

Let Us Run to Jesus, Part 1

Hebrews 12:1-3

July 7, 2024

Turn with me this morning to Hebrews chapter 12, back to where we left off. I want to begin this morning with an anecdote from history just to set the, the stage for Hebrews chapter 12. In 490 BC, the intense conflict between the Greek world and the ruling Persian Empire resulted in the Battle of Marathon, Greece, where we get the name for marathon races today. The Persians were coming to attack Athens, which was a source of the rebellion against the Persian Empire. But the Persians, they wouldn't land their boats at Athens. They would land their boats 26 miles away at Marathon, Greece, in order to disembark and march on the city.

The Greek army left Athens to meet the Persian troops at Marathon, and they told their women as they left Athens that if they lost the battle at Marathon, the women of the city, along

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with the children and everyone left, should commit suicide rather than be taken by the Persians. And so they gave these strict instructions to the women, and then they left Athens for Marathon. The Greek army was led by General Miltiades, and they positioned themselves in the hills around the beaches of Marathon, where the Persian army landed. And as the Persian army disembarked from their vessels, the Greek army realized that the Persians far outnumbered them. And after the Persians disembarked and assessed the situation, they recognized as well that they far outnumbered the Greek army from Athens, and so they decided to split their army. They decided to have half the army get back on the boats and sail on to Athens and attack the city that was defenseless at this point and leave the other half of the army there to take care of the troops at Marathon.

When General Miltiades saw that the famous Persian cavalry was among the troops getting back on the boats to sail to Athens, he made the strategic decision to give up their defensive position in the hills and make a strategic attack on the troops that were left. And while the Greeks were still greatly outnumbered after the Persians split their army, the Greek general knew that this was his best shot at winning, so he

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arranged his troops, and he marched on the Persian troops. And due to some strategic decisions in the battle, the Greeks ended up slaughtering the Persians. It's reported that over 6,000 Persian troops died while only 200 Greek soldiers were killed in that battle at Marathon.

So the Greek troops gained victory at Marathon, and they all knew that they had time to get back to Athens in order to protect the city from the attack. But they also knew that they may not get back before the Persian ships would become visible to the women in Athens. And the general feared that if the women and the people of the city saw the Persian ships sailing toward the city that they would enact the suicide plan that they had charged them with before the Greek army could get back to tell them that they had been victorious.

And so a messenger by the name of Pheidippides was commissioned to run the 26 miles between Marathon, Greece, and to Athens in order to tell the women of the city not to enact the plan, to tell the women of the city that the Greeks were victorious. Otherwise, everything that they had fought for that

day would be lost. What good was the victory at Marathon if they returned home to a bunch of dead families? For all those Greek men, returning home to bury their families would have been worse than dying on the battlefield.

So with his eyes fixed on Athens, laying aside any weight, any clothing that would slow him down, Pheidippides ran that 26 miles from Marathon to Athens. He ran with such determination, with such focus, that when he reached the city, he was able to give a shout, "We won! We were victorious!", and then he collapsed from exhaustion and died in Athens. This historical account became the inspiration for the modern-day marathon event, which was first introduced at the 1896 Olympics, a 26-mile marathon. It is an agonizing, grueling race to run.

This is the kind of race that the author of Hebrews has in mind as he encourages his readers to run the race that is set before them, this life of faith, this long marathon. And just as General Miltiades would have exhorted Pheidippides, "Son, if you don't get there before those boats are in view, all this was for nothing. If you don't run as fast as you possibly can, all is

lost." Just as that general would have exhorted Pheidippides, so to the author of Hebrews exhorts his readers, "Run the race that is before you." Here in chapter 12, we see this exhortation to live this life of faith, to run this life of faith well. And the author of Hebrews does so by means of the analogy of a long, grueling race.

So if you're there with me, Hebrews chapter 12, let's read verses 1-3. "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, laying aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him who has endured such hostility by sinners against himself, so that you will not grow weary, fainting in heart."

