

The Great Christian Race

Hebrews 12:1-4

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(Hebrews 12:1-4) Introduction— Christian Race— Perfection: this is one of the most stirring passages in Scripture, a passage that is written for the purpose of stirring us to run and to keep on running in the Christian race of life. What is the Christian race? It can be described in many ways.

1. It is the race for heaven.
2. It is the race for life, for both abundant and eternal life.
3. It is the race to live with God forever.
4. It is the race for perfection, a perfect life and world in which there is no suffering, corruption, evil, or death.
5. It is the race for righteousness and justice—for a perfect world of godliness.
6. It is the race for the *promised land*, the eternal land where we can live forever with God.
7. It is the race to live in the new heavens and earth with God forever and ever.
8. It is the race to know God, to commune and fellowship with God both now and forever.

This is the great Christian race, the great goal toward which believers are running. They believe in God and in His great promise of living with Him forever and ever; they believe in God's glorious promise of a new heavens and earth that shall be perfected eternally. Believers know that if they endure to the end, they shall be escorted into the very presence of God where they shall live with God forever and ever; and from there, they shall await the glorious day of redemption, the day when the heavens and earth shall be remade and perfected forever.

Believers know that God's promise to Old Testament believers—the promise of the *promised land*—shall become a living reality. How do believers know this—know it beyond question? By the *Promised Seed*, even by the Lord Jesus Christ. The *Promised Seed* has come, and He has died for our sins and been raised again for our justification. Therefore, we shall live forever in the *promised land* of God's glorious presence—live forever in heaven and in His love and worship and service. The goal of the Christian race is so wonderful a promise that we could go on and talk and talk about it. But the point of the present passage demands our attention: the great Christian race lies out before us. Therefore, it needs to be studied and understood by all who are willing to run it, and all need to run it.

1. **Its inspiration: a great cloud of witnesses (v.1).**
2. **Its required disciplines (v.1).**
3. **Its supreme example: Jesus (v.2).**

4. **Its controlling factor: staying one's mind on Jesus' endurance (v.3).**
5. **Its great demand: resisting temptation—even to blood (v.4).**

1. (Hebrews 12:1) Christian Race: there is the inspiration of the Christian race—a great cloud of witnesses.

The picture is that of a race. The scene is a great coliseum filled to capacity with spectators ("**great cloud**"). The race is about to begin. Two quick exhortations are given: get rid of all excess weight and clinging entanglements and run and run and keep on running—enduring to the end. As you run, remember Jesus ([Hebrews 12:2](#)). He formerly participated, and He participated for the joy of winning. He disciplined Himself, endured to the point of death. And He received His reward.

The picture painted by the author shows there are two senses in which the crowd witnesses the great Christian race. The crowd, the heroes of [Hebrews 11](#), have participated in the race. They have run and finished the race themselves—enduring to the end and winning. Therefore, they are witnesses and examples for us. But they are not only *participants*, they are also *spectators*. They actually witness our race and performance. They are vitally interested in how we run the race.

The point is this: a great cloud of witnesses surrounds and envelops us—witnesses who believed God and stood fast for God—stood fast against all kinds of trials, temptations, and opposition. Their great faith and endurance should stir and inspire us to believe and to endure in our belief. They never buckled or crumbled in their faith.

1. They endured against great temptation—against looking, touching, tasting, doing, thinking, feeling, and saying anything that would hinder their running the race. They did not give in to temptation—not for long—not as a life-style—not permanently. They endured in faith.
2. They endured against great trials—against problems, trouble, sufferings, loss, hunger, disease, accident, mockery, abuse, persecution, threats, and even in the face of martyrdom. No matter how terrible or awful the trial, they endured in faith—believing in God and His glorious promises.
3. They endured against all opposition—against opposition from family, friends, neighbors, fellow-workers, civil leaders, and even institutional religionists. No matter the opposition, they believed God and endured in their faith in God and in His Word of promise.

Again, the point is this: their faith and their endurance should stir and inspire us to believe God and to run holding fast to our belief.

2. (Hebrews 12:1) Christian Race— Endurance— Sin: there are the required disciplines of the Christian race.

