

1“THE CHRISTIAN RACE”

(Hebrews 12:1-3)

“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. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews contains what someone has called “God’s Westminster Abbey,” the Hall of Fame of the great heroes of faith from history past. To read this chapter is much like traveling through a “Divine mausoleum,” and reading the names and epitaphs of the great champions of faith, men of whom God was not ashamed. In that chapter, we come across the names of great men such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and others. And now, in the opening verses of chapter twelve, by a single touch, these saintly souls are pictured as having passed from the arena of faith, having finished their course, and now, they have taken their places in the crowded grandstand, and form a “great cloud of witnesses” who surround us as we run the race which they have already run.

So, at the very beginning of the twelfth chapter of Hebrews, we are alerted with a dramatic announcement—that as we live the Christian life and run the Christian race, we are being encouraged by those who have victoriously finished the course. Then, the writer takes us into the very heart of what it means to be a Christian. Join me in examining his words.

I. THE ILLUSTRATION

First, he sets before us a beautiful *illustration* of the Christian life. He says that the Christian life is like a “race.” “Let us run with patience the *race* that is set before us.” Paul frequently dips into his knowledge of the world of athletics to find an illustration of spiritual truth. Here, he takes us to a track meet. Every true believer in Jesus Christ is in a race. The illustration reveals some important truths about the Christian life.

First, it shows us that the Christian life is an *appointed, assigned* life. It is a “race that is *set before us.*” We do not select the course ourselves. We do not follow a route of our own choosing. The course is set before us by our Heavenly Father. The Christian is not a wayfarer along the byways of life. He is not a tourist taking a scenic tour. If he takes off on his own, he is on a course to ruin.

Many children of my generation read the story of the little train engine that became weary of following the same old track all the time. “I want to cross the fields and climb the mountains,” it said, “and I don’t have the freedom to do the things that I want to do.” So one day, the little engine jumped from its track and started off on its own. However, it soon found itself bogged down in the sand or the swamp, bumping into rocks and trees, and its progress was

totally stopped. Then, it saw that it was only free to fulfil the destiny for which it was made—to travel on the appointed track.

I recently read this story. “The morning sun shimmered brightly on the choppy waves of the bay as a small motor boat moved slowly over the water. Perhaps 200 yards away, 14 swimmers plied through the chilly waters. Twenty men and women had begun the race that morning, but six had been pulled from the water into one of the many boats that lined the course. Exhaustion, muscle cramps, or some other malady had taken them from the race even before the swimmers had reached the mid-way point.

“Just now the swimmers were bunched more closely than they had been for some time. As the far shore came into sight the competitors appeared to reach into their resources and pull with greater power and precision. Between them and the beach lay their greatest test, an area of swift-moving currents that had carried many a swimmer far toward the sea before he had been rescued or finally had given up and drowned.

“Of the 14 swimmers in the water, 13 had swum the bay before. They knew from experience the dangers of the currents. Although those who watched from the boats kept an eye on the veterans, it was the one rookie swimmer they watched most closely. Just now he was in the lead, several hundred yards ahead of the pack.

“Would he heed the warnings and follow the instructions he had been given to swim up the coast a little way before attempting to cross the swift-moving channel? If he did, he would win the race easily. If he did not, thinking that he didn’t want to waste the time to swim parallel to the shore, or that he was strong enough to meet the currents head on, they were ready to move quickly to rescue him. All watched anxiously to see what he would do.

“As the rookie neared the buoys that marked the swift-running water, it appeared for a moment that he would stay within the marked course and swim upstream. He had not moved more than 20 yards, however, when he turned and swam directly toward the shore. Instantly, motors sprang to life and two boats sped across the water to the now-struggling swimmer. There were Coast Guard boats manned by experienced rescuers.

“Later that afternoon when all the swimmers had reached the beach—including the rookie, who had been brought in by a Coast Guard cutter—the winner of the race approached the young man who had nearly drowned, ‘Why did you change your mind?’ he asked. ‘The officials told me that you started to follow the path marked out for us, but then you suddenly veered toward the shore.’