The author of Hebrews, here, exhorts his readers, and by extension us, to run. He gives us several points on how to do that, with a final command to consider. So we have two points

from this text to encourage us, to exhort us to live this life of faith in obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ, walking or rather running in a manner worthy of our calling that we might persevere in the faith.

So two points: Let us run, and let us consider. Let us run is from the first two verses, which are one long sentence in the Greek: "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, laying aside every weight and sin which so easily entangles us, let us run with endurance the race that is before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

One point in all of that, one main point: Run. Let us run. The author of Hebrews is writing to Jewish Christians, among whom were many who were tempted to abandon the Christian faith and go back to Judaism to escape persecution. They were being heavily persecuted, and they thought, "Maybe if I just go back to Judaism and can escape some of this persecution, I'll worship

Jesus back under the umbrella of Judaism.” But to turn back to Judaism was to turn their back on Christ. He wanted them to understand that to turn back to Judaism was apostasy.

This is why the writer of Hebrews starts in the very first chapter with the pre-eminence of Christ. Then he goes on to declare that Jesus is greater than angels. He's greater than Moses. In chapter 6, verse 1, he exhorts them to not fall away but press on to maturity, to keep the faith in Jesus. In chapters 10 and 12, the author of Hebrews has some final exhortations and warnings, but the whole book is full of exhortations and warnings to be faithful, remain faithful, don't turn back. Even going back to Judaism is apostasy.

Chapters 10-12 are some of the author's final exhortations and warnings—very, very strong. Turn back with me just a couple pages to Hebrews chapter 10. I want to read one of the strongest ones preceding this, immediately preceding Chapter 11 in this section. Chapter 10, verse 19 says, “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way which he inaugurated for us through the

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veil, that is his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

“And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near. For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.

“Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy by the mouth of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has regarded as defiled the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has resulted in

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the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

We could read to the end of that chapter, but for the sake of time, let's stop there. But this exhortation, many exhortations, "Let us draw near," "Let us hold fast," "not forsaking the assembly"—these exhortations are so that we might not turn back from the Lord and fall into the hands of the living God for judgment. It is on the heels of this very, very strong exhortation, and then chapter 11 following, on the faithful men who have gone before, the author writes in our passage, "Therefore, run." Let us run. Run like your life depends on it, like Pheidippides. If you don't run, all is lost. There's no reward.

"It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." So run in faith, and he will take pleasure in you. Those who run to the Lord in faith, there is no expectation of judgment for these. But if you shrink back, if you turn your

back on Christ, if you run the other way, well, the author of Hebrews says there is a tidal wave of fire coming for you that you cannot outrun. If you turn away, you may have a bit of ease in this life; you may have a reprieve from persecution. But such an act reveals an unbelieving heart, and eventually you will be hit with that tidal wave of fire. So the author of Hebrews writes, "Hold fast to your confession." "Run to Jesus," he writes.

Before we get into the outline, I just want to make a few observations about this exhortation to us to "run the race." First, "race," here, is the Greek word *agon*, from which we get our word "agony." It is not a short sprint, an exhilarating run. It is an agonizingly long race. It is a marathon. The author of Hebrews, he's likening the Christian life to a long race, not a short one, though for some the race is shorter than for others. But the primary thing that this word *agon*, "race," should evoke in our thinking is self-discipline, work, struggle. What this word should evoke in our thinking is the exact opposite of passive, luxurious, comfortable living. Arthur Pink has said, "The Christian is not called to lie down on a flowery bed of ease, but to run a race."

Many of us know that athletics are strenuous, to say the least. Sports demand self-sacrifice. They demand discipline. They demand that if we want to win the prize, we have to put forth every ounce of effort that we have in our bodies; that is, unless you just don't really care about getting the reward. Then the race is easy. If you just walk leisurely, maybe your training consists of eating lots of good food, short walks, maybe a speed-walk every now and then. Sure, it's not difficult, but you aren't going to win the prize that way. You aren't pushing yourself. That's what Paul refers to when he refers to "running in vain." You aren't making any progress.