They are twofold.

1. We must lay aside every weight and lay aside the sin that so easily traps us. The words "**lay aside**" (*apothemenoi*) mean to take off, strip off and to remove as in taking off clothes.

a. The Christian runner must strip off "**every weight**" (*ogkon panta*). This means any excess weight and bulk of body. All serious athletes train and strain to remove all excess weight. This refers to things that may be legitimate and innocent in and of themselves, but they hinder the Christian runner. They hamper and slow him down instead of helping him run faster. What kind of things would these be? What are some legitimate and innocent things, things that do not help a believer to grow and run the race as fast as he can?

1. Seeking entertainment instead of fellowship and communing with God—instead of praying and reading our Bibles—instead of worshipping and witnessing. Recreation is sometimes needed, but the problem with most of us is that we relax and rest far more than we need, and we neglect our fellowship and communion with God and our intercessory prayer for others. Too many of us do not even know how to spend long times *keeping our minds* upon God and communing with Him.
2. Seeking the possessions and things of this world instead of *seeking* God.
3. Listening to music and other sounds that do not build up our spirits nor focus our minds upon the truth and God. Watching films and television that fail to strengthen us.

We could go on and on, but the thrust is edification. Anything that does not build us up and make us stronger is excess weight that slows us down. The Christian runner must do exactly what the Olympic runner does: strain to remove all excess weight. Do nothing—absolutely nothing—that hinders or hampers him from running at full speed. He must strip off all unnecessary weight.

"Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions" ([Matthew 19:21-22](#)).

"And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" ([Luke 9:57-62](#)).

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" ([Hebrews 12:1](#)).

"But his wife looked back from behind him [at the world and its fate and daily events], and she became a pillar of salt" ([Genesis 19:26](#)).

- b. The Christian runner must strip off the sin which so easily trips or besets him. The words **"easily besets"** (*euperistaton*) mean the sin which clings, distracts, entangles, and trips up the Christian runner. It is the picture of clothing flapping around a person while he is running: it entangles and trips him and he falls. What is the sin that entangles and trips believers? Various sins have been suggested as common to all believers. However, the exhortation speaks strongly to every believer and to the *particular sin* that entangles and throws the believer. Each one of us must ask: What is the sin that so easily traps me? Pleasure, indulgence, the tongue, the flesh, pride, possessions, worldly friends, television, sports—what is it that consumes my energy and keeps me from following God fully and wholly—that trips me up far, far too often. We must strip it off or else it will entangle us and trip us up and we will never finish the race.

"If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles" ([Job 11:14](#)).

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" ([Isaiah 55:7](#)).

"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" ([Ephes. 4:22](#)).

"Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" ([Hebrews 12:1](#)).

"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" ([1 Peter 2:11](#)).

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" ([Romans 6:12](#)).

"Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame" ([1 Cor. 15:34](#)).

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" ([1 John 2:1-2](#)).

"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil" ([Isaiah 1:16](#)).

2. We must run with “patience” (*hupomonē*). The word means “endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, constancy, perseverance”. The word “patience” is not passive; it is active. It is not the spirit that just sits back and puts up with the trials of life, taking whatever may come. Rather it is the spirit that stands up and faces the trials of life, that actively goes about conquering and overcoming them. When trials confront a man who is truly justified, he is stirred to arise and face the trials head on. He immediately sets out to conquer and overcome them. He knows that God is allowing the trials in order to teach him more and more patience (endurance).

The Christian runner must be determined; he must have true grit. **He must be filled with steadfast endurance, letting nothing stop or hinder him, not any.....**

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| 1. sin | 6. desire |
| 2. distraction | 7. enticement |
| 3. lust | 8. luring invitation |
| 4. daring challenge | 9. appealing attraction |
| 5. worldly potential | 10. enticing chance |

"In your patience possess ye your souls" ([Luke 21:19](#)).

"Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer" ([Romans 12:12](#)).

"For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise" ([Hebrews 10:36](#)).

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" ([James 1:2-4](#)).

"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain" ([James 5:7](#)).

