

Fit To Run A Marathon

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Date: 30 December 2023

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] Let's begin our worship now. We're singing firstly tonight in Psalm 95. Psalm 95, that's the Scottish Psalter version on page 357. The tune is Gainsborough, and we're singing verses 1 to 6. Come, let us sing to the Lord. Come, let us, everyone, a joyful noise make to the rock of our salvation. Psalm 95 and verses 1 to 6. If you're able to stand, please stand for the singing.

O come, let us sing to the Lord. Come, let us, everyone, a joyful noise make to the rock of our salvation.

Let us, before his presence come, with praise and thankful voice, let us sing songs to him with praise, and make a joyful noise.

For God, a great, God, a great King, above all God's genius.

Depth of the earth, a great King, above all God's genius. The world's greatest is. But heaven is true. And earth Deusnen, though he cannot share, the earth is the most hope for our salvation.

[2 : 1 6] The Lord is good. His Spirit is one of us who Ruth is also the full cultivate, of her happiness is the highest Solomon's treasure. In the spacious sea he longs, for he the same day they make.

The dry land also from his hands is warm and worshipping.

O come and let us worship him, let us dwell down with all.

And on our knees before the Lord, our Father, let us whole.

Let's unite now in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord together. Amen.

[4 : 0 7] Your greatness, your majesty, your power. The fact that you are our creator, the creator of the universe. The way that we owe to you that worship that we owe to none other but to you.

And we thank you tonight, Lord, that we come together in this way to praise the Lord, to come together to hear his voice in the scriptures speaking to us. We pray that that will be a reality for us.

That your Holy Spirit, Lord, will speak to us through your word. That our minds and our hearts may be further enlightened and moved. That we may be furthered in our knowledge of you, in our commitment to you, and deepened in our love for you.

We ask, O Lord, that as we come into your presence, we may know that you are with us, that you are with your people as you have promised to be.

We give thanks, Lord, that you have made a dwelling place for yourself in the hearts of your people. And we ask, Lord, that we may be conscious of your inward presence.

[5 : 0 9] That we may be conscious of that working of your Spirit in our hearts. So that we may be furthered in our knowledge of you. And that we will know that we are on that path that is heavenwards.

We pray, gracious one, that you would give us then at the close of this year in our experience. To know that your years do not fail. That you are indeed the same yesterday, today, and forever.

And that you are the great God who presides over the passing of what we know of as time. You dwell in heaven. You dwell upon your throne.

You rule over all that you have created. Nothing happens without your will. And we give thanks, O Lord, that that extends to all the things that affect us from day to day.

And even over the workings of evil and of darkness, too. O Lord, our God, we come once again humbly before you. And pray that you would enable us to exalt your holy name.

[6 : 10] Bless us here, each one of us and each of the homes and families we represent. We ask, Lord, tonight that we will know your blessing as we enter into a new year.

We thank you, Lord, as we look back over the year that has now passed. We thank you for your goodness to us. We thank you for the mercies that you have shown toward us.

For the many ways, Lord, in which you have dealt with us, not according to our sins, but in your grace and mercy. And we pray, gracious one, that these will follow us into this new year as we shortly anticipate entering into it.

We ask that your gospel will be blessed. And blessed increasingly to us. Lord, we long for days when not only will we ourselves be revived in our inward soul, but when our community around us will come to know the voice of God, the voice of the Son of God speaking to us and bringing many souls to life, bringing people to know you and to follow you and to love you and to serve you in this world.

O Lord, our God, we lament the way in which we find our generation to be so much in denial of the things of your truth and so much given to elevate those things which we know are offensive to you.

[7 : 35] Lord, be merciful to us, we pray, as a people. Be merciful to us as we confess our sinfulness before you, our need of your acceptance and forgiveness and cleansing and our being established in your ways.

Lord, we pray for a heart that will prize your truth as we meet with people from day to day. Help us to communicate to them how we love the Lord and how we value his grace and his salvation.

And enable us, we pray, Lord, to continue to bear before you the world in which we live, in all its need, in all its darkness, in all its departure from God.