Beloved, living a life of luxury and comfort, that's walking leisurely, that isn't running. And I fear that in this work-hating, comfort-seeking, pleasure-loving world, many Christians, maybe even many of us, we try to live a life of comfort and luxury rather than a life of being a runner in a race, who periodically gets to enjoy these comforts and luxuries that we have, but only for a short time, then get back up and run. The people that the author of Hebrews was writing to, they're going through great hardships. He was encouraging them

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with such things because he knew the Christian life was hard, full of trials and hardship and persecution. This Christian life is a life of running a race, not lying on a cushy bed of flowery ease.

And for many of us, we would not forsake the faith or not show up on the Sunday mornings because we wanted to escape persecution and hardship like the people that Paul was writing to. Rather, our lives are fairly cushy, and we're just trying to hold on to comfort. We've laid down in the flowery bed of ease, and we like it too much to get back up and run. Like a husband maybe, who faithfully works to provide for his family, comes home, sits on the couch only to get stuck that comfortable couch as if he's glued to it.

Such a blessing from the Lord that we have these comforts to enjoy, but we must be able to get back up and get into the race, to shepherd our family, study our Bibles, lead our families in Bible time, discipline the children, learn the Scriptures, evangelize, disciple, rather than every moment we get lying down on that flowery bed of ease. Beloved, life is a

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race, the author of Hebrews tells us. It isn't supposed to be lived without breaking a sweat. A life of running isn't going to be easy. It isn't going to be comfortable. And if it is easy and comfortable all the time, if your life is easy and comfortable all the time, then you probably aren't running.

One more observation of this command before we get into the outline. The author tells his listeners to continue on running in the race, and he says, "Let us run the race that is before us." All of the saints that we read about in Chapter 11, their race is over. But for all of us, all believers now living, our race is before us, not behind us. Our race isn't over until we die or the Lord returns to take us home to be with him. But for us, this race is always before us, and we each have to run our own race. Unlike most races, we are not running against each other, we aren't running against someone else. We have our own course marked out by the Lord, and he wants us to be faithful to run it. And faithfully running this race is how we win the prize or the reward at the end.

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But we have to run the race that is before us. And I also fear many people, maybe partly due to social media, I think many people spend too much time wishing that they were running a different race, or wishing they were running someone else's race, daydreaming, living in the fantasy world of video games, pretending to run a race other than the one that the Lord has given us to run. And all the awards and achievements, likes or pins—they're deceiving us into thinking that we are running when we really aren't.

That's just a fantasy world. We're really lying down in a flowery bed of ease, staring at a box of lights, pretending to run, imagining we are running and winning when we're not. The only achievement or award that really matters: standing before the Lord on that day and hearing those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And that can only happen if we are running our race, if we stop trying to run a race that isn't ours, but we set our hearts upon the race before us that the Lord has given us, not looking at what is behind, but "straining toward the call, the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

So the author of Hebrews exhorts his readers to run, and by extension, we are exhorted to run. We are exhorted to think about our life as a race, to live with aim, to live with purpose. Everything we do, we're thinking about the award at the end. All of the pain is worth it. Not living for pleasure, for ease, but being disciplined to grow in holiness, sanctification, stewarding our lives faithfully that we might hear those words on that day. This is the author's main point in this section. Run the race that is before you. All the other phrases and the participles around this, they tell us how to go about running this race of life well, things that we need to do in order to run well.

So we have four subpoints in here. Let us run, and four subpoints all beginning with Let us run: Let us run by reminding ourselves; Let us run by unburdening ourselves; Let us run by exercising ourselves, and Let us run by focusing ourselves. So by reminding ourselves, by unburdening ourselves, by exercising ourselves, and by focusing ourselves.