3. ([Hebrews 12:2](#)) Christian Race—Jesus Christ: there is the supreme example of the Christian race—the Lord Jesus Christ.

Believers who have trusted God and endured in their faith are great examples for us. We have seen this in the *Great Hall of Faith* in [Hebrews 11](#). And we see it in the example of believers all around us—believers who really live for Christ. But as great as these examples are, there is one supreme example of faith, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ. We may and should look at the example of other believers, but we should always be *looking to Jesus*. The word "looking" (*aphorōntes*) means “to fix your eyes upon Jesus”. It also means “to fix your mind upon Him” (Kenneth Wuest. *Hebrews*, Vol. 2, p.214). The Christian runner is to focus his eyes and mind upon Jesus Christ. Why? Because Jesus Christ Himself ran the race of faith when He was upon earth, and He shows us exactly how to run it.

We should remember four things about the race He ran.

1. Jesus Christ participated in the race Himself; He actually ran the race of faith. In fact, He is the very Author and Finisher of faith.
 - a. The “Author” (*ton archēgon*) means that He authored, began, originated, created, and gave birth to the Christian race.
 - b. The “Finisher” (*teleiōtēn*) means that He perfected, completed, and consummated the race. He ran the race to the finish.

The idea is that Jesus Christ ran the course of life perfectly. He was sinless, perfectly righteous, always obeying God in everything. He ran the race of faith—of utter obedience and trust in God—all through His life upon earth. He finished His course living a perfect and righteous life upon earth. Therefore, He created and authored and completed the Christian race for all believers. He is the blazing example of faith in God—of utter dependence and obedience and righteousness—for the believer. The believer is always to be looking to Jesus the Author and Finisher of faith.

"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession Christ Jesus" ([Hebrews 3:1](#)).

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" ([Hebrews 12:2](#)).

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" ([1 Peter 2:21](#)).

2. Jesus Christ had a great inspiration: the joy that was set before Him. What was that joy?

The glorious day of redemption.....

1. the glorious day when He would be united and exalted with all believers of all ages.

2. the glorious day when He would realize all the glory and joy for which He had died and for which God had purposed His death.
3. the glorious day when the new heavens and earth would be recreated and all the redeemed would be worshipping and serving God as all in all.
4. the glorious day when the salvation of all believers of all generations would be completely and perfectly fulfilled, and He and all those who loved Him would be ruling and reigning with Him forever and ever.

There are many ways to express the joy that was set before Christ, but the thing to see is that it was the joy of redemption—of God's very purpose for the world—that stirred and motivated Christ to come to earth and author salvation for man.

Thought 1. The glorious day of redemption should stir and motivate us as well. Christ our Lord is our supreme example in being stirred by the joy that lies before us.

"In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight" ([Luke 10:21](#)).

"And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing" ([Luke 15:5](#)).

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" ([John 15:11](#)).

"And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves" ([John 17:13](#)).

"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" ([Romans 14:17](#)).

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" ([Hebrews 12:2](#)).

3. Jesus Christ is the supreme example in discipline: He followed the rules of the race even to the point of dying in order to create the race. He obeyed God perfectly. He ignored and despised the shame of the cross in order to finish the race of perfect obedience to God. And because He was perfectly obedient, He has blazed the path of perfect righteousness, of the very faith that makes us acceptable to God. The Christian race exists because Jesus Christ disciplined Himself; He obeyed God perfectly, even to the extent of dying for us. This He willingly did, and because He did, He is the supreme example for us. We should endure in believing and obeying God no matter the cost or price we have to pay, even if it means martyrdom.

"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" ([John 10:11](#)).

"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" ([Romans 5:6](#)).

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" ([1 Cor. 15:3](#)).

"Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" ([Galatians 1:4](#)).

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" ([Galatians 3:13](#)).

"And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour" ([Ephes. 5:2](#)).

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" ([Hebrews 2:9](#)).

"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" ([1 Peter 2:24](#)).

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" ([1 Peter 3:18](#)).

