

Running with Endurance, Part 1 (Hebrews 12:1–3)

Hebrews 12—we're going to read together the first three verses.

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2 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.

3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (NASB)

There is an obvious athletic or sports metaphor that is at play in this text. Oftentimes in Scripture, biblical authors would use everyday examples, everyday analogies, everyday experiences, everyday things in order to communicate biblical truth. You see it most remarkably in the parables of Jesus. When Jesus would tell a parable and speak, for instance, of a man who hosts a party and invites people to come in, and he has a guest list and they don't show up and he's disappointed, and he's made the preparation, so he goes out and finds other people to come in and to enjoy what he has prepared. Or He tells a parable about a king and his subjects, and the king goes away for a period of time and gives control over his kingdom and his estate to somebody else, and they take advantage of that and abuse it. Or Jesus would tell a story about laborers in a vineyard who would work all day in the hot sun and how it was difficult to find people who are willing to work and certainly willing to work for an honest day's wage. Or He'd tell a story about a wedding celebration and people coming to celebrate, and the marriage of two people and what that would look like, and one person going away to find a bride and come back. These were all illustrations, examples from everyday life that people in His day would have readily understood and got the picture. Losing a coin, losing a sheep, a jealous older brother—all of those things are things that we can all relate to. Maybe not losing a sheep—I've never lost one of those—but a coin I can relate to. And I don't have a brother, but other than those two things, the rest of that I can relate to.

Paul spoke of vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor, bowls in a house and pitchers and jars. He speaks of a potter and the clay and the fashioning of that. Paul described his ministry in terms of being a farmer or a soldier or an athlete or a boxer or a runner.

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In fact, athletic metaphors were very common with the apostle Paul. It was one that he alluded to a lot. And we have the same kind of thing here in our text before us, the same kind of illustration in this passage where running the Christian life, the life of faith, is likened to a race, a footrace, where people race and pursue a prize, pursue a goal, pursue a reward at the end. That is the analogy that is here in Hebrews 12:1–3. In fact, you see in verse 1, the central idea of the entire passage in verse 1 is “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” That's the central idea of verses 1–3. Run with endurance the race that is set before us. All of the other phrases in 12:1–3, all of the other details, the explanation, all of that serves the purpose of telling us how it is that we are to run, the manner in which we are to run, what we are to look forward to after we are running, the reward that we are running for. All of that is described, but the central idea is that we are to run the race that is set before us and to run it with endurance.

That analogy of running a race would have been one that would have been readily understood to the audience of the original author of the letter. It also is not lost on us, for it is very easy to see the similarities between running the Christian life or living the life of faith and running a race. In fact, oftentimes Paul would make reference to this analogy of running a race and liken it to some aspect of his ministry, his discipline, his self-control, his self-denial, or the prize that he expected to receive at the end. He would make reference to it, and he wouldn't even need to explain it because the parallels are just, they're right up on the surface. It's easy for us to see the parallels. Some examples of how the apostle Paul would use this analogy—1 Corinthians 9:24–27. And my guess is that all of these passages are going to sound familiar to you.

24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.

25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;

27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified. (NASB)

In Galatians 2:2, the apostle Paul uses the analogy of running to talk about—to describe the possibility that he might have run in vain if he had the wrong message. So he says,

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“The message that I preached among the Gentiles, I took it up to Jerusalem, and I presented it to those who were the notable ones in the church.” Galatians 2:2: “For fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.” In other words, all of Paul's effort in gospel preaching and his self-denial and his sacrifices and the missionary journeys and the fundraising and the writing and the laboring and the prayer, all of it would be for naught if indeed in the process of all of that he was preaching the wrong message. If he was actually preaching a gospel that would lead to the damnation of his hearers, then everything he was doing was ultimately in vain. He was just running without aim, running to no purpose, running for no prize.

In Galatians 5:7, Paul says of the Galatians, “You were running well; who hindered you?” Who hindered you? The Galatians had started off well. The gun had fired, and they were off the starting blocks and down the course. And then it was as if somebody sort of threw a rope around their waist and dragged them off course. And pretty soon they're running in another race that has nothing to do with the race that they started with. So Paul says, “You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (Gal. 5:7)

Philippians 2:16: Paul says to the Philippians, we're to hold fast “the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.” Hear the analogy to running?