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So let's begin by reminding ourselves; let us run by reminding ourselves. And we find this in Hebrews 12:1: "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us." "Since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us run." The author, what he's pointing to, he's just reminded his readers of this cloud of witnesses. We are motivated to run well by being reminded of the cloud of witnesses throughout history who have gone before us.

We should not think of these as witnesses of our life, as if they're in some heavenly stadium looking down on us, watching us live our life. They're not witnesses of us. They're witnesses or testifiers of God's grace. They testify, not as speaking today, not as witnessing us, but they testify by their life of faith.

Look back just quickly at Chapter 11, verse 4, just to make this point. It says, "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he was approved as being righteous, God approving his gifts; and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks." He still witnesses. Abel is the first

in this long line of witnesses who, though they are dead, they still speak to us, and they speak to us through their testimony that we have here in Scripture.

And this testimony is quite significant. Hebrews chapter 11 is the largest chapter in the book of Hebrews. The author dedicates over 10% of this epistle to this one chapter in order to exhort his readers to run well. He even has to cut it short. He wants to write more; he wants to elaborate more, but he's got other stuff he wants to fit on his scroll, and he's running out of room.

But he proverbially creates this "cloud of witnesses." The word for "cloud," here, is not the Greek word which refers to a single, detached cloud floating through the sky. Rather, it is the word that refers to a massive cloud that creates darkness, refers to a compact, numberless throng. It's used to refer to a horde of locusts that creates darkness. It refers to a large mass of a numberless throng.

So this word “cloud,” it already has the idea of a large mass, but then the author also includes that adjective, “so great.” There is this great numberless throng of witnesses who have lived their life of faith. They have all run the race, and they have finished well, and they testify to us of their life of faith. They ran the race that was set before them.

But why did the author of Hebrews spend so much time on Chapter 11? I think we're so familiar with it, sometimes we just read it, and we read past everything. Familiarity breeds contempt. But the author knew that putting before his readers this great cloud of faithful witnesses would spur them on to run. He knew it would encourage them to trust in the same God that these faithful witnesses put their trust in. He knew it would remind them of God's faithfulness, that if God was with these men, he would be with those that the author of Hebrews was writing to as well.

He would be with them as well, that “if God sustained all these men through all these difficulties, God will sustain you,” is what the author of Hebrews wants to tell them. It would be a

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great source of encouragement to them, putting all these examples before them, reminding them that these were men just like us, who were strengthened by God to accomplish the task at hand, to run the race that God had marked out before them.

Thus we would do well, we would be encouraged to run by reminding ourselves of the great cloud of faithful men and women who have gone before us. We also have this "great cloud of witnesses." So beloved, let us be encouraged by them. And we do this first and foremost by reading the Scriptures. He summarizes a whole lot, here. But we read Scripture and we are encouraged by the example of the faithfulness of these men.

But this numberless throng of witnesses doesn't stop with Scripture. We also ought to avail ourselves of the encouragement we can find in reading Christian biographies of other faithful men and women throughout history who have run the race before them. There are so many. We have many in our bookstore. You probably have some on your shelf at home that you just never got around to reading. I know I do. But this is a huge source of encouragement for us to run.

And just to emphasize this in this sermon, as the author of Hebrews emphasized it, I just wanted to add one witness to this list, maybe to encourage you to read more about other witnesses to spur you on to live your life of faith well. One such faithful witness in church history is a man named John Chrysostom. Many of you are probably familiar with him, but John Chrysostom is recognized as being the greatest expositional preacher in the history of the Greek church. He was attributed the name Chrysostom by his parishioners and admirers because it means "golden-mouthed," recognizing his great preaching ability. And while he was most notably recognized for his preaching ability, John's fidelity to the Word of God in the face of opposition, and his dedication to live in accordance with the Word of God and how he preached, well, this was unparalleled in the Christian world.