““Those 20 yards that I swam upstream against the current were so easy that I thought all the fuss about that channel was just so much hype. So I decided to cut through it to win the race by a large margin. I soon realized that not only wouldn’t I win the race, I wouldn’t even finish it. For an instant I felt so dumb for throwing away the race, but then I realized that I had jeopardized my life as well. I’ll never try this again.’

““Oh, I think you should enter the race again next year,’ said the veteran racer. ‘You’re a magnificent distance swimmer. Just follow the rules the next time and you’ll find that the

crossing point determined by the race organizers is challenging, but not life-threatening. Each year that point is different because the currents constantly change, so we all have to follow the prescribed course. One year we didn't race at all because the officials couldn't find a safe place to cross the channel. I wanted to talk them into sponsoring the race anyway, but I knew that would be foolish. Most likely no one would have finished anyway. Well, I hope to see you next year. It's about time someone beat me. For a while I thought this would be the year."

What a sad story! Although the rookie swimmer had the ability to beat the veteran, he lost the race, and nearly lost his life, because he wilfully chose to leave the assigned course and follow a convenient course of his own choosing.

Instead, the Christian is a runner engaged in a race that God has appointed for him. This is an "invitational" race. The one invited may reject, ignore, or accept the invitation. If he accepts the invitation, he also accepts the prescribed course. And each runner is assigned a specific lane on the race track, and expected to stay in that lane. All *opportunities* are previously determined, and all *obstacles* as well. It must be clearly fixed in the Christian's mind that God sets before each of us a clearly defined race, an appointed course.

Then, this illustration shows us that the Christian life is an *active, aggressive life*. "Let us run," the text says. It is God's job to set the course of the Christian life, and He has done that quite precisely. Now, it is our job to run the course He has set. We are not to sit still to be carried by the prevailing currents or winds. We are not to loiter or linger. We are not even to *walk* as men with measured step. We are to *run!* Sometimes the life of faith is presented as if it were completely passive. It is true that we are to "not try, but trust," and that the Christian life is "not I, but Christ." However, this does not mean that we are carried dreamily to heaven on an air-foam cushion. The Christian life is a life of concentration, discipline, and energetic effort. In fact, the Greek word that is translated "race" in this verse is the word, *agona*, from which we derive our English word, "agony," and it pictures strong and powerful exertion of energy. *In order to live the Christian life, we must "run."*

Several years ago, one of the leading international diplomats of our nation was Mr. Averill Harriman. He was the United States representative at many European conferences. One day a reporter asked him the question, "How is your French?" He replied, "My French is excellent, all except the verbs." What a commentary on the life of the average Christian. *It often happens that our Christianity is excellent—all except the verbs!* The verbs are the *action* words. The Christian vocabulary has wonderful *nouns*—such as "Master, Savior, Redeemer, Lord, repentance, faith, forgiveness," etc. It also have inspiring *adjectives*, such as "excellent, wonderful, unsearchable, unspeakable." But the *verbs* are often missing. There are no verbs—there is no *action*—which corresponds to the wonderful nouns and adjectives of our faith. The *propositions* of the Christian faith are magnificent, but the *practice* of the Christian faith is often deficient. Yet the verbs are the very heart of the Gospel, great verbs such as "come, go, follow, serve, give, love, share, make disciples." The true Christian life is an active, aggressive life. There is no room for idleness, slackness, negligence, indifference. This is powerfully illustrated by the picture of a race.

II. THE INSTRUCTIONS

Then, the writer records the *instructions* for running the Christian race. A runner who does not discipline himself *before* a race, and follow a plan *during* the race, is not likely to *win* the race.

Twice, the author uses the words, “let us.” And each time he follows with instructions for running the race. What must we do to win this race?