O Lord God, we pray that we ourselves will, in this year that is before us, come to develop increasingly as a people who will be known as a people who love the Lord.

Grant your blessing, Lord, to each one of us. We thank you that whatever our need is tonight, you are able to deal with us powerfully and efficaciously and in a way that will enable us to marvel at the work of your hand.

[8 : 47] We bless you for your manifold grace that is designed, Lord, to meet us in all the variety of our need. And we pray that as we express these concerns and prayers and petitions before you, Lord, we pray that as we go on in life that we will be all the more determined to be your people and to be known as your people in the world.

Remember, we pray tonight those who have different problems in their own experience, different providences that cause them distress and pain.

We remember those who come to the end of this year, O Lord, thinking back over the loss of loved ones in the year that's gone by, or even in previous times.

We know that this time of year is very poignant for those who look back upon such circumstances. We pray for those who presently mourn the passing of loved ones too.

Lord, we remember those tonight who will look forward to having funerals in these days to come. Lord, we pray that you would bless them as they anticipate this, and we pray that you would strengthen them and encourage them during this time.

[10 : 02] We pray for those who are ill at this time. We pray, Lord, for those who are seriously ill. We remember them before you. We pray that all our illnesses, whatever magnitude they may be of, may be a reminder to us, O Lord, that we are closer to eternity tonight than we have ever been, and that we will leave this world at some point of your own appointment and come to face you as our judge.

And we ask, Lord, that our hearts may be solemnized, and yet that we may rejoice in your salvation as we think of these great issues. Bless, we pray then, those who are laid aside in illness at this time, those who have received and are receiving treatment, those who are in hospital, those in our care homes, those who tend to their needs.

We thank you, Lord, for all who have, over this past year, and continue to deal with us in our times of illness, times of bereavement and sorrow, and all other types of need as well.

Lord, we give thanks for your goodness in continuing to provide us with these resources, and we pray that they will continue with us into this new year also. Bless us, we pray, as a congregation.

We thank you for all that you enable us to do, for all that you have enabled us to take part in this year that has passed. And over the past year, Lord, we ask your blessing to accompany everything that has been done with regard to our young people and our children and all who have come to various activities and courses, as well as attend the worship services of the congregation.

[11 : 40] Remember then, we pray. Grant that your own blessing will come in days to come to be seen as a blessing upon your word, a blessing of the gospel to our souls.

Hear us now, we pray. Continue to bless the world in which we live with all its troubles. And we pray, Lord, that tonight we see violence and war and deprivation and famine, so many things that trouble people from day to day, so many things that people have to live with, the trauma in their lives compared relatively to ours.

Lord, be merciful to us as human beings. Oh, Lord, send forth your light and your truth. And may your gospel advance throughout the world and create peace, we pray, where there is war.

And create, we pray, for yourself a people who will reflect and glorify your great name. Hear us now, we pray, for we ask it all, seeking pardon and cleansing from all our sins.

For Jesus' sake, amen. Let's continue to sing praise to God. We're singing this time in Psalm 119. Psalm 119.

[12 : 55] You'll find that on page 167 of the psalm books. Psalm 167, the verses marked 161 to 168.

The tune this time is rocking him. Psalm is throughout this. Psalm, as you know, is in very different ways speaking about his appreciation for God's Word and how he applies that Word of God to his own circumstances.

Sometimes circumstances like in these verses where he's facing falsehood and people misrepresenting him and so on. So he's saying here that he nevertheless has found and finds great peace with those who love God's law.

So Psalm 119 at verse 161. Though rulers hound me without cause, my heart fears nothing but your word. For in your promise I rejoice like one who finds great spoil, O Lord.

And so on down to verse 160 to God's praise. The rulers hound me with a ghost.

[14 : 15] My heart fears nothing but your word.

For in your promise I rejoice for in your promise I rejoice like one who finds great spoil, O Lord.

All falls to die upon a day. With all my heart I love you, Lord.

I praise you seven times and eight.

For your commands I hold it all.

[15 : 27] For in peace of those who love you, Lord. They will not stumble in the way.

I wait for your salvation, Lord, and your commands I will obey.

I will, O say, your standards, Lord, my love for them is great and true.

