yes, friend, I do. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord." The ax falls; the head falls in a basket.

The next scene is Heaven and there's Paul. He's looking into the face of Jesus, the same one He met on the Damascus Road. What do you think he said? I don't know what he said, but I'll tell you what I think he said. "Lord, I wasn't big, I wasn't strong, but, Lord, I sure did run. And, Lord, I have finished my course. I have finished my course." And what did Jesus say to him? I don't know, I wasn't there, but I think I know. It was something like this: Jesus said, "Well done, good and faithful servant." "You've been faithful over a few things. I'll make you ruler over many."

I want to remind you that salvation is not a gift at the end of the race or a prize at the end of the race; it's the gift that puts us in the race. But I don't want to get the booby prize when I get to Heaven, do you? And don't you count yourself out. No matter how young, how old, how rich, how poor, God has a race for you to run. And if you'll run it, you'll say, "It will be worth it all when we see Jesus."

Lets bow our heads in prayer. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. Would you ask the Lord to make you a spiritual athlete? Remember, you don't have any excuse. Paul ran a race when he was in prison. Paul ran a race when he had nothing, when he had plenty. Would you pray, "God, make me a champion of faith and help me to run like a champion."

I've got some wonderful news for you. The Lord Jesus Christ wants to save you, He will save you, and He'll save you right now. May I lead you in a prayer? And if you say, "Pastor Rogers, I want to know for certain that I'm saved," let's get it settled right now. Would you pray this prayer, "Dear God, I am a sinner. My sin deserves judgment, but I want mercy. I need to be saved. Lord Jesus, You died to save me. You shed Your blood for me. You were raised from the dead. You are the Son of God. You promised to save me if I would trust You. I do trust You right now, this moment, with all of my heart. Come into my life. Forgive my sin. Save me, Lord Jesus. Save me, Lord Jesus." Pray it. "Save me, Lord Jesus." Did you ask Him? Were you sincere? Then pray this way, "Thank You for doing it. I receive it by faith and that settles it. You're now my Lord, my Savior, my God, and my Friend. And now, Lord Jesus, I'm at the starting block and I'm going to run the race of life for You, because You've saved me. In Your name I pray. Amen."



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