First, we must *listen to the witnesses who encompass us*. “We are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses,” the writer says. The word “witnesses” that is used here does not include in its meaning the idea of a person looking at someone or something. These witnesses *have already seen something*, and now are *testifying to us of what they have seen*. These witnesses are *not spectators* who are *watching you*, but “*speakers*” who are *silently witnessing to you*. Rather than *their* looking at us, we are to *look at them* and *listen to them*. Note especially the word about Abel in Hebrews 11:4, “He being dead yet *speaketh*.”

The very success of each of these heroes of faith recorded in Hebrews eleven is a witness to us. When the Emperor Napoleon was leading his French army in the great Egyptian campaign, they came one day to the neighborhood of the famous Pyramids. Napoleon called his army together, raised both his arms toward the nearby ancient monuments of Egyptian culture, and cried out, “Men, forty centuries are looking down on you today!” This is the message of Hebrews 12:1—not in the sense that former runners actually see our performance today, but that their trophies of victory encourage us to excel in the same race of faith. Any athlete will tell you how inspiring it is to read of the examples of great athletes in his field.

Some years ago, a great film was made about the post-war trial of Nazi war criminals. It was entitled, *Judgment at Nuremberg*. The courtroom scenes are packed with drama and emotion. Spencer Tracey played the judge. He listens to the prosecuting attorney build his case, piece by piece, film by film, fact by fact, against the Nazi officers on trial. Then he listens to the defense attorney as he presents them in a different light. After a particularly tense part of the courtroom trial, the judge calls for a recess in the courtroom procedure. During the recess, the judge leaves the courtroom and takes a walk.

As the judge walks the streets of Nuremberg, he comes to a vast arena where there are no people. There are just seats in a stadium. He walks onto the race track in the floor of the stadium, and he begins to hear in his imagination the sounds of a great cloud of witnesses. Though they are imaginary sounds, they make a deep impression on the judge. Director Stanley Kramer brings to life the imaginary picture of a man—a madman—Adolf Hitler, screaming his shouts and empty promises and hopes. You hear the people shouting back from the stands, screaming in almost antiphonal voices their words of allegiance and confidence in him. It’s a powerful scene. Well, this is precisely the way we are to receive the idea of Hebrews 12:1. We are at this moment “surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses,” and their testimony to us is powerful and overwhelming.

One of the renowned leaders of the Salvation Army was a “Colonel” named Samuel Logan Brengle. Late in Brengle’s life, when speaking engagements had to be canceled because of the gathering darkness at the end, he wrote, “I have sweet fellowship at times in my own

room. The saints of all the ages congregate there. Moses is present and gives his testimony, and declares that the eternal God is his refuge. Joshua arises, and declares, 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' Samuel and David, my dear friends Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel, Paul and John and James, and deeply humbled and beloved Peter, each testify to the abounding grace of God. Luther and Wesley and the Founder (General William Booth) and Finney, and Spurgeon and Moody, and unnumbered multitudes all testify. Blind old Fanny Crosby cries out, 'Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine!' So, you see, I am not alone. Indeed, I can gather these saints together for a jubilant prayer and praise meeting almost any hour of the day or night. Hallelujah forever, and glory to God!" In the same imaginative way, the writer of Hebrews asks us to hear the loud and clear testimony of silent witnesses from the past.

Each of these former victors of Hebrews eleven is a *silent spokesman*, and each has a testimony to give to us concerning the necessity, the nature, and the power of faith. Kenneth Wuest says, "The word is *martus*, one who testifies, or can testify, to what he has seen or heard or knows by any other means." So we must *listen to these witnesses that encompass us* as they say to us, "It is gloriously true that the just shall live by faith. You are on the right track. Be faithful to Christ. God did not mock our faith, and He will not mock yours." So, as we live the Christian life and run the Christian race, we are being encouraged by those who have victoriously finished the course.

