Running with Endurance

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[0:00] We're going to be in Hebrews chapter 12 tonight, covering verses 1-3, we hope.

! That contain a spiritual message. Paul was the master at communicating those types of images. You remember in his writings, he spoke about being a good soldier, putting on armor. He talked about being a boxer and so forth.
Today, we're going to see the writer of the book of Hebrews, and he's going to compare the Christian life to that of a runner running a race.
And again, we appeal to Paul. He loved the image of the runner. He spoke of running well.
[1:21] He spoke of running the race. He even talked about some who run in vain. And the writer of Hebrews uses the example of running in this great 12th chapter.

John MacArthur describes these using a series of words, beginning with the letter E. He speaks of the event, the encouragement to run, encumbrances to running, the example to follow, the end of the race, and the final exhortation.
The event we find in Hebrews 12, 1, where it says this, Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.
Our focus in this section is that we should run with endurance the race that is set before us.
That may be our subtitle. Run with endurance the race that is set before us. Bible scholars are unsure if the term let us is referring to believers or to the yet uncommitted members of the Hebrew congregation.
[3:12] We've talked about that off and on throughout our study. But either way, the writer of the book is exhorting them, Hey, get in the race.

There's a race out there to be run. The unbeliever cannot win unless he runs.
And the believer cannot win unless he runs with endurance. So both must be in the race. Now, we live in a time today when most people are not even in the race.
They show up every two or three Sundays, but they're not in the race. They go about their daily lives totally unconcerned about the approach of the Lord in judgment.
Even many Christians live as if they were not in the race at all. And they focus on non-essentials and non-spiritual matters.
[4:31] The word race used here is agon or agon in the Greek language. We get the English word agony from it.

The race we are called to run is demanding. It's grueling. And it can be agonizing.
To run the Christian race takes self-discipline, determination, and perseverance. Now, endurance is the steady determination to keep going to the end.
It means to continue even when everything and everyone about you is yelling, slow down. You're running too fast.
Slow down. Slow down. Slow down. In that regard, let me say that there is no retirement plan for true believers.
[5:40] It would be better for each of us to burn out rather than rust out. Now, when speaking of endurance, there is a principle for living the Christian life here.

Teach this to your children and to your grandchildren. The Christian life is not a sprint.
The Christian life is a marathon. Go for the distance. And we need to cross the finish line even if we are worn out.
And God may have to carry us. But He will do that. There will be obstacles and weariness.
But God is looking for steadfastness. My oldest son, and many of you knew him, and he was one of these boys that got saved three or four times.

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[6:48] And we kept waiting for one of them to take. And the last time we were excited about it, but he got out of the blocks and he was sprinting.

And I sat him down and I said, Justin, it's a marathon. It's not a sprint. You're going to burn out. And he did. It took him six or eight weeks and he burned out. And he still burned out. When speaking of endurance, there's a principle for living the Christian life here.
And that is, don't sprint. Run the marathon. Run to the end. Like most believers in our day, these Hebrews had started well.
They'd been running the race. But then the pressures of life and the pressures of the world and, of course, the lurking devil, who's always nearby, began to slow them down.
[8:07] Now, some of these had dropped out altogether. They decided, well, this isn't for me. Others were thinking about dropping out.

And if you've ever been in any church, you've seen people drop out. We've had them here by bucket loads, Mike. When we look back over 40 years, 40 plus in Mike's case, a lot of guys dropped out of the race, took their families with them, took their wives with them.
They no longer had the desire to win. They no longer had the desire to win. And when you lose the desire to win, you have a tendency to drop out.
Paul is a great example of running the race with endurance to win. Now, he ran the race.
But he didn't run it for comfort. He didn't run it for convenience. He certainly didn't run it for money or popularity or anything other than it was the will of God that he run the race.
[9:26] And that was good enough for Paul. That should be good enough for any believer. And we know some of the history of Paul. He was beaten. He was stoned.

He was left for dead. Some people tend to believe he might have died and the Lord may have resurrected him. The Bible is not totally clear on that. But he was certainly beaten to the point of death.
He was shipwrecked. Made it to an island where he was then bitten by a deadly snake. That had been enough for me to drop out. He was imprisoned by the Empire of Rome.
And yet he continued to run the race all the way to the gates of heaven. Well, what about the encouragement to run?
Well, we are all to run the race we've been given. But the best runners have something that encourages them to run.
[10:37] And there's an encouragement here in this first verse of Hebrews 12. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, we have witnesses watching us run the race.

Now, it begs the question here, who are these witnesses? Well, we just finished up a study of a bunch of them in the preceding chapter.
In the context of the book of Hebrews, the cloud of witnesses are those faithful saints we studied in Hebrews chapter 11.
We call it the heroes of the faith. And we looked at a bunch of them. The writer is encouraging us. He's inviting us.
He's even commanding us to run the race in the same manner that they ran the race. How'd they run?
[11:48] Well, they ran a race that trusted God, never gave up. They faced obstacles and hardships with faith. And that's the kind of race that every believer is supposed to run.

In the race, the witnesses ran. And you go back, even in the Old Testament, we find out they opposed Pharaoh.
They passed through the Red Sea. They shattered down the walls of Jericho. They conquered kingdoms.
They shut the mouths of lions. They received back their dead through resurrection. Many were tortured, mocked, scourged, imprisoned.
They were stoned. They were sawn in two. They wore the clothes of animals out in the desert. And they were destitute on world standards because of their faith.
[13:02] But they'd driven a stake in the ground and said, here I stand. And the writer to the book of Hebrews says, run like they did.