Your laws and reasons I obey, for all I wait are known to you.

I'm going to read now from God's Word. The reading this evening is from the letter to the Hebrews. The letter to the Hebrews, beginning at chapter 11 and verse 32.

[17 : 05] And we'll go on reading into chapter 12, down as far as verse 11. So that's Hebrews chapter 11, beginning at verse 32.

As you know, this has been a great list in this chapter of those who have lived by faith. And the chapter lists some of the activities that they engaged in through faith, how they came to know the blessing of God as they came to trust in him.

And in verse 32, he comes towards the end of his list, where he says, What more shall I say?

Some were told? Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned. They were sawn in two. They were killed with a sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy, wandering about in deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth.

[18 : 46] And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely.

Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him, who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood, and you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons.

My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him, for the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.

[19 : 59] It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. But what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the father of spirits and live?

For they disciplined us for a short time, as it seemed best to them. But he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant.

But later, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. And so on, may the Lord follow with this blessing, that reading of his word.

Before we turn to words at the beginning of chapter 12 there, let's sing again in Psalm 34. Psalm number 34. And that's again in the Sing Psalms version on page 41.

[21 : 16] To tune Evan. The tune is Evan. We'll sing verses 12 to the end of the Psalm, 12 to 22. Does anyone delight in life and long to see good days?

Then keep your tongue from evil speech, your lips from lying ways. Depart and turn from evil's paths and practice what is right. Desire to know the way of peace.

Pursue it with your might. The Lord's eyes are upon the just. He listens to their plea. The wicked he rejects and blots from earth their memory. The righteous cry.

The Lord responds and frees them when distressed. The Lord draws near the broken heart and rescues the depressed. And so on through to the end of the Psalm.

From verse 12. Does anyone delight in life? Does anyone delight in life?

[22 : 18] And long to see good days? Then keep your tongue from evil speech, Your lips from lying ways.

Depart and turn from evil past and practice what is right.

He's tired to know the way of peace. Persuive it with your might.

The Lord's eyes are upon the just. He listens to their plea.

The wicked he rejects and blots from earth their memory.

[23 : 43] The righteous cry. The Lord responds and frees them when distressed.

The Lord draws near the broken heart and rescues the depressed.

From all that happens and blots of the just. The Lord will set him free.

The Lord's eyes are upon the broken heart and broken down well in.

The wicked are condemned today. All those who make the just.

[25 : 05] God saves his soul. The wicked are not broken. The wicked are not broken. For in the Lord may trust.

God saves his soul. Amen. Amen. Please turn with me now to Hebrews chapter 12. Hebrews 12. Hebrews 12.

We'll read again from the beginning. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely.

And let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfection of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

And then verse 3 begins, Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself. Well, we're very familiar in our day with various kinds of stadia.

[26 : 20] A stadium where certain activities, sporting activities usually take place. We're familiar with spectators crowded round the sides of the stadium.

And with the activity, whether it's a game of football or athletics or whatever taking place in the stadium, where the competitors take place and the crowd, the surrounding crowd, is involved in some way or other, supportively or otherwise, with those who are actually taking part.

We're all familiar with that as we see it very often on our TV screens and maybe even attend as well. And that's the kind of imagery, as you know, that's behind these verses and other verses in the New Testament, especially Paul uses the same kind of imagery, which seems that he and the writer to the Hebrews here borrowed from what they saw happening in their own day with regard to athletic contests of various kinds in various stadia.

And borrowing from that and using that imagery to present us with aspects of the Christian life, both the individual Christian and also the collective life of the church, and how in the likes of this passage, we are ourselves encouraged to actually run a particular course of life in a particular kind of way, running the race that is set before us and doing it looking unto Jesus, running the race with endurance, looking unto Jesus.

Now, if we take it that the crowd of witnesses here refers to, especially those who are mentioned in the previous chapter, he's gone through the list there of individuals that are named at different points in history and how they lived by faith in God and how through faith they were enabled by faith to do certain things for their own benefit, but sometimes very often for the benefit of many others besides.