Second, we must *lay aside the weights which encumber us*. "Let us lay aside every weight," the writer says. The word translated "weight" is *ogkon*, which means "bulk," or "mass," or "excess, superfluous flesh." To follow the analogy of the text, "weights" were training devices for an athlete. He would train with heavy weights attached to his lower leg or ankle. This would strengthen his legs, and the removal of these weights before the race would make the runner light-footed and eager. No athlete would think of competing in a race while wearing these weights. In fact, the athlete will give up things that are perfectly legal and innocent in order to excel in athletics. The track coach would say, "If you would win, you must run light." Anything which puts a drag on your feet in following Christ is a "weight."

What a message there is here for Christians! One of the greatest failures of the average Christian is that his loyalty is divided, his life is fragmented by countless preoccupations. Each reader will remember the children's fable which we heard many times as children. It is entitled, *Little Red Riding Hood*. The little girl in the story was on an assigned mission of mercy to visit and care for her ailing grandmother, but she was distracted by the flowers on the way and stopped in the woods and did not reach her grandmother's house in time. She ran into serious danger, both to herself and those she loved, because of this distraction. In our Christian lives, we often run into serious danger because of the "weights" that slow us down or turn us aside from our assigned race. The weights may appear innocent, but they prevent our victory in the race of life.

"Some men perish from shrapnel, Others' lives go down in flames,
But most men perish inch by inch, Playing at little games."

These preoccupations, these "little games," may be completely legal and innocent in themselves, but if we realize the true nature of the Christian race, we will put them aside so we can run to obtain the prize. The Moffatt translation says, "Let us lay aside every handicap."

In the Christian community, we have often failed to distinguish between sins and weights. The word here does not refer to sin, but rather to needless baggage, excess weight. I have read of mountain hikers that they even trim the one-inch margin from the maps they carry to get rid of any unnecessary weight! They are far wiser than most Christians, who never realize the handicap that “innocent” weights are to them.

This will make sense when we emphasize the picture of running in a race. Simply stated, 350-pound people don’t win races! (*Each of us needs to hear and heed the implications of this last sentence*) A Christian must apply a different standard than the standards others use. He can’t merely ask, “Is it *wrong*?” He must also ask, “*Does it hinder me?*” Arthur Pink said it vividly: “In a race, a bag of gold is as great a handicap as a bag of lead.” In his devotional commentary on Hebrews entitled *The Way Into the Holiest*, F. B. Meyer wrote, “Thousands of Christians are like waterlogged vessels. They cannot sink, yet they are saturated with so many inconsistencies, worldlinesses and little permitted evils that they can only be towed with difficulty into the celestial port.”

In running the Christian race, this rule must not be forgotten: *All that does not help hinders*. When we stand still, innocent things don’t feel burdensome. But when we try to run, we learn what encumbrances “innocent” things may be. We begin to feel entangled and weighted down. In fact, the best way to discover what hinders us is to begin to run this race. When we’re taking life easy, we can be covered up with burdens and hardly know it. But when we enter this race, we begin to recognize many of the trappings of our comfortable lives as burdens. Every believer must decide what his own “weights” are—and we must not judge one another on these.

Pastor and author Hoover Rooport told of a *Washington Post* reporter’s account of the maiden voyage of a cruise ship on the Potomac. The ship was built to carry passengers from Mount Vernon to Washington, D. C. All kinds of Washington dignitaries gathered for the trip, including Congressmen and Senators and Cabinet officials. The ship steamed out into the river on a very hot, humid, muggy day.

One Congressman sitting by the rail took off his shoes and socks. Suddenly someone running down the deck knocked one of his socks over the rail and into the water. “Now,” said the reporter, “this Congressman did a very impressive thing.” Without hesitation he picked up the other sock and dropped it over the rail too. The reporter found that impressive because he knew exactly what he would have done. He would have taken the remaining sock home and kept it in his drawer for a year until he could figure out what to do with it. Yet, how much more sensible it is to just say good-bye to the useless sock, as the Congressman did.

