

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

Our time today is shortened because we have a potluck which is to follow our worship service today, and so without any ado whatsoever, we will jump right in with both feet to our passage. Since this is part three of a four-part series, the fourth part of which might take two weeks, so don't try and do all the math on that as to how many parts this will be—but we're working our way through this analogy in chapter 12, verses 1–3 as we consider how the author likens the walk of faith, the life of faith, to a footrace. A footrace is something that all of the audience to which he wrote would have been familiar. They were familiar with the contests and the games. And so he is likening our path in this world and the race that God has called us to run to the footrace of an ancient athlete. And we have considered this and we've looked at this twice, the two recent weeks. Let me try that sentence again. We have spent two weeks looking at the analogy so far. That's better. We spent two weeks looking at the analogy thus far and we've noticed how he is encouraging us to run and to run our race well. And if we're going to run our race and to run it well, then four things are necessary.

First, we must consider others who have finished the race before us. That was the first part of chapter 12, verse 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.” Countless men and women have gone on before us and they have run their race and they have finished their race and they have finished it well. And their example testifies to us of the need for faith and the reward that faith brings to those who finish their course. So through the triumphs and the trials and through the sufferings and through the sacrifices and through all of the successes of life, faith has held strong and faith has endured alongside those who have run their race and allowed those who have run their race to finish their race and complete it all the way to the end.

The second thing we must do is cast off all of the entanglements that threaten to hinder us, all the extra weight, all of the masses, all of the things that slow us down, that bog us down in a race. We are to examine ourselves and look at our own lives and see what is it that slows me down, what is it that keeps me from running my race effectively and doing it well. And then we are to cast those things off. We are to be light of foot as we set aside all of the entanglements and the hindrances that slow us down in our course. The sin that besets us, we must continually mortify it and set it aside and throw it off so that we can run lightly and run with ease, and that is a lifelong and continual work that we are to do if we are to finish well.

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Now, third, we must continue the course that is set for us. This is the end of verse 1. He says that we are to “lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and [here's the phrase] let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

The fourth one is that we are to concentrate on the One who will reward us. That's verse 2 and 3. Let's just finish that up so we have the entire context. Verse 2:

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. (Heb. 12:2–3 NASB)

The author does not want us to grow weary in our race and to lose heart, so he tells us in verse 2, or sorry, at the end of verse 1, that we are to run with endurance the race that is set before us. That is our phrase that we are considering this morning, and that is the central command of the whole passage. It's the main idea of the passage, the central verb, the central idea. You are to run your race and to run it with endurance, to run the course that is laid out for you. And just the notion of running, the idea of running, that phrase, can communicate something of the exertion that is necessary in running the race and running it well. All of the other phrases in verses 1 and 2 are all intended to explain to us what it means to run and to run well, to finish the course, what it is that we are to look forward to, but the central idea is that we are to run.

That word *run* means to rush at something or to move quickly. It's used in Scripture in the New Testament of literal running, like when John outran Peter on the way to the tomb. That's the word that is used there. It describes the exertion that you put forward in moving quickly. But most often in the New Testament the word is used to describe running in a metaphorical sense, and we looked a couple of weeks ago at all the various times in the New Testament where this idea of running comes up. A notable example is 1 Corinthians 9:24 where Paul says, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? [And here's the command] Run in such a way that you may win.” So the Christian walk, the walk of faith, is likened to a footrace, and we are encouraged not to enter the race and meander around, not to tour, not to simply walk about aimlessly, but when we enter the Christian race, we are encouraged to run the race and to run well. As if we are in competition with other people, we want to run in such a way that we may win. We want to come in first place.

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Now, in reality, we're not running against one another, as if the goal of our Christian life is to outdo the people who sit around us on a Sunday morning. That's not the goal of it. But we are to focus and run in such a way as if we were running against each other, as if it is a genuine competition because we want to not just run and to run well and to finish well, but we want to run in such a way as that we would achieve that prize if we were running against everybody else. If it were a competition, we should run in such a way that we would win the race. And if everybody runs in such a way as to win the race, then there really are no losers. Even though we're not competing against one another, then we would all finish and we would all finish well. So you don't step into a race to sit down or to walk or to relax on the curb. You don't step into a race to wander around. You don't step into a race if you're a coach or a spectator. You step into a race if you are a runner. And if you are going to step into the race, then you want to run, and you want to run well.