[28 : 25] And that as he uses here the imagery of the stadium, the imagery includes those in chapter 11 as the surrounding crowd, if you like, who have gone before those who are participating and now sit as watching and coming to be spectators of those who continue to actually are involved in, let's say, in the races.

They're talking about a race, so let's just leave it at that. They're engaged in a race of some kind. And the practice in those days in the Greek games, we're told, by those who look into these things, we're told that the practice was that if you are running races, certainly in the major competitions of the day, that once you finished your race, you didn't disappear from the stadium, you actually then went and took your place amongst the crowd of spectators.

And that happened all the way through the various races that were being followed through in the stadium until the final race was over and those who finished that race then took their part to have placed with the spectators as well.

And then when it was all finished, the prizes would be given out to those who had actually won these competitions. And if you bear that imagery in mind, it helps us, I think, to understand some of the phraseology and some of what's being said here and helps us then to apply that to our lives as well as individuals and to the Christian life in particular.

And if you look at verse 2 here, it's much more to do, I think, with what you would call a marathon rather than short sprints. There would be all types of races in those games, of course, like there is today.

[30 : 13] But the language here is really a language that suits a marathon. And a marathon really suits as an image of the Christian life more so than a short sprint, because that's really what the Christian life very often is like and very often feels like as well.

It's the kind of race in which you have a long distance to travel before you reach the end. Of course, our lives vary in terms of how many years we live and all that sort of stuff.

But nevertheless, the kind of thing a marathon is really fits the imagery that he has here of running the race that's set before us.

So if we keep these points in mind, there are two things especially that are brought out in the passage for our attention. The first is a laying aside. There are certain things he mentions as laying aside.

Let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely. Things which are to be laid aside or put off in order to run effectively and efficiently with a view to winning the race.

[31 : 23] That's in the ordinary sense. But in a spiritual sense, we'll see that's also important. That's the first thing, a laying aside. And then secondly, he speaks of a looking ahead.

Let us run with endurance looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

So there is a laying aside and a looking ahead as part of the Christian race, of the race that we're engaged in as believers in this life.

And of course, as we come to the end of a year, we're very conscious of events that have taken place in the year that's gone by. People who belong to our families, to the congregation, who are no longer with us, passed away over the course of that year.

And you can say in a sense that all of those whom we've known in life, and especially those who were known and known by us as Christians, committed to God and witnesses to Him in this life, they are for us in a sense a crowd of witnesses.

[32 : 37] They are spectators of our race as we run it, because they've gone before us. They've taken their place now in the spectators, as it were. And they're now, we're at least mentally conscious or spiritually conscious, that we've seen them running their race.

And we're following them. And we're seeking to follow in the same way as they did the Lord Jesus Christ. So he says, let us lay aside.

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, as we think of those who've run their race, who've gone before us, who lived a consistent Christian life, and as they were people that we looked forward to meeting with, and shared fellowship with, and admired, and looked to, and saw as our examples, seeing we're surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely.

When you think of an athlete, especially an athlete in serious competition, you can't imagine at any time, let alone nowadays, an athlete seriously entering into a marathon or any other type of race and not being prepared before for it.

Preparing beforehand and preparing even at that day itself on the occasion. You don't find them actually coming to take part in a race without laying aside their outer clothing, anything that's going to be too heavy, and clothing themselves with the lightest possible fabrics, including running shoes and everything else as they are nowadays, and so that you would find every advantage possible in doing that in order to actually try and make sure, as far as possible, that you were giving everything to winning this race if you could.

[34 : 29] And that's important for us spiritually, as we'll see, as well. It would be absolutely futile for an athlete to come to face a marathon or any other race, and to think that they could neglect the basics of preparation, and hope meaningfully to take part in that race.

Because the basics of preparation mean training in a proper way, being sure to actually have the right sort of diet so that they weren't encumbering themselves with problems when they began the race.

And, of course, the clothing, as we've said, important as well. So he really is saying, let us lay aside every weight. In other words, every impediment, everything possible that we can know of that would prevent us effectively running the Christian race.

Let us lay aside every weight, whatever it is that's a weight, that's a hindrance to us. And remember, there are hindrances for all of us, not just outwardly, but also inwardly as well in our own soul.