John Chrysostom was born in Antioch around AD 347-349, so just about 300 years after Paul was there, less than 300 years after Paul ministered in Antioch, same city. But he was born in Antioch to Anthusa, the wife of Segundus, a high-ranking military official. His father died shortly after he was born,

leaving his 20-year-old mother Anthusa a widow. She did not seek a husband, but remained unmarried and focused on raising John. She was able to give John a good education in his earlier years, planting a seed of faithfulness that would later grow into a tree for the world to see and partake of the fruit of. But as he grew up, the prevailing pagan and secular nature of education, the idolatrous pagan culture, drove him to passionately study the Scriptures for truth.

He quickly connected himself to Meletius, who was the leader of the Orthodox church there in Antioch at the time. And as a part of that community, John was greatly influenced by Diodore of Tarsus, who was, we might say, the assistant pastor of discipleship, so to speak. This man taught John how to study the Scriptures, and after the death of John's mother around AD 374, he fled from the seductions of the city life to the monastic life in the country, in the mountains south of Antioch, where he spent six years as a monk, studying, meditating, praying in an attempt to learn self-control.

And in an attempt to do this, like many did, he afflicted his own body with severe asceticism, depriving himself of sleep, of food for long periods of time. And as was the case, we see this with Martin Luther, it resulted in very, very poor health, which made him have to return to Antioch, where he was immediately ordained as a deacon, and within a few years he was made an elder, which gave him access to the pulpit.

John was a preaching elder in Antioch for roughly the next twelve years, during which time he was made Bishop of Antioch, the highest position; he was over the entire city of Antioch. His preaching enraptured people, defying his physical appearance. His long years of asceticism made him look as if he was almost on his deathbed. His eyes had sunk in; he was pale. If you look at pictures of him, you can see this. He looked like a very unhealthy man; he looked like he was on the brink of death.

Yet these physical disadvantages made it all the more surprising when he preached so powerfully. And it's said that his preaching so captivated the listeners that as they were

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standing outside when he was doing street preaching, as he was standing outside, vandals could come and they could pickpocket everybody listening without their noticing because they were so enraptured with his preaching.

This great preaching ability made him known as far as Constantinople, the, the capital of the kingdom, where the emperor was, modern-day Istanbul and Turkey. But when the Bishop of Constantinople died, the head pastor over Constantinople died, the Emperor Arcadius decided that he wanted the post filled by John, the golden-mouthed preacher, because this was going to be his church; he wanted the best preacher there for himself.

So the emperor did what I think any of us would do when they wanted to hire a pastor: He kidnapped him. He knew, based on reports, that John did not want to leave Antioch. He wanted to stay there. So he sent a dispatch of soldiers from Constantinople to Antioch, and he had the governor invite him to visit the chapel outside the city, allowing the soldiers to take

him to Constantinople, where he would eventually submit and take the post of Bishop of Constantinople.

Upon his arrival, he wasted no time reforming the church. He regularly preached on the responsibility that the wealthy had to be generous to the less fortunate. This church in Constantinople, and really the city, had been completely given over to sensual, luxurious living of the rich at the expense of the poor. So he often just preached the Scriptures, preached that the rich ought to take care of the poor brothers in the church. The common people, the majority, loved him, while those who wanted to continue living comfortably and lavishly, well, they hated his constant rebukes.

The wealthiest and the most vain of them all was the emperor's wife, Eudoxia. One day John was preaching through 1 Kings 21 on the wickedness of Jezebel to seize someone else's vineyard, and it just so happened that the emperor's wife, Eudoxia, had recently seized the vineyard of a poor widow and done the same kind of wickedness. And whether or not John knew of her actions is debated in church history. Some think he did,

some think he didn't. But regardless of whether he knew or not when he was preaching that sermon, everybody was sure he was referring to her.

Meanwhile, a man by the name of Theophilus, who had long envied John's prominence, decided to seize upon the opportunity and oust John, damaging the city as well. Eudoxia was much obliged to play along with Theophilus, so Theophilus staged a kangaroo court in the church and brought false charges against John. John never even gave credence to the court by showing up. It was a sham, everybody knew it. He didn't even bother showing up. But that didn't stop the puppet court from doing Eudoxia's will. The official church banished John to exile in the wilderness for life.