And even—not just the running communicates something of the exertion that is necessary, but the word that is translated “race” itself communicates something of the exertion that is necessary. It is the Greek word *agone*, from *agon*. We get our word *agony* from that word. It describes a conflict, an effort, a contention, a fight, an agony, a race, a struggle, or a constant struggle. You and I are to run—that's exertion—our struggle, our conflict, and our fight. If anybody sold the Christian life to you on the understanding that it was going to be easy, that it was going to be your best life now, that it was going to be everything you've ever dreamed of and wanted in this world and a whole lot more that is in the world to come, then you were sold a false, a fake, bill of goods. Because the Christian life is not easy. The Christian life is not simple.

When I do evangelism training out at Cocolalla Lake Bible Camp every year, I encourage the kids that when you're communicating the gospel to those who come to camp, you don't tell them that if you trust Jesus as your savior, everything will be better when you get home because that might be a lie. It might be the case that those kids are going back into homes and environments that are filled with unbelievers, where they're going to be persecuted and hated for their faith, where they may end up having to sacrifice everything they hold dear just to be faithful to Christ.

So if you were sold the notion that your Christian life would be easy, it would be simple, that it would not require any effort, then you were lied to. I'm sorry you were lied to, but that's what you get for listening to a prosperity preacher or to Joel Osteen. You listen to liars, you should expect to be lied to. We're to run—exertion—the agony that is

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set before you. That's the honesty with which Scripture describes the Christian walk. It is an agony, a conflict. This is a call to labor, to industry, to effort, and to hard work in the Christian life.

Now let's be clear about something. We're not talking about labor, effort, industry, and hard work to *be* a Christian. That's not what we're talking about. We're not talking about laboring in order to merit God's goodness or grace or the eternal life to which we are called. We're not talking about laboring for our salvation. We're talking about laboring once we have been called into the race of faith. The faith comes first, the laboring comes next. So we're not laboring to have faith. We're not working to gain God's merit or God's favor or God's grace. Not at all. Instead, having received by faith God's grace, you and I are to work and to labor and to run the agony that He has set before us.

So the Christian life, then, is a fight of faith in this world. We wrestle against flesh and blood. We resist temptation. We fight the desires of the flesh. We crucify the old man. We put to death the sinful deeds of the body. We resist the allurements and the siren song of the world and the world system. We keep ourselves unstained by the world. We refuse to bow to idols. We refuse to go downstream with everybody else, to capitulate and to compromise with the spirit of the age. In fact, all of us as Christians are commanded and expected to swim upstream against the entire flow of the world. That requires effort.

Paul invited Timothy—*invitation* is the wrong word. Paul commanded Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:12, “Fight the good fight of faith [that's the language; fight the good fight of faith]; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” In all honesty, the apostle Paul said to the Philippian church, “You are to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that it is God who is at work in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” So this is the balance of Christian living. We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, laboring, resisting, fighting, knowing that it is God who is actually at work in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure. So there are two elements at play here: our work and God's working in us. Now, as you work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, as you run your agony that He has set before you, who gets tired in that task, you or God? You get tired; you get exhausted. But we do this knowing that God is at work in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Therefore, we fight the good fight of faith so we can say, hopefully, with the apostle Paul at the end of our lives, as he did in 2 Timothy 4, “I have fought the good

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fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith” (v. 7). See, that's the goal. There's the apostle Paul saying, “I've run my race, I've struggled in my agony, I have reached the end, and now I have crossed the finish line.”

So many of us have all of the energy that is necessary, all of the time that is necessary, to gladly spend it in our occupations, in our businesses, outside of our spiritual lives, for employers and for reward that will perish in this life, but then when we get home and it comes to fighting the fight with our family and for our family and our wife and our children and our church and the spiritual battle that is in front of us, we just don't have any energy for that nor desire for that. And the opposite should be the case to make sure that we are spending our efforts and our energy and our time making sure that we are faithful to do what God has called us to do, and then we give to everything else outside of that, whatever effort, whatever energy, whatever time we have left.