4. Jesus Christ is the supreme example of receiving the reward of faith. He was exalted to the right hand of the throne of God. Believers witnessed His ascension and several believers have seen Him in visions and dreams since then ([Acts 1:9](#); [Acts 7:55](#); [Acts 9:3](#)).

"So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God" ([Mark 16:19](#)).

"Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God" ([Luke 22:69](#)).

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" ([Acts 2:36](#)).

"Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places" ([Ephes. 1:20](#)).

"And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church" ([Ephes. 1:22](#)).

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name" ([Phil. 2:9](#)).

"Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him" ([1 Peter 3:22](#)).

"Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" ([Rev. 5:12](#)).

4. ([Hebrews 12:3](#)) Christian Race— Jesus Christ: there is the controlling factor of the Christian race—keeping or staying one's mind on the endurance of Jesus Christ.

The word "consider" (*analogizomai*) means "to compare, reckon, count up, weigh". Believers are to focus upon Jesus Christ and His sufferings and compare and weigh them against their sufferings. Christ endured so much more than we have to endure. Let any orphan, widow, criminal, prostitute, slave, or sufferer—any person whatsoever compare himself with all this, and remember

Jesus bore *all this*:

1. being born to an unwed mother ([Matthew 1:18-19](#)).
2. being born in a stable, the worst of conditions ([Luke 2:7](#)).
3. being born to poor parents ([Luke 2:24](#)).
4. having his life threatened as a baby ([Matthew 2:13](#)).
5. being the cause of unimaginable sorrow ([Matthew 2:16](#)).
6. having to be moved and shifted as a baby ([Matthew 2:13](#)).
7. being reared in a despicable place, Nazareth ([Luke 2:39](#)).
8. having His father die during His youth ([Matthew 13:53-58](#)).
9. having to support His mother and brothers and sisters ([Matthew 13:53-58](#)).
10. having no home, not even a place to lay His head ([Matthew 8:20](#); [Luke 9:58](#)).
11. being hated and opposed by religionists ([Mark 14:1-2](#)).
12. being charged with insanity ([Mark 3:21](#)).
13. being charged with demon possession ([Mark 3:22](#)).
14. being opposed by His own family ([Mark 3:31-32](#)).
15. being rejected, hated, and opposed by audiences to whom He spoke ([Matthew 13:53-58](#); [Luke 4:28-29](#)).
16. being betrayed by a close friend ([Mark 14:10-11](#), [18](#)).

17. being left alone, rejected, and forsaken by all His friends ([Mark 14:50](#)).
18. being tried before the high court of the land on the charge of treason ([John 18:33](#)).
19. being executed by crucifixion, the worst possible death ([John 19:16](#)).

Note why we should compare our sufferings with the suffering of Christ. It keeps us from becoming *weary*, that is, exhausted, tired, worn out, and relaxing when we should be working; and it also keeps us from *fainting in our minds*, that is, from losing heart and becoming discouraged and despondent, from drawing back and giving up.

"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved" ([Matthew 10:22](#)).

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" ([Matthew 11:29](#)).

"Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" ([Galatians 5:7](#)).

"Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" ([Galatians 6:6](#)).

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" ([Ephes. 6:10-12](#)).

"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" ([Phil. 3:14](#)).

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" ([2 Tim. 4:7](#)).

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" ([1 Peter 1:13](#)).

"For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully" ([1 Peter 2:19](#)).

5. ([Hebrews 12:4](#)) Christian Race— Jesus Christ: there is the great demand of the Christian race—to resist temptation even to the point of blood.

This is the picture of Christ's ordeal in Gethesmane and upon the cross. He struggled against the temptation to choose some other way other than the cross, but He endured to the point of blood in both experiences ([Matthew 26:36-46](#); [Mark 14:32-42](#); [Luke 22:39-53](#)).

The point is both striking and powerful: **we must resist temptation.....**

1. to the point of sweating blood if necessary.
2. to the point of death.

"And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible" ([1 Cor. 9:25](#)).

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" ([1 Cor. 10:13](#)).

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" ([2 Tim. 4:6-8](#)).

"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin" ([Hebrews 12:4](#)).

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" ([James 1:12](#)).

"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" ([1 Peter 1:6-7](#)).