The common people, upon hearing this, were outraged at the injustice. Being certain of his innocence, they surrounded the church and refused to let the authorities take him. So loved by the people that they were willing to die for him, they surrounded the church. Chrysostom could have easily, with a single word, roused the people to sedition and rebellion against

the city. But instead, not wanting to endanger the people, he knew many people would lose their lives that day if he did that, he slipped past them all and surrendered himself. He was hauled off, forced onto a ship that would take him into exile.

But that very night, Constantinople was struck with an earthquake. And historical records vary. Some people, some records say Eudoxia gave birth to a stillborn baby. Some people say it was an earthquake. Maybe it was both. But Eudoxia, being very superstitious, believed that this was God's judgment upon her for banishing John. And so she immediately reversed course and sent to recall John from exile before he had even left on the boat.

John went right back to the pulpit, right back to faithful expositional teaching and living a life that was entirely in line with what he taught. But just a few months after his return from a very short exile, Eudoxia set up a silver statue in the city, of herself, right near the church; and to inaugurate this, they had a bunch of games and festivities and celebration on the Lord's Day, and in the middle of the church service. It so

disrupted the church service that John condemned it right there in his church service, and by extension, Eudoxia was condemned herself.

Eudoxia was enraged once again, and thus Theophilus opportunistically decided to try a second time to get rid of John. He declared that Eudoxia really had no authority to recall John from exile, since it was a decision of the church, and so John needed to go back to exile. Once again Eudoxia was happy to comply, even if it diminished her authority. Emperor Arcadius had John put in house arrest as a first step to hold him for a little while, and the mass popular support gave him great pause to send him into exile. But in the end, Arcadius, who had kidnapped John because he wanted him there as a preacher so badly, he was now persuaded by John's foes to exile him a second time.

John once again submitted to the injustice, and he went into exile. And after John was in exile for three years, Eudoxia, still stewing really in her own conscience and over the things she had done, but stewing over that, decided that his

current punishment wasn't good enough. So she had soldiers march him through the desert as punishment. The soldiers led John on a forced march through the blazing hot sun until it baked him red as a brick. And John collapsed in that blazing sun and died at the age of 58.

Had John Chrysostom forsaken his fidelity to Scripture, there's no doubt he could have lived much longer. But because of his tenacity and refusal to indulge sin in his church, he paid the price with his life. He could have at any point laid down on a flowery bed of ease and stayed in his pulpit and been a great preacher that everybody liked. But he didn't do that. He ran his race faithfully. He was known for being a great preacher, but it was his faithfulness to righteousness that led to his death. He refused to lay on that flowery bed of ease and take the comfortable road with all the other rich in his city. Instead, he chose to faithfully run the race that was before him.

And the same God who sustained John Chrysostom, who sustained all the saints throughout church history, is the same God who will sustain us by his grace to run the race before us.

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That same God can give us strength not to compromise even when our life depends on it. Beloved, let us keep on remembering the great numberless throng of witnesses we have surrounding us. Let us remember them by reading them, of the testimony of God's grace in their life. Let us remember their life of faith and be encouraged to run ourselves.

So we first run, we're exhorted to run. And then the author of Hebrews tells us we run well by remembering all of those who have gone before us, the "great cloud of witnesses surrounding us." We remember them. That helps us run well, looking to them as examples for encouragement. But second, subpoint B, we run well by unburdening ourselves, unburdening ourselves. Back to the second part of chapter 12, verse 1.

So we are to run, "laying aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us." Wait, here, the word for wait, it's the only place this word is used in the New Testament, and it's thrown to the front of the sentence for emphasis. It refers to something large and awkward, something heavy, burdensome, something that would inhibit you from doing something, like if

your body swelled up. It's used to refer to someone who became pregnant, something that impedes someone from doing something. And that "something" in view in the text, here, is running a race; and these weights, they're not necessarily sin in and of themselves, but hindrances to running well.

