

Win the Race!

Hebrews 12:1-2

I. Introduction: 1, 2

1. **3** In the New Testament the Christian life is often compared to running a race. (**1 Cor. 9:24-27**; **2 Tim. 4:7**: “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*”; **Heb. 12:1**: “*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*”)
2. The NT also speaks of victory and gaining the prize. (**1 Cor. 15:57**: “*But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*”; **1 Jn. 5:4**: “*For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith.*”; **Phil. 3:14**: “*I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*”).
3. Thus, in the analogies of athletics and contests, God’s Word sets forth the guidelines for true success so that we as His people can win “*the race that is set before us*” (Heb. 12:1). God has given us the necessary requirements for success.
4. Let’s carefully consider this and apply it so we’ll succeed. In order to win the race, we must:

II. Discussion:

1. **4** Properly enter the race:

- A. Some try to run without having properly entered the race; e.g., you can’t just show up at the Indianapolis 500 and expect to run in the race! (**2 Tim. 2:5**: “*And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*”).
- B. Obedience to the gospel of Christ is essential for one to be qualified to run.
 - (1) This includes faith in Christ, repentance of our sins, confession of our faith in Christ, and baptism for the remission of our sins (Jn. 8:24; Acts 17:30; Matt. 10:32-33; Mk. 16:16).
 - (2) By this obedience, we enter into Christ (**Gal. 3:27**: “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*”), and thus can run the race set before us.

2. **5** Lay aside all hindrances:

- A. We cannot run the race successfully while carrying the burdens of worldliness and unholy living.
- B. We are new creatures in Christ! **2 Cor. 5:17**
 - (1) When we obeyed the gospel of Christ “*we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*” (Rom. 6:4)
 - (2) The Hebrew writer said we must “*lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*” (Heb. 12:1)
 - (3) James said we must “*lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*” (James 1:21)
 - (4) We must heed the command Paul gave Timothy: “*No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.*” (2 Tim. 2:4)
 - (5) This is really important! **Col. 3:5-10**

3. **6** Exercise self-control in all things:

- A. The notion of exercising self-control is not a popular concept in today’s society (e.g., 1 in 3 adults are obese in U.S.; 1 in 6 children and adolescents age 6-19 are obese in U.S.).

- B. In sports self-control is called being “in training” and “staying in shape.”
 - (1) Boxers train 6-8 weeks for their next fight.
 - (2) Olympic athletes spend four years getting ready for a few minutes of competition!
- C. Self-control requires dedication, commitment, endurance and self-discipline (**2 Tim. 2:3**: “*You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*”; **1 Cor. 9:27**: “*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*”).

4. **7** Run the race with patience:

- A. The Christian race is not a 100 yard dash, it’s a marathon, an endurance race!
- B. That’s why the Hebrew writer wrote: “*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*” (Heb. 12:1)
- C. Some begin the race with vigor and zeal, but fade away long before they get near the final stretch.
- D. Perseverance is essential so as to endure the pains and struggles that inevitably come before we reach the finish line (**Rom 5:3-4**: “*And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance ; 4 and perseverance , character; and character, hope.*”; 2 Pet. 1:6).

5. **8** Run as if we’re the only one to be crowned:

- A. Paul said, “*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.*” (1 Cor. 9:24)
- B. While we understand that others will be crowned too, we realize that we must continue to press forward, as though we were all alone, so as to reach the goal of heaven (**Phil. 3:14**: “*I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*”).
- C. With this in mind, we need to be thankful.
 - (1) If I had to run this race alone on my own strength, I know I wouldn’t make it!
 - (2) I know that if it were like a worldly race with only one winner, I could never be good enough to be the winner.
 - (3) But thanks be to God all who are in Christ will win the race! **Eph. 1:15-23**

6. **9** Make every effort count:

- A. Paul said, “*Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.*” (1 Cor. 9:26)
- B. Detours and wasted motion hinder rather than help (Illinois experience).
- C. We must use our time wisely! There’s not time to waste! Jas. 4:14
- D. Imagine if someone came to you and guaranteed you a billion dollars if you would follow a certain course of action (no sin involved, no immorality, perfectly legitimate). BUT you had to follow this plan of action explicitly for 20 years. What would you do? Matt. 16:26

7. **10** Strive lawfully:

- A. Paul said, “*And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*” (2 Tim. 2:5)
- B. Every sport has its own set of rules (e.g., football, basketball, etc.) and referees to enforce those rules.
 - (1) God has His set of rules! **2 Jn. 9-11**

- (2) Even though we don't have a man in a black and white striped shirt with a whistle following us around; God knows! (**Phil. 3:18**: "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:").
- (3) We also cannot win the race if we cause others to stumble (**Matt. 18:6-7**: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!").

8. **11** Keep our eyes on the goal:

- A. The Hebrew writer said, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 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 has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."; Heb. 12:1-2).
- B. We cannot win the race by looking back and trying to live in the past (e.g., Indy 500, don't stop the clock!).
- C. We can be easily diverted from the course before us if our eyes are not fastened on the goal ahead (me in grad school).
- D. Note what Paul said concerning this: "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:12-14)

9. **12** Pray to God for strength:

- A. Help and strength are available if we will ask in faith (**Eph. 6:18**: "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints").
- B. When praying we must:
 - (1) Ask in faith (**Jas. 1:5-8**: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.").
 - (2) Be persistent (Lk. 18:1-8).
 - (3) Pray with thanksgiving (**Phil 4:6**: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;").
- C. The result: "and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:7)

10. **13** Finish the course:

- A. The winner of the Indianapolis 500 is the one who completes 200 laps around the track in the shortest time, not 1 lap, not 199 laps...all 200!
- B. We will not win the Christian race if we quit half-way through the race. Nor does the intention of finishing the race mean we completed the race.
- C. The actual winning of the race requires effort (Phil. 2:12), determination (1 Cor. 15:58), and perseverance (**2 Tim. 3:10**: "But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance").

- (1) Let us save our glorying and exultation in victory until we gain the prize.
- (2) We can and should rejoice in what we have attained, but let us not forget the difficulties that lie ahead of us.
- (3) As one has said, “Let him not boast who puts his armor on, until he puts it off when the battle is won.”

III. **Conclusion: 14**

1. Surely, if we will use God’s guidelines for success, we can be winners in this great race.
2. Let us all live the life of a faithful Christian so that we—Win the Race!
3. Are you in the race?!

Adapted from a sermon by R. J. Evans.