This is the struggle, this is the conflict that we are called to. And we would despair if we thought for a moment that we would do this without any reward, but you and I, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, you and I can work and toil knowing that our toil is not in vain in the Lord, because we look forward to the hope of the resurrection that is to come. That statement—“Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord” (v. 58)—that comes at the end of an entire chapter, fifty-seven other verses on the subject of the resurrection, the bodily resurrection, and the resurrection that is to come. So because there is a reward ahead of us, you and I can work and labor and toil with the expectation, with the anticipation, that in that reward, everything that we have struggled, all of our agony, all of our agonizing, all of our fight, all of our resisting of temptation, all of our battling of the flesh and putting to death the deeds of the flesh, all of it, every last bit of effort, will be amply rewarded. Why? Because there's a resurrection to come, that's why.

So run the race. This will take exertion and it will take endurance. Notice that the author says we are to run with endurance the race that is set before us. Why does it require endurance? Because it's an agony. It's a conflict. You're not called to capitulate to the flesh; you're called to fight the flesh. You're not called to give in to your basest desires but to resist your basest desires in the power of the Holy Spirit. You're not called to submit your members as instruments of sin, which comes quite naturally, but rather as instruments to do righteousness, which is not at all natural to us in our flesh. And all of that effort and all of that agony, we must do that with endurance. The Christian life is not a forty-yard dash. It's not a hundred-yard dash. It's not even a quarter-mile run. The

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Christian life is a marathon. So when we set our sights on the finish line, we understand the finish line is not just up there a little ways. It doesn't take endurance to run a forty-yard dash, at least not for most of us. Maybe some of us would need a little endurance to run forty yards or a hundred-yard dash. But it does take endurance to run a marathon. And the Christian life is a marathon. We're called to run and to run, and it's going to be difficult. We have to endure those things because they are not easy.

You and I don't endure things that are easy. We don't endure things that are delightful. We don't endure things that are pleasant. We only endure things that are difficult. And it is in the difficulties of life where endurance is necessary. This is why the author says in Hebrews 10:36, "You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised." See the reward? You endure because there is a reward that is to come. So you have need of endurance so that when you have done the will of God, you may finally receive what was promised. You cross the finish line, get to the end, and get everything that He has promised to you. You receive the reward when you endure in faith. And so we have all of those examples in Scripture (Hebrews 11) of those who endured in faith and thus received the reward.

That's encouraging to a group of people who had endured a great conflict of sufferings, chapter 10 says. They had been imprisoned for their faith. They had suffered the seizure of their property. They had endured reproaches and tribulations. They had endured all of those things. But the author says you still have need of even more endurance because, having suffered through all of those sacrifices for your faith in the midst of a hostile world, you're going to have to have even more endurance to cross the finish line. We endure the agony of the faith. We endure the agony of the race. We have to endure these things because they're not pleasant.

And listen, all along the way, the world, the flesh, and the devil will offer us exits off the race. They will present to us little soft spaces along the curb, right along the way, and they will sing to you, "If you just sit down, you can rest and you can relax. This will be so much more pleasant than finishing the course." And that's true. It will be so much more pleasant than finishing the course. But in the long run, there is nothing more joyful and nothing more pleasant than finishing the course. In the short run, all of the temptations to take the exit offer us an alleviation from the need for endurance. But as long as we are in this world, we have need of endurance.

This is the example of faith that we observed in chapter 11. Noah waiting 120 years while he built the ark in faithfulness, obeying God in his generation. Abraham waiting

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twenty-five years for the promised son. Abraham waiting and living in tents his whole life in the promised land. Even though he had been promised the land, living as a stranger and an alien in that land, in tents, in temporary shelters, waiting and even dying in the land without receiving the promise. And today you and I wait for all kinds of promises that the Lord has given to us. With great expectation we wait for His return, for the establishment of His kingdom, for the final judgment, the vindication of His righteousness, our resurrected bodies and our eternal reward, and the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness dwells. Those are the things that we have been promised that we are still anticipating and still waiting for. And listen, most of us will die before we see any of those things. There'll be a small generation at the end of time that will live through and see the return of the Lord. I hope it's in my lifetime. But we ought to be prepared to live and agonize in this world for our entire lives and never see the fulfillment of that promise and yet die in faith and cross that finish line knowing that we have run our race with endurance. So, just like the saints of old, we look forward to unkept promises to this point, but promises that will most certainly be kept by the end.