The aspiring Christian must say good-bye to some good things he has gotten used to in order to say hello to a lot of Best Things he has not yet experienced. He must have the courage to let go of “that old sock”! “Let us lay aside every weight.”

Third, we must *leave the wickedness that entangles us*. “Let us lay aside . . . the sin which

doth so easily beset us,” the writer says. The word translated “beset” occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It comes from a root word which means to “surround.” The phrase could be translated, “the easily-clinging-around-us sin.” Just as no runner could hope to outstrip his opponent if he has not first stripped himself of the close-clinging oriental robes he wore previously, so the Christian must strip from himself “the sin which so easily entangles him.”

What is this sin? In the context of the book of Hebrews, he is not referring generally to “besetting sins,” but to one particular sin which is always dogging the steps of Christians and threatening to entangle them. There is one primary and deadly sin in the book of Hebrews, and it is the sin of unbelief. The greatest chapter of this book is chapter eleven, *the faith chapter*, and the greatest sin of this book is *unbelief*. The mother sin, the father sin, the parent sin, of all sins is the sin of unbelief. Unbelief is not merely a *weakness*, as we so often regard it; it is a deadly *sin*. Unbelief is a *sin* which needs *our repentance* and *God’s forgiveness*. What heavy garments would be to an athlete approaching the starting line of a crucial race, the sin of unbelief is to a Christian. What that athlete does to those garments, the Christian should do to the sin of unbelief—he should strip it off, and lay it aside. You see, weights slow us down, but sins trip us up. “Let us lay aside . . . the sin which doth so closely cling to us.”

Fourth, we must *last through the weariness which exhausts us*. “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” Verse 3 warns us of the danger of “being wearied and fainting in our minds.” Verse 12 says, “Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.” Apparently, discouragement, weariness, and exhaustion are real dangers as we run this race. Our own personal experiences allow us to know just *how* real these dangers are.

The word translated “patience” in our text means “steadfast endurance.” Moffatt translates it “determination.” The Christian life is not a wind-sprint, such as a 100-yard dash. It is rather a long-distance race, a marathon, an endurance contest. Many Christians would easily manage the Christian life if it were just a brief span of concentrated energy. It was to spiritual sprinters that Paul wrote in Galatians 5:7, “You did run well; who did hinder you?” They *started* well, but had little endurance. The track coach would use the word “stamina,” and this is a good word for Christians. *Faith is not to be a mere momentary burst of emotion, but a settled habit of the soul* which carries us through the tenth lap as well as the first. These are the instructions—“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.”

III. THE INSPIRATION

Finally, the writer sets before us the *inspiration* for the running of the race. Where do we find our example, our motivation, our inspiration for running this race? The text answers, “Looking unto Jesus, the Author and the Finisher of our faith.” Every word of this phrase is important. Here we find the supreme inspiration for the running of the race of faith.

We are to “*look unto Jesus*.” The word translated “looking” in this verse is found nowhere else in the Bible. It is the Greek word “*aphorao*.” It literally means to “look *away* to” Jesus. It includes a deliberate turning from all possible distractions and a deliberate focusing on one object. It describes the complete capture of the attention by the single object, Jesus. We are to look away from *sin*, from *self*, from *the future*, from *the past*, from *failure*, from *people*, from

circumstance, from our own ignorance, from our own learning, from our own helplessness, from our own merits, from our own efforts and struggles, from our own self-righteousness, from our own works, from our own faith. We are to look away from everything else, and to Jesus.

I can remember hearing the saints I met in my early Christian life state it over and over again as a rule for victory in the Christian life that the believer must “keep his eyes on the Lord.” No greater counsel can be given or received. For years, I played the game of golf with a mixture of enjoyment and embarrassment. There are many (many!) important things to remember in the game of golf, such as correct grip, right stance, coil of body, use of legs, smooth back swing, complete follow-through, *ad infinitum, ad nauseum*, but most important of all is *the keeping of the eyes on the ball* (and being sure you are not standing too close to it *after you hit it!*). All the other lessons are of little value if the golfer does not learn to keep his eye on the ball. In the Christian life, also, the other lessons are mere religious regulations if the believer does not keep the eye of faith fixed on the Person of Christ.