Even Philippians 3:14, that familiar verse: “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” That's the analogy. Pressing on is the language of an athlete who would press on in his course, running his race toward that goal so that he may cross the finish line.

But did Paul cross the finish line? Did he run his race? Did he finish his course? He did, because in the very last Epistle, in the very last chapter of the last Epistle that he wrote, which we read earlier, 2 Timothy 4, Paul says, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course” (v. 7). See, he ran, he ran well, and he finished the course.

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;

8 [and here's the reward] in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Tim. 4:7–8 NASB)

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There is there the course that is set before us, the reason that we are running, the race that we are to run. There is the finish line that we are to cross, and having finished it, we step over the finish line, as it were, and receive a great reward. This is a perfect analogy for the book of Hebrews, the running analogy. It's a perfect one because the author was writing to an audience that was tempted to turn away from the course that they had begun on to a different course, a different race. Remember, this is an audience of people who had left the temple and the sacrifices and all of the religion of their ancestors and had pressed on and come into the fullness which is in Jesus Christ. And they had, many of them, only apparently begun the race, but they had begun this race and now, facing opposition and hostility and persecution, they were tempted to stop, to slow down, maybe just stand there on the course, maybe walk off to the side to sit down on the curb and take a drink of water. And maybe for some of them they were tempted to even turn back and go the other direction, go back to the temple, back to the sacrifices, back to what they were familiar with. And the author in this Epistle wants them to press on in the race that they have begun lest they show that they have just begun running in vain.

The persecution that they were facing is described back in chapter 10, verses 32 and following:

32 Remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,

33 partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.

34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. (Heb. 10:32–34 NASB)

There's that catalog, that list of afflictions and sufferings, the hostilities, the trials, the tribulations, the temptations, they're all present in that list of opposition that the original readers had faced. And now the author does not want them to throw away their confidence. He says that at the end of chapter 10: "Do not throw away your confidence" (v. 35). In fact, he says, "You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised" (v. 36). Right? You must endure to the end so that you can cross the finish line, and having crossed the finish line, you will receive the reward. So it's a perfect analogy since many of them were tempted toward

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apostasy. It is a perfect analogy for the book of Hebrews since many of them, far too many of them in their midst, had already apostatized. That's what the warning passages are about in Hebrews 6. They had appeared as if they had started on this race, but their lack of endurance demonstrated that they really didn't have any faith to begin with. Instead, they shrunk back to destruction. That's the language of chapter 10, verse 39. There were a number of them that had shrunk back to destruction and did not have faith to the preserving of the soul.

And it's a perfect analogy because many of the examples in Hebrews 11 are examples of perseverance to the end. Perseverance. Noah persevered despite the hostility of an unbelieving world around him who mocked him and jeered him and resisted his message. And yet he persevered. Abraham persevered in faith, even though in his lifetime he did not receive all that he was promised. Moses persevered in his faith even at great cost to himself, namely, all the treasures of Egypt and maybe a claim to the throne itself. He gave all of that up for the reproaches that belong to Christ.

So the author's concern here is that unlike the apostates of chapter 6 and chapter 10 and chapter 2 and chapter 12, unlike those apostates who would fall away and suffer shipwreck and ruin of their souls, that we would finish our race. He wants us to endure to the end and to cross the finish line and to receive the reward. The author wants us not just to run but to run well. And he wants us to, having run well, be rewarded well.

So now the issue then is how do I run well? This is why the analogy of the race is perfect here. All the encouragements and instructions of these verses, in 1–3, all of them are geared to equip us to run the race well and to finish well so that we may be rewarded well by it. That's the goal of the Christian life—to run well, to finish well, and to be rewarded well. So how do I run well? Well, there are four things that we must do. Four encouragements or instructions in this passage that we must do in order to run well. All that was an introduction. Now, I want your eyes to glance down through verses 1–3. I want to show you our outline.