And we are to run with endurance (notice this last phrase) the race marked out for us, the race set before us. That word *set before* means to lay out openly and to expose something. If you take something out in public view, you set it out in front of everybody so everybody can see it, that's the idea. There is a race that has been marked out in front of all of us. It is a race marked out clearly in the Word of God. It is a race that has been run by others who have come before, so we know what the course entails. We know what the expectations are. It's been clearly described for us, clearly laid out for us. So there's nothing hidden from our sight in terms of the difficulty of this course. It's laid out in front of all of us, marked out openly. So we run this race in front of everybody. There's something even in the language here of "the race that is set before us" that harkens us back to that phrase that we run in front of a great cloud of witnesses, as if all of the witnesses are in the stands watching us run our race. That's the analogy. And they, from their vantage point, can see the course that is laid out for us. And we, from our vantage point, because we have the revelation of Scripture, we can see the course that is laid out for us.

No runner sets their own course. You're aware of that, right? No runner ever steps up to the starting line and says, "I know I'm supposed to go around this circle thirty times, but instead I want to go off and take a deviation. I want to go by the snack shack. I want to go out through the parking lot. There's a watering hole down the way. I'm going to stop for lunch over here, and I'll come back around into the stadium, and then I'll finish the

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course.” No runner does that. No runner ever gets to determine their own course. Our modern mentality says that all courses end up at the same place and as long as you're running with your best intentions, as long as you're following and living your own truth, as long as you're following your heart and going after whatever desires—you have to choose your own course, and you have to run that faithfully. That's hogwash. There is a race that has already been set out for us that we are called to run. The path is laid out for us, marked out with clarity. Scripture marks it out for us. It's laid out in the Word of God, the path of obedience to what God commands us. The Christian life and the truth are revealed in Scripture. Our job is not to determine what course we are to run but just to run it faithfully. I'm thankful for that. That way I don't have to wonder if the course that we're called—the course that I'm running—I never have to wonder if that's what's going to please the Lord or not. He's already marked out for me the path of obedience, and now I just have to obey.

So we deny the lust of the flesh. We turn from our love of the world. We mortify our sin, casting our sinful desires off, taking up the works of righteousness, yielding our members in obedience to Him, living for others, denying ourselves, fulfilling our duty, taking up our cross, walking in obedience to the truth, embracing the reproach of the cross. And just as we have received Christ Jesus, so we are to walk in Him in a manner worthy of the calling with which we are called, being renewed in our minds and presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice. Now, that's simple, right? It's all laid out for us. Already in Scripture we're given the course that we are to run. We don't have to invent it. We don't have to discover it in terms of it being some mysterious and hidden will of God that is not revealed to everybody. He has marked out the parameters of that course, and it's the same for all of us. And the Word of God is our guide. The steps are laid out. We know what obligations we are to fulfill. We know what responsibilities we are to take up. We know what affections we should have. We know what acts we are to do in obedience to Him. We know what desires of our heart are pleasing in His sight. We know all of that. He has not hidden any of it from us. The commands are there. The warnings are there. The examples are there, positive and negative. He's given wisdom to us in the book of Proverbs. He's told us how we are to worship in the book of Psalms. He's given us His law so we might morally know His will. He's given us the Epistles so that we might know how we are to live with one another. He's given us promises of the future so that we know what we're running toward and what we should expect. All of it's laid out in Scripture. This is the race set before us.

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Now there is a sense in which you have need of endurance because there are parts of that race that you don't know about. You don't know what tomorrow brings, do you? I had no way of knowing that when I went bowling yesterday, I would be struggling to walk today. No way of knowing that. Things hidden from my sight. Difficulties even in my life, losses, sorrows, and joys, all of which I will experience, that are common to all men. So the individual aspect of what lies before me, I don't know. But the general strokes of the pen, as it were, I do know because other people have gone before me.

And who is it that sets out each and every difficulty of my race? Who is it that has appointed my affliction today? It's my God who has appointed this, right? You say, Jim, it's just a sore muscle. It's true, it is just a sore muscle. But listen, if I get into a car accident this afternoon and I lose my ability to walk entirely, it is just as much appointed for me by the loving hand of my God as a sore muscle is. Every last difficult trial, every last difficulty, every last affliction, every last suffering is appointed for us by the hands of a loving and all-wise, all-kind, and all-benevolent God who has marked out the course for us. He sets us on this journey. And listen, every last difficulty is appointed for us not to trip us up and to cause us to fall, not to do us harm, not to hurt us, not to stop us, but to strengthen us, to encourage us, and to fit us for the world that is to come. So He has laid it all out for us. The difficulties are chosen not for our harm but for our good.