Englishman Roger Bannister and Australian John Landy were the first men to be timed in less than four minutes in the one-mile race. A highly publicized match between them was held in Vancouver, British Columbia, and the hype of the match turned it into one of the great sports events of modern times. In fact, the race was billed as “the Mile of the Century” by sports writers. The race was decided in the stretch run just a few yards from the finish line. Landy was leading by perhaps two steps when he turned to look over his left shoulder to see where Bannister was. The distraction was fatal to the Australian’s hopes for victory. At precisely the second that Landy glanced over his *left* shoulder to check the position of his opponent, Bannister was making a move on the outside, to Landy’s *right*, and the split-second break in pace allowed Bannister to pass Landy. The record books of the game of track and field will forever hold Bannister’s name as the winner of “the Mile of the Century,” the race that set the four-minute standard as the target for all future runners—*because John Landy became distracted from his goal and looked to his opponent instead of the finish line.* I repeat: we are to *look away from everything else, and unto Jesus.*

Also, this verb is a present participle, which means *continually* looking away to Jesus. We are not merely to look now and then, but we are to acquire the habit of looking always. We are to see the other witnesses who surround us, but we are to see another vision which will turn our eyes away from them. We may see the distractions—the weights and the sin which cling closely to us— but this vision calls our attention even from them. This vision, when once seen, will make the soul forget all else. If your faith is growing weak, and your feet are growing weary, and you are not running as you should in the race, I call upon you to “look unto Jesus.” In the Christian race, we are found all too often looking at ourselves or others. *This may look innocent, but it is fatal to the successful running of the appointed race.* Our sole safety, our constant inspiration is to be found in keeping our eyes off of self and others, and keeping them unswervingly “looking unto Jesus.”

To “look away unto Jesus” means to keep the mind and heart firmly and unwaveringly fixed on Jesus Christ. The first chapter of Hebrews tells us that Jesus Himself is the exact representation (the “image”) of God (Heb. 1:1-3). Human beings are so constructed that it is normal for some mental image (imagination) to fill their minds. The Christian should always

hold before the eyes of his soul the image of the glorious Son of God. He should meditate on the mysteries of God revealed in Christ's holy birth, in His sacrificial life on earth, in His redemptive passion and death, in His death-shattering resurrection, in His ascension to heaven and in His age-long session at God's right hand. And the Christian should always remember that this risen and glorified Jesus is in him.

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.”

We are to “look unto Jesus” in a certain character. “Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith.” In an ordinary race, there is a *starter*, a *pace-setter*, and a *judge* at the finish. *Jesus is all of these to the believer in the Christian race.*

He is the “Author,” or *starter*. It is He who sets us off on the race of faith. It is by faith in Him that we are *in* the race at all. The Bible says in Galatians 3:26, “Ye are the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ.” If you are not in the race, look unto Jesus at this very moment for your salvation and your start.

If you have become aware while reading these words that you are not really in the race the text describes, I am going to ask you to do a daring, crucial, revolutionary thing. I am going to ask you to break with your past self-centered lifestyle (this break is called “repentance” in the Bible), and re-center your life around the Person of Jesus Christ by a crisis act of trust (this act is called “faith” in the Bible). Let me take a moment and explain the negative act of repentance and the positive act of faith.