As we get into this, I want to first mention what these weights are not. Many make the great mistake of thinking that if only their life circumstances would change, this would lift a great weight off their shoulders and they could run. But as one commentator said, "Changing life circumstances doesn't change the person. They're the same person regardless of their life circumstances. The life circumstances just reveal what's in our heart."

In fact, the Lord often puts trials in our life not to weigh us down, but to spur us on. If you are lying in a flowery bed of ease, relaxing in comfort, and the Lord sends a trial of a swarm of bees into the flowers to make you jump up and run, even if you are painfully stung a few times, that's worth it

because the Lord is actually provoking you from your comfort, provoking you onward to get back in the race.

Whether these trials are dealing with ungodly family members, ungodly co-workers, ungodly children, a spouse who doesn't obey the Lord, these are not weights that keep us from running the race. They are spurs that the Lord has given to keep you faithfully running toward the goal, increasing your sanctification. Yes, these trials are hindrances, but they're not hindrances to our running. They're hindrances to our comfort, which as Americans we treasure so much. So the weights are not trials that the Lord has put in our life. They're not our life circumstances. Those are the providence of God that he has marked out for us.

So what are these weights? They are things, as I said, not necessarily sin in and of themselves, but they are sin for you because they hinder you from running well. These weights refer to anything that keeps us from running, anything that keeps us from growing in our sanctification. They keep us from growing in our love for our Savior. They hold us back from running

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faithfully. They don't spur us on to good works. They hold us back and hinder our sanctification and our walk in godliness.

One commentator says that these weights could be a friendship, an association, an event, a place, an entertainment, a pleasure. But if this otherwise good thing drags you down, you must strip it away. If it draws your affections away from God, if it draws your affections primarily away from pleasing God, it is sin for you, and you must cast it off.

Imagine if you're in a marathon and the race starts. There are a few people who take off. They get way ahead of you much faster than you at the beginning of the race. But as you're running, you begin to catch up to some of these people who took off much faster than you did. And as you begin to pass one of them, you see very quickly why you were able to gain on them so fast, so quickly.

You find that somewhere along the way, this person who's running this marathon picked up a microwave, and they're trying to run with it, carrying this bulky hindrance, shifting it

around. When these muscles get tired, you shift it around to these other muscles, and if this person is your friend, you're running alongside this person who is your friend, you tell your friend, "What are you running a race with a microwave for? Throw that thing down."

And then he begins to tell you, as he's trying to run with you, that it's well within his rights to run with a microwave, that he has the freedom to run with a microwave. And certainly it's not against any rules of a marathon to run with things, but no one does it because it's stupid. It's totally hindering you in the goal to win the race.

And yet, how often do we declare our own Christian freedoms to do certain things, but they're really hindrances to our own race? And due to everyone's varying desires, what may drag someone down may not drag someone else down. Watching a TV show for one person might not draw that person's heart away from the race, but another person may get so sucked into binge-watching the TV because they turned on one TV show.

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For that person, that is sin. One person can get on Facebook for five minutes while another is sucked into doom-scrolling for hours. We have to each of us assess the things which are not sin in and of themselves, but they are for us because they draw our affections away from the Lord. They draw us off to lying in the flowery bed of ease instead of running the race.

These things, while we do have the Christian freedom to do, if they slow us down, we have to assess that and drop it. Otherwise, it's like running a marathon with a microwave. We must assess these things and throw them off, cast them aside. We have to be honest with ourselves. We have to cast those things off. They're really hindering our faithfulness and stewardship. We must not try to convince ourselves that "You know what, carrying this microwave, it's really not hindering me that much." But how many of us do that with the things in this life that we have the freedom to do? Those things are sin for us because they slow us down. They hinder our walk.

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The small dumbbells that you're running with, maybe you think you're something special, you're going to carry these just to show how good you are, how strong you are. But after a few miles of running a marathon, you can't even lift your arms anymore because you have these even light dumbbells in your arms, and you really want to win. Are you going to hold on to those? Are you going to drop just one of them? No, you're just going to drop all those things like a sack of rocks.