He doesn't imply in that advice that it's easy. If it was easy, everybody would be doing it.
But he doesn't imply that. Most people don't want anything to do with such a race. But the genuine will run just as did the saints of old.

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Now let me clarify a point here. I had to do some thinking about this. I don't believe those cloud of witnesses are staring down at us as we live our daily lives.
That would be a terrifying thought. At least for me. I remember Dr. McBride was asked one time, when we get to heaven, when we go into a certain room and everybody will be in there, and they'll show a video of our life from beginning to end.
[14:19] He said, if they did that, that wouldn't be heaven. I don't want to see that video. I've got too much to hide from you guys. Can't hide it from God.

He knows that. But that would be a terrifying thought. They are witnesses not of what we do. They're witnesses to God through the way they live their lives. That's a real important distinction, by the way. That is the kind of witness we should be.
And then the Bible talks about the weight that hinders us. Let us lay aside every weight.
A weight is an encumbrance. It's what weighs us down. It could be something that is even innocent and harmless.
[15:24] But it diverts our attention from the finish line. These things can also dampen our enthusiasm and sap our energy.

Even harmless things can become a weight around us that restricts our ability to run the race. This may sound very sad.
It's intended to. Sometimes a fellow Christian can be the weight around our neck. Since they are not running the race God set before them, they do not want others to run either.
When you have a church of 300 people, not all run with enthusiasm. Some can become barriers to those doing the work of God in the church.
Let us lay aside the sin that clings so closely. The greatest hindrance to Christian living is sin.
[16:43] We all know that. The greatest sin for believers is doubt and loss of trust in the Word of God.

That takes us right back to Genesis chapter 3. Every lie started there, as God said. It is a form of unbelief.
It is very entangling. When we try to run with such weight, Satan and the world will weigh us down. They weigh us down. And we have to drag. And then we have an example to follow in chapter 12, verse 2.
Looking to Jesus. That speaks volumes, doesn't it? Looking to Jesus. The founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
[18:07] Now, where you look is very important to runners. I'm sure there's probably guys in this room that ran track. I was on the track team. No, I didn't run.

I threw the javelin. I didn't run. I didn't throw the javelin very well, but the kid I trained was the state champion the next year. I found that after I was already in college.
But where you look is very important. If you get distracted, you may well end up on your face. I've done that a number of times.
And where Christians look as they run is equally important. Now, we all know Christians that are preoccupied with self.
They're the subject of every story. They want people to know what they've been up to and how proud God must be of them.
[19:10] Sometimes believers can be preoccupied wondering or worrying about what other believers think of them.

There's nothing wrong with what other believers think of them if it keeps them focused on the race. But if there are things that divert our attention from running the race, that's when it becomes a hindrance.
That's when we can stumble and fall. So we are to keep our focus on the Lord Jesus Christ.
Look to Him. He is the example to us. And there's no other. He's the primary example.
When we focus on Jesus, everything else comes into focus for us. After all, He is described as the author and perfecter of our faith.
[20:25] He will carry our faith to the end. And the word perfect or perfecter here is the same word used for completion.

Jesus always finishes the task He starts. And that includes our salvation. Aren't you glad? Jesus ran His race by faith in the Father.

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He did so all the while enduring the cross, despising shame. We have not approached that level of suffering that our Lord endured.
so run with victory in view. And while you are running, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.
What about the end of the race? Jesus, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
[21:54] Now, people run races to win prizes. In the days of the ancient Olympics, they ran for a laurel leaf, a sprig that's going to decompose.

Oh, man, I just... Today, they run for trophies and ribbons and medals and all that. Jesus ran the race to be well-pleasing to the Father.
That was His goal. And He knew that at the end of that race was a supreme reward of sitting down at the right hand of God the Father.
We can't even digest that. He would return to glory, the same glory He had from the beginning, the glory that He had shared with the Father.
And we're to run in such a manner that it brings glory to the Father and to the Son. And we know that at the end of the race there will be joy inexpressible.
[23:27] And we know that there will be rewards for faithful servants of the Lord. Even in our suffering, we rejoice that we have been found worthy to suffer for the name of Christ.

Jesus endured the cross for us. We can endure the Christian life for Him no matter what comes our way. No matter what comes our way.
Diane descends from the covenanters of Scotland. If you've never studied them, you ought to do that. These guys went to prison.
These guys lost their lives. 18,000 were killed in a 10-year period. Diane had grandfathers and great grandfathers that served in prison because they wouldn't deny the faith.
We've been to some of those prisons in Scotland. But we're to run in such a manner as they ran to bring glory to the Father and the Son.
[24:46] And remember when Jesus was on the cross, He endured the cross not for Himself, for us. we believe in the substitutionary atonement.

He took our place. He didn't deserve to be up there, I did. We should be able to endure the Christian life for Him no matter what comes our way.
And then we have an exhortation in verse 3. Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted.
An unfair question. I don't want anyone to yell out an answer, but do you ever get tired of running the Christian race? Many do. Do you ever think God has turned your back on you?
Some people do. Do you ever think you're in a mess from which there is no escape? If you ever have those feelings, look at this verse very carefully and closely.
[26:15] the Lord Jesus endured from sinners hostility against Himself so that we might not grow weary or faint-hearted.

we draw strength from that and we rejoice that one day we will be with Him but we should remember really we're with Him now.
We're with Him now. We're not to live this life in our own power. power. It is to be lived in His power and His presence or to be in His presence.
And that is why we can say with Paul Galatians 2.20 I've been crucified with Christ.
It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God.
[27:36] who loved me and gave Himself for me. Amazing passage of Scripture.

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