Several years ago, a well-known 77-year-old United States Senator named John Glenn went back into space on a United States NASA rocket. This was a return trip for Glenn, one of America's early astronauts. When a rocket ship is fired into space, there are two vital matters to know. One has to do with what NASA calls “escape velocity,” which is the force of thrust that is necessary to overcome the present gravitational pull that holds the space ship down on the earth. It is a proven fact that more of a rocket's fuel is necessary for the first two minutes of the flight than for any other part. If there is not enough escape velocity generated in the first part of the flight, the entire trip is aborted. *The escape velocity that is necessary to begin the Christian life is called repentance.* Repentance in the sinner's life must be of such a kind and quality that it breaks him loose from the former gravitational pull of sin and selfishness—no small task! So even his repentance is a miracle of God.

NASA also knows that, once the space ship is moving away from the earth's gravitational pull, it can use the increasing gravitational pull of its new destination—the moon, for example—to supply force for its flight. The nearer it gets to its new destination, the greater is the pull of that object. The Bible defines the “flip-sides” of the salvation experience as “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20-21). Repentance provides the escape velocity that frees us from the gravitational field of sin and selfishness, and faith in Jesus Christ

provides the force which “shifts the center of gravity” from self to God. Jesus becomes the new Center of a believer’s life.

If you have not repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus Christ to save you, let me suggest a prayer for you to pray. While your heart is alerted to sin and to God by His Truth and by His Spirit, pray this prayer directly to Jesus Christ: “Jesus, I am a sinner, and I am lost. I cannot help or save myself. If I continue to depend on myself, I will remain selfish, sinful and lost. But you have told me in your Word that You love me, and that You want to save me. I know that You died on an awful Cross for me and my sins, and I thank You for loving me that much. You also tell me that if I will repent of my sins and trust You, You will save me. Right now, in my deepest heart, I repent of my sins and trust You and You alone. Please come into my life, forgive my sins, give me Your gift of Eternal Life, and become the very center of my life. As I trust You, take my life and make me what You want me to be. Help me to express my love and gratitude to You by walking with You and serving You the rest of my life. I thank You for saving me. In Your Name I pray. Amen.”

In the moment of your salvation, you entered a great romance. You have been “married unto Another, even to Him who is raised from the dead” (Romans 7:3). The potential joys and relational victories of your new life are limitless. However, you have also entered a great war. When you enter into peace with God, you are immediately at war with the devil. The picture used in our text is that of a long-distance race. Read this message again, and ask God to make it practical to your daily life. Prepare yourself accordingly, and begin to run the race today.

Then, Jesus is the *pace-setter* in the race of faith. The word “Author” means File-leader. This means that Jesus leads the long procession of those who believe. He is just ahead of us all the way, setting the pace, drawing out our speed, and keeping up our spirits until we cross the finish-line.

Finally, Jesus is the *judge*, the “Finisher” of our faith. This picture comes from the Isthmian games, in which the judge sits behind the goal, awaiting the runners as they come in. Behind the goal sits Jesus, watching the race and awaiting the runners as they cross the goal. The runner may be pictured crossing the goal victoriously, and falling exhausted into the arms of Christ.

Hebrews 12:3 says, “For consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds.” The word translated “consider” is the Greek word *analogizomai*, from which we derive our English word “analogy.” The dictionary defines this word as “an agreement,. likeness, or correspondence between the relations of things to one another.” The shorter dictionary definition of an analogy is “an agreement or a similarity.” To “consider Jesus,” then, is to “draw an analogy between ourselves and Him.” It means to make a comparison between ourselves and Him, *to take a lesson from Him with the intent of achieving similarity between ourselves and Him*. We are to give full attention to Him—His character, His conflicts, His conquests. We are to be constantly occupied with His Person (12:2a), His Passion (12:2b), and His Position (12:2c)—and with His Model always before us, we are to *keep running the race!*

Are you in the race of faith? If not, why not enter today? Receive Christ as your own Savior and let Him enter your name among the names of those who believe. And if you are in the race, are you running according to instructions?

SPIRITUAL LIFE MINISTRIES
Herb Hodges - Preacher/Teacher
3562 Marconi Cove - Memphis, TN 38118
901-362-1622 E-mail: herbslm@mindspring.com