Every weight, every impediment, including our minds. Remember 1 Peter 1, verse 13, uses the kind of phrase, then, gird up the loins of your mind in the old translation of it.

[35 : 47] And that goes back, indeed, to the days in which Peter lived, where long garments were commonplace. And if you're running a race, and if you're running quickly, think of Elijah, for example, running after the contest on Mount Carmel, he girded up his garments, and he ran with his full might.

And so, if you really wanted to run and not be tripped up in the process, you gathered up your garments, you tied them under your belt or something, not in professional races, or races such as envisaged here, but even in the ordinary course of life, running effectively meant, don't let your garments hang loose.

Tie them up. Be sure they're effectively bound. And he's using that language with regard to the mind. Peter is, gird up the loins of your mind.

Prepare your mind properly for action. And that's the same idea that you've got here. Let us lay aside every weight. Have we prepared our minds aright to run the Christian race?

Are we engaged in the Christian race meaningfully with a view to actually running effectively in following Jesus, in being servants of Jesus?

[37 : 05] Have we geared up the loins of our mind today in coming to worship him? Have we stopped to prepare so that we can benefit from being together as worshipers of God?

Are we preparing for this new year, God willing, that will shortly be entered in a few hours' time by girding up our minds, by actually stopping to take stock of what is it in my thought processes?

What is it in my attitude? What is it in the way that I think or not think? Have I become flabby in my thinking? Have I actually stopped concentrating to the extent I should on the things of God?

Let us lay aside every weight. And then he goes on, and the sin, the sin or sin which clings so closely. Now this has given rise to very many different kinds of opinions.

If you consult commentaries, you'll find there's all sorts of opinions over the years as to what's meant by sin which clings so closely to us. Some people think of this as a particular sin which is individual to every person.

[38 : 18] We all, I'm sure, have a sin or sins that we find ourselves more prone to than other sins or than other people even. And some commentators say that you take this as being whatever sin you're most liable to fall into, what sin you're more prone to, that you would actually use it in that sense.

And that would make sense in the context as well. But I think it's better just to take it. You notice here in translation, it doesn't have the definite article. It's not the sin.

It's sin which clings so closely. And I think it's better saying if you think of laying aside every weight as a reference in general to the principle of the thing, he's now coming to the more specific and he's saying whatever is a weight or a hindrance to us will always have sin behind it, will always be based upon the workings of sin, the sin that's so very much with us still in this life.

Lay aside every weight and you might say and particularly give attention to sin which clings so closely. You think of your TV monitor or your computer monitor and so often you've got to wipe it because dust clings to it.

You have to cling it. It's got that static attraction which attracts dust to it and you've got to actually clean it from time to time or at least we're meant to clean from time to time.

[39 : 49] And sin is like that. Sin clings so closely to us. It's just such a part of our frame as fallen sinners. It's with us every day.

It's there. Even forgiven sin, even forgiven sinners, people who are Christians who know that their sin has been forgiven, they're still very conscious of going through life and running this race and still they find this sin at times clings so closely to them.

It's something that's attached to them just like cling film attaches itself to a bowl or to a plate. And you've got to lay aside sin which clings so closely.

You've got to have that kind of mindset. That's where the mindset comes in as well that we don't neglect looking inwardly and stop and ask ourselves, am I really taking account of sin properly in my life?

Am I coming with it to God in such a way that seeks grace from God to just detach this sin and myself from this sin as I go on?

[40 : 56] So the task is to lay aside this daily. That's what you find throughout the New Testament you're very much aware of the fact that as doctrine is set out by Paul and by Peter and the writer to the Hebrews here, it's always followed by imperatives for our behavior.

In other words, Paul would be saying, seeing such and such has happened, seeing you are justified now by faith in Jesus Christ, seeing you have been renewed by the Spirit of God or language like that, therefore, don't give your bodies to sin.

Don't give yourselves over to the service of sin. And that's the pattern all the way through the New Testament. And that's what is before us in this verse as well. Because we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, because we're running seriously this Christian race, this race that's going on until we enter into eternity.