First, we must consider the others who have finished before us. Verse 1: “Since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us.” We have to consider the others who have finished this race before us. Second, we must cast off the entanglements that threaten to hinder us. Also in verse 1: “Let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us.” And then third, we must continue in the course set before us. “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (v. 1). And then fourth, we must concentrate on the one who will reward us. Verses 2–3:

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2 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.

3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (NASB)

We must consider the others who have gone before us, cast off the entanglements that threaten to hinder us, continue in the course that is set for us, and concentrate on the One who will ultimately reward us. That is our outline for verses 1–3.

Let's jump in at the beginning of verse 1 and see how far we get. Just to be clear, I know how far we're going to get, but you are all going to find out together how far we're going to get this morning. In verse 1, the word *therefore* connects this back to the argument that the author has been making, as I demonstrated last week, from the middle of chapter 10 all the way through chapter 11, those examples of faith. He's drawing a conclusion, he's drawing a lesson from all of these examples. And he is saying, given that all of these things are true, therefore this conclusion, this analogy, this command, and all that is contained in these first three verses is the natural application, the life lesson, the exhortation that flows out of all that he has said regarding faith up to this point. But how is this analogy connected to faith? It might not appear on the surface how it is connected to faith, but it is certainly connected to everything he has been saying about faith. That's why he says "therefore." These verses, verses 1–3, are often treated as if they're sort of a standalone idea, just another thing that sort of pops into the author's mind. But that's not it. He's rolling into a conclusion here. He wants us to learn the lesson from all of these examples of persevering faith in chapter 11. "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us," we are to run in light of those who have gone before us (Heb. 12:1).

How is the analogy connected to faith? It's very simply this: Faith perseveres. Faith endures. Faith calls you to this race. It calls me to this race. Faith is what has put us into this race. Faith is not deterred by time or by trials. Faith is not distracted by triumphs or by tribulations. Faith demands that we run this race and faith enables us to run it well and faith enables us to finish it well. All of that is the act of faith. The author is not asking us to abandon everything we know about faith and now focus on running a race. Oh, no. The race is to be run in this way. It is connected to faith. Faith is what puts us in the race. Faith is what gives us the strength to run the race. Faith is what gives us the ability to finish the race. And by faith, we will receive the reward for the race. It's all

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connected. This is the race of faith that we're talking about. So if you are in Jesus Christ, the question is not are you running but how are you running? The question is not, Are you in the race? You are in the race. The question is, Are you standing in the race or sitting in the middle of the course while everybody else runs by you? Have you wandered off to the curb and sat down? Or are you just sort of walking and meandering around? Or are you running with diligence, your eyes fixed on the prize? The question is not, Are you there? The question is, What are you doing while you're there?

So how are we going to run well? We're going to run well by considering those who have gone before us, what the author calls the great cloud of witnesses that surround us. The great cloud of witnesses. Who are these witnesses? By the way, his reference to a great cloud, this group of people that surround us, is an evidence that the author does not have in mind a race that we run all by ourselves, sort of out through the countryside, with nobody else around, nobody to watch us, nobody to cheer us on, nobody to be there for us, nobody to pick us up if we stumble and fall. That's not the imagery that the author has. Instead, we run a race that is surrounded by a very great cloud of witnesses. And so the imagery is as if we are running in a coliseum or an amphitheater of sorts and we have this large cloud of witnesses that surround us.

So who are the witnesses? It's the list of people that we spent thirty-seven long, miserable weeks looking at in Hebrews 11, all of those heroes of faith. Those are the witnesses, those men and so much more. The word *cloud* here is a word that describes a mass of clouds or a pile of clouds. The imagery is that of a large collection of clouds, like—I don't know if you could have this, but clouds piled upon clouds. And there is this large number of these piles of large crowds of witnesses that surround us. So the idea here is the multitude, this vast multitude of people who are witnessing to us as to the importance of faith. So we're not surrounded by a mist of witnesses or a fog of witnesses but piles upon piles upon clouds upon clouds, and a large one at that, of witnesses.

