

Run The Race!

What fourfold plan do people of great faith use to overcome sin and lead triumphant lives in Christ?

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What characterized men and women of great faith? How did they devote themselves single-mindedly to the glory of God and His great plan of redemption? They knew God, believed Him, and trusted His precious promises.

These men and women did not abandon the race God set before them. They possessed a deep and abiding commitment to run the race with patience. Counting it all joy when they suffered, they knew that trials produced the patience to keep running and so to overcome the challenges of their particular time in redemptive history.

[Hebrews 11](#) introduces some great saints who were strong in faith at their times in redemptive history. It is as if we were ushered into a long corridor with each side covered with portraits of great men and women of God. Near the end of the corridor the walls are blank, and there is an exhortation to the saints today:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith . . .” ([Hebrews 12:1-2](#)).

There is a fourfold plan in this exhortation. Following this plan can build us into people of great faith. We, like others before us, can live at the cutting edge of the Church's growth and development.

LAYING ASIDE EVERY WEIGHT

The first part of the fourfold plan is laying aside everything that hinders. The *King James Version* translates this as laying aside every **"weight."** The Greek word for **"weight"** refers to bulk, mass, superfluous flesh. It conveys the idea of preparing for a race by reducing encumbering flesh.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is telling Christian runners to rid themselves even of innocent things that might retard them. All that does not help hinders.

When we stand still, innocent things don't feel burdensome. But when we try to run, we learn what encumbrances are. We begin to feel entangled and weighted down. That is why the author encourages us to run. It's the best way to discover what hinders us. When we're taking life easy, we can be covered with burdens and hardly know it. But when we accept Christ's challenge to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him with

determination to live holy lives and to draw others to Him, we begin to recognize the trappings of our comfortable lives as burdens.

Every believer needs to decide what his own weights are. And we must not judge one another on these. What is a weight to one will not necessarily be a weight to another.

One thing we often struggle with is maintaining our focus on spiritual things. **“Set your minds on things above,” Paul wrote, “not on earthly things” (Col. 3:2).** It is all too easy to depend on riches instead of on God. That is why the writer to the Hebrews warns us, **“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5).**

If you are willing to consult the Holy Spirit and forsake your encumbrances, He will point out your weights. God is looking for men and women of great faith who will lay aside every weight.

In *The Way Into the Holiest*, F.B. Meyer says, *“Thousands of Christians are like waterlogged vessels, they cannot sink; yet they are saturated with so many inconsistencies, worldlinesses and little permitted evils that they can only be towed with difficulty into the celestial port.”* But athletes gladly forego things they find pleasant, and things that others value, because their minds are intent on the prize. Like athletes, we must lay aside every weight to pursue the prize.

LAYING ASIDE SIN

In preparing to pursue lives of faith we must not only lay aside every weight, but also the sin that so easily entangles us. I believe these words must be read with the theme of chapter eleven in mind. That chapter centers on faith and the heroes of the Old Testament era. It follows, in light of the context, that *the sin* which so easily entangles us is *unbelief*, the opposite of the faith highlighted in chapter eleven.

This understanding sheds new light on unbelief. It is no longer a frailty or a personal failing: it is sin.

Satan tempted Eve by asking, in essence, **“You don't really believe God, do you? You don't really believe God's Word, do you?”** Throughout history he has used this tool to paralyze people. We must not yield to the sin of unbelief. We need to believe that God is all that He says He is, and that it is His nature to commit Himself to His Word, and that it is because of His great Name that He chooses to act.

How can we strengthen our faith? Not by sitting comfortably and asking God for it, but by exercising it, just as athletes exercise their bodies. We must accept the challenges of holiness, of disciplined living, of witnessing to others and standing for those things of which God approves in the face of a ridiculing society, and even a ridiculing Church. We must, in short, run the race to which God calls us.

RUN WITH PERSEVERANCE

The third part of living as people of faith is that we must learn to run—to run with patience, with perseverance—the race that God has set before us.

Much leaven is created by an affluent, licentious, morally lax society. We must not stand still and be swayed by the world's shifting standards that try to infiltrate the Church. Leaven works without being seen or heard, and brings about a fundamental change.

The leaven of sexual temptation changed the life of a Christian businessman I was helping grow. He was walking with God and leading many to Christ. But suddenly his life went downhill. He fell into gross sin. We worked through the sin, and then I tried to find out how the downward process began. It began in his thoughts. Then it went to magazines and movies. And then one day a young lady knocked on his door when he was alone. But it all began with leaven working silently and unseen, and one day the leaven brought about a fundamental change.

It takes courage to throw off the weights created by affluence and to run the race as people of faith. It is easy for Christians to be impregnated with the self-seeking thinking of the world. But the high call of Christian commitment demands the courage born of trust in God's providence and constant study of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit says, **“Let's throw off the encumbrances and *run!*”**

And when He invites us to run, He invites us to run with *perseverance*. Impatient runners run out of steam before the end of the race. But patient runners don't get uptight. They rest in the LORD, they wait on God; they keep their eyes on the goal.

As Paul put it, **“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others I myself will not be disqualified for the prize”** ([1 Cor. 9:24–27](#)).

FOCUSING ON JESUS

Perhaps the most important element of living in faith comes last. We are to **“fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.”**

Right focus is essential to a life of faith. **“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God,”** Paul writes. **“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly' things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God”** ([Col. 3:1–3](#)).

What was the key to the greatness of the saints described in [Hebrews 11](#)? Abraham **“. . . was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God”** ([Hebrews 11:10](#)). Those great saints set their hope and their focus on eternity.

They lived in the present in light of an eternal future. They would have said with Paul, **“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal”** ([2 Cor. 4:16–18](#)).

These saints knew what motivated them. They were pilgrims, strangers and sojourners passing through this life, not earth clingers. Motivated by eternity, they believed that God had prepared an eternal city for them.

A Christian of the second century wrote these words of his fellow believers: *“They inhabit their own country, but as sojourners. They take part in all things as citizens, and endure all things as aliens. Every foreign country is theirs and every country is foreign to them.”*

Our home is not here. It is in Heaven. Fixing our eyes on Jesus means living with an eternal perspective.

In contrast, I am amazed at the thoughts that went through my mind when my father died and the time for inheritance rolled around. They were thoughts of greed, and I had to deal ruthlessly with them.

God led me to make some aggressive applications. **“Whom have I in heaven but you? And being with you, I desire nothing on earth”** ([Psalm 73:25](#)). That was the verse God used to change my thinking. It is not my inheritance *here* that I should be concerned with. God has called me to live by faith and set my mind on things above. I want to make sure that I live that way throughout my life.

Men and women of great faith, single-mindedly and submissively committed to the glory of God and to His great plan of redemption, moved the Church forward throughout its history. They knew God, believed God, and took God at His Word. They accepted the challenge. They ran with patience. They rejoiced when they suffered for the faith, knowing that it was the very testing of their faith that produced the patience to run.

If you are going to live as did the saints who have gone before you, you'll need to make some tough decisions. Will you lay aside every weight and forsake the sin of unbelief? Will you run your race with patience? Will you run in such a way as to get the prize? And will you fix your eyes on Jesus, setting your mind on things above instead of on things of this world? If you answer **“Yes!”** *in thought, word, and deed* to each of these challenges, then you will become a man or woman of great faith. You will be prepared to move the Church forward at this crucial time.