Therefore, lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely. And then he says, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Now here's the positive perseverance side of it, if you like. Perseverance is one of the great doctrines that the Bible teaches us of.

[42 : 22] Perseverance in terms of depending on God's grace, certainly to work through us, but nevertheless, there's a responsibility laid upon ourselves to persevere in the life that we follow as the life of faith.

Life of trusting in the Lord, the life of serving the Lord. It's not a very easy exercise necessarily to just find out where the side that God is involved in in terms of the grace that He gives us and the responsibility that's ours to carry forward our life and our actions and so on, but it's there.

And the two things fit together. It's not one or the other. And so, he's saying, let us run with endurance, with perseverance. Endurance, you could sometimes, in the meaning of the word nowadays, you could think that what he's saying is just to have a sort of passive, stoic kind of approach to your problems or to your difficulties or your challenges and just sit and endure them and have to put up with them.

Well, that's not what the word is saying. It's a very positive word. It's an active word. A word that means we actively persevere. We actively persevere in the race in which we are now running.

Remember how Paul wrote to the Philippians where in his testimony of his own life as he set out before the Philippians in the Philippians in chapter 3 verses 13 and 14 especially.

[43 : 57] He's saying, well, from verse 12, not that I've already obtained or I'm already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. He doesn't mean by that that he hasn't yet accepted Christ, but since he accepted Christ or Christ came into his life, he's been reaching forward, as he says in the following verses, to the prize of this high calling of God in Christ to finally obtain that wonderful terminus of glory with Christ, of heaven.

So he's saying, brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. In other words, I'm not yet there, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Now the language he's using there is the language of athletics. I press on, and you can see in athletics just especially in the final lap of a race, even a marathon after all of these miles, those who are participating, especially as they're coming near the finishing tape and especially if they're in the prospect of winning the race, they'll stretch themselves forward, they'll strive forward, just put everything into these last few strides to reach the tape.

And Paul is saying, that's what I'm doing. Even at this stage of his life, it's been over 20 years since the Lord came into his life, but he says, this is what I do.

[45 : 36] I'm pressing on toward the mark. I'm stretching forward to the finishing tape. I'm making sure that as far as I can in dependence on God, I'm nevertheless putting every effort I can into this race that I'm involved in.

And what he's saying here, what the writer here is saying in Hebrews, is saying, let us run with perseverance, with endurance. You know, athletes speak about, especially athletes who do long distance running and marathons especially, they use phrases such as hitting the wall.

And I often wondered what that meant. And if you look up what that means, of course, if you Google it, like everything else, nowadays you'll find an answer to it. Hitting the wall is the expression that athletes use for a stage in the race, usually around the 20 mile mark, it seems.

I've never done it, so I don't know. But around 20 miles, they begin to feel this tremendous strain on their body. Their energy is just being sapped.

And that's why it's called, it's just like hitting a wall. They just, even your brain just wants to give up. And you've then got to just adjust yourself in a different way so as to try and get through the moments, the minutes in which that's happening and then just continue with your race.

[46 : 58] So when you hit the wall, you remember your training, you slow down for a bit perhaps, because the problem is that the stuff in your muscles, glycogen I think it's called, which is stored in your muscles, it's being used up as you run a marathon.

And you come to a point where it's almost depleted and that's when you begin to really hit the wall. And you have to spend a bit of time adjusting to that so that you then begin to draw energy from fat reserves.

I'm just going by what I'm told. I have no idea myself personally, but this is what apparently is the case. And so, in the Christian life, there are some times when you just hit the wall.

When your mind wants to give up. When you say, I didn't realize the hill was going to be this difficult to climb. I didn't realize the route was going to take me in this direction.

Why is it so difficult in my life as I see it compared to what I see others? Their race seems to be much easier. And now I'm beginning to find that this is so challenging, more than I expected, that really you feel like just your energy is being sapped.

[48 : 18] and you begin to think, well, should I just give up at this point? And it's vital then that you've done the training beforehand. I'm talking here about athletics again.

When you hit the wall, it's comforting to know you've done all the training, you've taken all the right nutrients, you've actually made sure from that point of view that you're ready for the moment when you hit the wall.