And if we did not know the all-wise and all-loving and all-gracious character of our sovereign and providential God, you and I would have reason to despair of the hope—of any hope—in this world or the next. But because we know who our God is, we know that whatever it is that is on the course set before us, whatever individual difficulty He has set in our way by His own divine appointment, it is for our good and it's for His glory, and it's for the good of everybody around us. That is how our God works. And if we did not know that, we would despair.

Nothing about our race is hidden from us. He's given us a full description of what we should expect. Let me give you a few passages that describe it for you. "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27). You realize the cross is an instrument of death, which is why in Luke 9, Jesus said,

23 If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

24 For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.

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25 For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? (Luke 9:23–25 NASB)

Those are the terms that we agree to. Those are gracious terms, by the way, for He's worth all of that and so much more.

Acts 14:22: "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Now, that's honest, isn't it? Yeah. Not through many easy ways, not through comfort, not by lounging in a hammock, spiritually speaking, do we enter the kingdom of God. But through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

Second Corinthians 4:17: "Momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."

Romans 8:18: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

First Peter 4:

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;

13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;

16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name." (1 Pet. 4:12–16 NASB)

Second Timothy 3:12: "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

See, the Lord has been very honest with us about what this entails. He's hidden nothing from us. It's only folly and foolishness that we enter into the Christian life and think, "I didn't realize it was going to be this hard. I didn't realize it was going to cost me this. I didn't think I was going to be reproached and hated and persecuted by the world." Can

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you not read? Who sold you this in the beginning? These were the terms. The end-user agreement. When you clicked “yes” in your salvation, you agreed to all of those terms. Maybe you should have read them more closely before you agreed to them if you're going to object to them but those are the terms. Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

This is why you have to run your race with endurance. This is why we all have need of endurance. It's not easy, and the path is difficult. I'm going to close with a quote from Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon said this:

How can we poor limping mortals run in such a race as this? Even the starting is beyond us: how much more must perseverance in it outreach our strength! See, my brethren, how we are driven to free grace, how we are driven to the power of the Holy Spirit! The race which is set before us most clearly reveals our helplessness, and our hopelessness, apart from divine grace. The race of holiness and patience, while it demands our vigour, displays our weakness. We are compelled, even before we take a step in the running, to bow the knee, and cry unto the strong for strength. We dare not retreat from the contest; but how can we begin a struggle for which we are so unfitted? Who will help us? To whom shall we look?

That's good. The race of holiness and patience, while it demands our vigor, displays our weakness, displays our need.

So here's what we're called to do. We're called to run with endurance the race that is set before us, casting off every weight and the hindrance which so easily entangles us, while we look to those who have already finished the course before us so that we may cross the finish line, do so with joy, do so in faithfulness, get to the end of our race, having pleased Him, step into the eternal kingdom and hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” That's the goal.

Is there anybody here that is fit to do that? I certainly am not. You certainly aren't. But who is? You see, I suspect that we need to look to One who has already run His race in perfect obedience to the Father and crossed the finish line, who for the joy set before Him ran a race that you and I could never run, endured a conflict that you and I could never endure, and crossed the finish line that you and I could never faithfully cross. What we really need is One who has run the race for us in our stead and done it perfectly so that when we step into His eternal kingdom, it is not our own merit or our

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own effort or our own ability to run that race that is praised and rewarded, but rather we are praised and rewarded based upon the work and the merit and the race of somebody else who did it in our place. And that's Jesus Christ.

If you do not know Jesus Christ, you have no hope of running the race or finishing faithfully or ever hearing “Well done, good and faithful servant,” for you do not belong to Him. But His righteous life is sufficient to give us all the righteousness that you need to stand in the presence of God. And His death on the cross was sufficient to pay the price for your sin so that you may have eternal life. All of your sin, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, was laid upon Him. Every stumbling in your race, every failure, every sin is already atoned for, laid upon Him, and dealt with at the cross. And therefore, we are freed up to run that race, and we are enabled to run that race, not because of our own strength, but because of the strength of the One who ran His race and finished it perfectly.

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“Running with Endurance, Part 3 (Hebrews 12:1–3)” by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

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