No marathon runner who wants to win carries any extra weight with him. He wears the lightest clothes because he doesn't want anything weighing him down. Likewise, as Christians, we must not be content just throwing the microwave down. We have to shed every single weight that hinders us, no matter how small. So beloved, examine your hearts. Shed every single weight that keeps you from running faithfully.

Next, the author says to lay aside something else: to put off or rid oneself of the easily entangling sin. "Easily entangling" is another word found nowhere else in Scripture. It's a compound word meaning, well standing around, good

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standing around. That is to say, this is the sin that easily brings you to a standstill. With this verb of laying aside or putting off, it gives the imagery of clothing.

As a runner, you don't wear baggy clothes because you get tripped up, you get tangled up. That's the idea here: clothes that wind around you, bind you, trip you up and bring you to a standstill in the race. And of course, any sin is going to trip us up and bring us to a standstill when we are seeking to run faithfully.

As Christians, we should seek to mortify every sin in us. But the word for sin here is articular, meaning it has the article on it. It is "the" sin. And many commentators think that the author of Hebrews is pointing to a specific sin, and they point to the sin of unbelief, which is regularly confronted in the book.

The sin of unbelief, like any other sin, brings a person to a standstill. This is not necessarily unbelief in the sense of apostasy, though it could ultimately reveal itself to be full

apostasy in a person. But this is unbelief in certain truths of God, like failing to believe in the goodness of God. We read these earlier, but Chapter 11, verses 5-6 talks about Enoch by faith: "Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death and he was not found because God took him up. For prior to being taken up, he was approved as being pleasing to God, and without faith it is impossible to please him. For he who draws near to God must believe that he is, that he exists, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him."

What would make a runner who is trying to win stop in his tracks more than anything is the doubt that there was really any reward at the end. When the sin of doubt creeps into our minds, when we believe the lie of this world, that the present sin will bring greater pleasure than the future reward of God, well, that just stops us in our tracks.

No one runs faithfully when they don't believe God's reward is better than the pleasure of present sin, or worse, that there's no reward at all. That sin stops runners dead in their tracks. We all know it is a daily, if not moment-by-moment

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battle to remind ourselves that the future reward is better than the pleasure of sin or any comfort of this life, that the present reward, even of pleasing God, is better than the sensual pleasure of sin. We all know this is a daily battle.

The imagery of this text is clothing that entangles and trips us up. We have to be diligent to cast off such clothing. We have to cast off such doubt, such unbelief. Beloved, let us run believing God, that he exists and that he is a rewarder of those who run. Let us run, never believing the lies of Satan, that sin is better, that that flowery bed of ease is better than the reward waiting for us at the end.

So to recap, we run well by reminding ourselves of what the author of Hebrews has just reminded us of, the great innumerable throng of faithful witnesses throughout history. Let us run well by reminding ourselves of them, remembering them. Let us be encouraged by their example, learn from them, be encouraged by their faith to follow them in their footsteps. Let us be encouraged by their example.

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And let us run by throwing off every weight and sin which so easily entangles, trusting that God will reward us when we run to him. Let us run, beloved. And if you're taking notes, you're really worried about the time because I'm two subpoints in. Well, we're going to pick this up next week and finish it. Don't worry. But beloved, let us run. Let's pray.

Father, we've already recognized that we are weak and frail. We have no power, we have no strength in and of ourselves to run this race. We know it is only by the power of your Holy Spirit that we have strength to run. But there are many things we can do to help ourselves along the way. I pray that we would be diligent to remind ourselves, be diligent to read through Scripture, to remind ourselves of the faithful men and women who have gone before us, that we might be exhorted on to live faithfully, that we might throw down anything that hinders us and strip off the doubt of sin, trusting you, that you are good and that you reward those who run after you. Make this a reality in our hearts, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.