The word *witnesses* here refers to those who are witnesses or those who testify. In fact, this word is similar to one and is the same one actually that we have looked at that brackets the list of people in Hebrews 11. You remember at the beginning of Hebrews 11, the author says, "For by it the men of old gained approval." It was the word for "they gained the witness" or "they received the testimony." Hebrews 11:39: "And all these, having gained approval through their faith. . ." Having received the testimony through their faith. This is the same word for testimony or approval. It is the witness or

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the testimony. Now in those two references, at the beginning of Hebrews 11, at the end of Hebrews 11, the idea is these people have received a testimony or received a witness from somebody else. Namely, it is God Himself who has testified concerning those with faith that they please Him and that He will reward them. That's the testimony that God gives. But now those of whom God Himself has testified concerning their faith, now they're bearing testimony, and their testimony is to us. They bear testimony to us of God's faithfulness and of the superiority and the supremacy and the greatness of faith. So they're now witnessing to us. God having witnessed of their faith, they are now witnessing to us as to the need of faith. And so they are the witnesses.

In the stands, as it were, sits Abel and Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, that whole list. They're there in the stands. These are men and women of whom the world is not worthy. Remember that? And since their time, more have joined them. Spurgeon and Whitfield and Edwards and Owen and Luther and Calvin and Wycliffe and Tyndale and Huss. They've joined them in the stands. Those are men of whom the world is not worthy. And most recently, our friend Bruce Morock has gone past the finish line, has stepped up into the stands. He is a man of whom the world is not worthy. And so that's our witnesses. They're the ones that surround us. It's actually the word for martyr, the word that is here for witness or testifier. It's one who—ultimately that word, *martyr*, came to be used of those who would give ultimate testimony by shedding their own blood to bear witness to the veracity of what they were testifying to. So we are surrounded, as it were, by a great tremendous cloud of witnesses. Not all of them have shed their blood for the faith, but all of them can testify to the supremacy of faith and the need for faith. They are the witnesses.

Now, what is the nature of the witness that they testify of or that they bear? There are two ways to use the word *witness*, by the way, and we recognize this even in our English word *testify*, right? You can be a witness and be a noun; you are the witness. And you can bear witness, which is the verb. It's an activity that you do. So a witness could refer to one who observes, and a witness could refer to one who testifies. And they don't necessarily have to be tied together, but sometimes they can be. You want the person who testifies in a court of law to actually be a witness to what it is that he's testifying to. And that is the sense here of this word. They are witnessing something and observing it, but they're also testifying to it. Both of those ideas are tied into this word for witness, this great cloud of witnesses.

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Now, at this point, we have to address what I think is an abuse of the metaphor so that we don't take the metaphor too far, beyond what is intended. There are some who see the phrase, "the great cloud of witnesses," and they say this describes those who have gone before, who have now gone into Heaven, and now they sit in a heavenly coliseum, as it were, and they are observing us, watching us, fixated on us and how well it is that we run our race. They would see that this crowd of witnesses is watching us as we run the race, so that Bruce, for instance, might be sitting in Heaven, and now he's kind of interested in how things are going to turn out for me. So from his chair in the cheap seats up at the very top of the stadium, he's looking down on me, and he sees me mess up and he's disappointed, a little surprised for sure but certainly disappointed, hoping that I do better next time. And that all the saints who have gone before are now observing the race on earth. They're getting the press releases, they're watching the video feed, they're monitoring, as it were, all the saints who remain here to see how it is that things are going to turn out for us. I think that that's an abuse of the metaphor. I don't think that that's what the author intends. That is one of the meaningful witnesses, that is to observe, but that's not the sense in which the author is using the term here. Just as spectators would fill the stands, they would say, to observe in a stadium, so those who have gone before sit in Heaven to watch us run our race so that your life becomes something of a heavenly *Truman Show* where everybody stands around watching it unfold and then comments on the mistakes that you made and the things that you did that day. I think that that's an abuse of the metaphor.

Homer Kent says this in his commentary:

To draw from this notion that the dead are presently viewing the activity of believers on earth is not supported by other Scripture, and it is to press the illustration in 12:1 beyond its necessary limits. [Listen] The point of the statement is that the experience of these Old Testament saints testifies to us of the importance of persistent faith.

The point of the statement is that the experience of these Old Testament saints testifies to us as to the importance of persistent faith. So while we run, they surround us, as it were, that by their testimony, by their example, by their legacy, by their name, by the story of their life, by what that demonstrates concerning the God whom they serve and in whom they believed—it is their example that surrounds us. So it is not that they are looking at us. In fact, it's quite the opposite. *We* are to be looking to *them*. And that's the point of the analogy. Now, this is where the analogy might break down and be

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different than what might take place in the Olympic Games or in a normal amphitheater where those who are gathered in the stands sit around and cheer and they observe what's going on because they're entertained by it or they have a vested interest in it in some way. But here it's the opposite. It's not that they are watching us, but their testimony is cheering at us. Their testimony is shouting down to us. And so we are the ones who are supposed to look up and to receive the encouragement, the guidance, the instruction, and the lessons from their testimony because we are surrounded by this massive cloud of witnesses, this massive cloud of martyrs whose testimony and faith all shouts to us as to how this race is to be run and what we are running for.

So they have observed God's approval by faith. They have seen God make them strong in weakness. They have seen God carry them through adversities, trials, temptations, difficulties, and disappointments. They have observed all of those and experienced all of those things, and now they're not preoccupied with what's going on with us. We are to be in some sense focused upon what they did and how things worked out for them. Bruce is not sitting in Heaven wondering how things are going to work out for me. Frankly, I don't even think he's interested in how things work out for me. I think he has other things that interest him at this moment. But his testimony shouts to us. And so does Luther, Calvin, Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Paul, Peter, John. Their testimony shouts at us, and there is encouragement in their testimony.

Those in the stands in the Olympic Games or in the amphitheater watching a contest, they would be cheering on those that they were cheering for. You can imagine the crowds; you're familiar with this. We have the phrase "home field advantage," right, where all the people in the stands are wearing your color uniform and they're cheering for you. And you're down on the field playing this and you say this is the home field advantage. Everybody here that is surrounding me wants us to win, wants us to pass the race, wants us to cross the finish line. They want us to do well. They want us to finish well. They want us to receive the reward. And that's the analogy here. Friends, the race that we run, we have home field advantage because we know where that finish line is at. We don't know when it's at, but we know where it's at, and we know that we're going to cross it. We know that we're going to be brought safely across it. So therefore, let us run well. Let us run well so we can finish well, and having finished well, we'll be rewarded well. That's the point. And it's not that the departed saints are literally cheering us on from Heaven, but, in a sense, being dead, they still speak. Remember that's the phrase that the author used earlier in Hebrews 11. Being dead, these men still speak. Their examples are cheering us on.

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Let me give you sort of a sports analogy that is more modern day, more contemporary, one that you'd kind of be familiar with, how something can speak without actually being present there. You walk out onto a football field today, you'll notice up around the football field that they have what's called the ring of honor, right? They have the names and the numbers of players who have gone before, some of whom are living, many of whom are dead. And that ring of honor sits up there to honor those people and their dedication and their devotion. So, for instance, if you go out to Lambeau Field and Green Bay and you look up there, you'll see Brett Favre and Bart Starr and Reggie White. You'll see their names and their numbers up there. If you go down to Levi's Stadium in San Francisco—or Santa Clara, you'll see Joe Montana, Steve Young, and Jerry Rice. And what more shall I say? For time will fail me to tell of Dwight Clark and Tom Rathman and Roger Craig. And the list just goes on and on. And the same is true if you go to CenturyLink Field and you walk out on the field where the Seahawks play. You can look up and see all the space reserved for the good players whose names they're going to someday put up around the ring of honor in that stadium. And by faith, they built that entire stadium and left all that space available. But when the players step out onto the field and they look up and they see that ring of honor, they see these men, some of whom are dead, but they still speak. This is what diligence gets you. This is what discipline gets you. This is what hard work gets you. In the case of the Patriots, this is what cheating gets you. But for the most—for the rest of them, they have a good testimony that they bear. Those men being dead, being gone, being retired, they still speak. And so it is that the example of those who have gone before us surrounds us. These are the martyrs. These are the witnesses. And being dead, they still speak. In fact, they cheer us on and they shout down to us, “Run, run well, finish well, and be rewarded well.” That's what their message says.

And there is encouragement in that, such a great cloud of witnesses. There is a witness in that cloud in that stadium, there is a witness for every trial, every difficulty, every temptation, every affliction, every bit of suffering, every bit of heartbreak, every bit of whatever it is that you're going through, there's a witness there who can testify as to the supremacy of faith. So for instance, if you are tempted to serve God in your own way, ignoring His instructions, you look to Abel and say, OK, here Abel is an example of one who by faith did what did not seem reasonable or common sense to him. And yet by faith, he obeyed God, and God accepted him, and God accepted his sacrifice. He was obedient. If you are tempted to lose heart in a wicked world that is full of hostile sinners, then you look to Noah, who for 120 years kept building an ark. That make sense

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to him or to anyone around him? And yet, after over a century of obedience, the Lord saved him and his family, fulfilled His word to Noah. If you are tempted to feel as if the promises of God are slow in coming to you, then you look to Abraham. Here was a man who lived as a nomad in his own land, the land he was promised. It was his by covenant, it was his by promise, and yet he never possessed it. And he lived in that his entire life, raised his children there his entire life—or what remained of it after he had children—and then he died. Here's a man who lived in a land and never saw the land actually given to him and his descendants. He never saw anything other than a couple of generations. He certainly never saw the multitude of descendants that was promised to him, and yet he persevered in it.

Are you tempted to think that the world with all its treasures is alluring enough for you to depart and walk away from Christ? Well, then you look to Moses and you realize that all the treasures of Egypt do not compare to the glory of the reproach of Christ, and that what you receive in His kingdom is greater than all the kingdoms of the world put together. If you're tempted to doubt if God will grant you great triumphs through your faith, then you look to Barack and Samson and Gideon and David, who obtained the promises and shut the mouths of lions and conquered armies and from weakness were made strong. And if you're tempted to wonder if God shall sustain you through your trials, then you look to those who experienced the mockings and the scourgings, the chains and the imprisonment, who were put to death by the sword and went about destitute, men and women of whom the world is not worthy. And you look to their example and say, “Yes, I serve a God and I believe in a God who will sustain me through everything, who will strengthen me for every good work that He has promised to accomplish in me and through me and around me. And He will give me the grace to run my race well, to finish my race well, and then to stand on the other side of it and to receive the reward and be rewarded well.”

You see, this analogy reminds us that you are not the first to run the race, you are not the last to run the race, and you are not alone as you run the race. And see, while we run our race, we're not running against the other saints. I'm not competing with you. I'm not competing with you. We need to keep that in mind. The purpose of me running my race is not so that I can conjure up more spiritual rewards than somebody else or so I can look better or do better or do more or be more. That's not the point of running the race. See, you are not my competitor in the race, you are my compatriot in the race. So we're all running the race together. In fact, in this race, in this amphitheater where we're surrounded by these witnesses, there's no other team. We're the only team there.

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That's good, right? The other team hasn't even showed up. We can't help but win. When the other team doesn't show up, you're guaranteed to win. There's no other team in this amphitheater. So we just have to run our race, and we have to run it together with each other, looking to the reward and trusting that God will reward us.

You and I are the players on the field. The stadium around our contest is filled with the lives of men and women of whom this world is not worthy, and they testify to the same truth, that by faith they have received a great reward. By faith we are approved by God, by faith we serve, by faith we live, by faith we obey, by faith we run, by faith we testify, and by faith we finish our race. Learn that lesson, receive that testimony, hear it, believe it, trust it, embrace it, and live by it. For the day will come when you and I will leave this battlefield. We'll cross the finish line and we will step up into the stands and take our place, and by the grace of God, our lives and our faith and our testimony and our legacy will remind the others who are here that there is a great reward when you run well and you finish well.

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