And so it is in the Christian life. Because when you come to hit the wall, it'll be really comforting to know that you have followed the Lord, that you've been using His Word, that you've been praying to Him, that you've been in the company of other Christians, that you've taken their counsel, that you love to be in their fellowship, that all of that is behind you and undergirding you as you come to hit the wall.

Because it'll strengthen you, and especially the grace of God, to go through those moments and on into the rest of the race. Let's run, he says, with endurance, the race that is set before us.

And when he says set before us, I think he means by that the race has been set for us. We haven't chosen the course ourselves. Those who run in a marathon don't get to choose which course they actually take part in.

[49 : 35] They don't choose which direction the course takes. They don't determine how many hills and how many hills they have to climb, how many they have to come back down again, how many straights they're beyond.

They don't get to choose. That's all chosen for them. There's the map. Get on with it. That's your race. You have to keep to the course set out for you. And it's difficult in the Christian life to accept that the race course has been set for us by God.

sometimes it's not easy to accept why certain things take place in our experience. But you've got to come back again as an athlete comes back to the training and to the preparation for the race.

So you come back to thinking, well, who is in charge of my race? Who has set the course? What wisdom has devised this course for me?

What strength do I rely on to go through with the rest of the course? And of course that takes you back to God and takes you back especially to Jesus as we'll see in a minute.

[50 : 45] You lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and you run with endurance the race that is set before us. So tonight and as we enter into a new year we each have our race set out for us.

It's not for us to say, why don't I have the same course set for me as others have? The wisdom of God, friends, has set the course of life and it is faith that accepts that and trust in the Lord accepts that and goes on with the race that He has set out for us because His grace will always be sufficient for us to finish that race.

But not only is there laying aside there is also looking ahead and as soon as He said that the race that is set before us let's run it with endurance looking to Jesus.

Looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith. And what He means of course is looking while we're running the race we're looking to Jesus we're looking up to Jesus we're looking to the one who's at the end of our course waiting to meet us.

And what do we look for? What kind of look does He mean here looking to Jesus? Well I think He explains that or enlarges on that in verse 3 Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself.

[52 : 21] Consider is a very significant word in the context and in the letter to the Hebrews in fact it really means to study carefully means to give all your attention to means to give your mind this where the mind again comes in be mindful of this give all your mind as far as possible to this consider Him looking unto Him looking considerably unto Him looking studiously to Him looking in a way that really seriously reckons with who He is and where as well as what He has done.

And so you'll find the same thing you see in the previous runners in verse 11 if we can call them chapter 11 call them that look at verse 10 there in chapter 11 you'll find there that Abraham is mentioned as a man who lived by faith he was looking forward to the city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God and then Sarah she herself received power to conceive when she was past age since she considered Him faithful she gave her mind carefully to who God was and what her relation to Him was verse 11 you'll find that emphasis there she considered Him faithful and then verse 15 if you go forward to verse 15 you'll find a similar emphasis there if they had been thinking these people who had left their homeland had left the place where they were living if they'd been thinking of that land from where they had gone out they would have had opportunity to return but as it is they desire a better country that is a heavenly one they make it clear that they are seeking a homeland they're considering carefully where they're going as well as where they've come from and then you go forward to verse 19 whereas

Abraham having been commanded by God to offer up his son Isaac says he considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead same word again he considered he studied carefully he gave a mind to it and then finally verse 26 speaking of Moses and all of this is of course within the workings of faith he considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt for he was looking to the reward this is what he said by faith he chose rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin how why could he how could he for he considered the reproach of Christ he thought upon the reproach of Christ his mind was on what it was to suffer for Christ and he said this is actually especially in the outcome of it it's a far greater treasure than I would ever have had if I'd stayed in Egypt as a Egypt he considered it you see faith and the way that this chapter 11 runs into or flows into chapter 12 where we're thinking about running this race take all of that with you and it means that faith faith that's mentioned up through this chapter faith that flows into the race in chapter 12 what is faith is it just a leap in the dark as some people accuse us of doing as Christians nowadays people will say why don't you start using your minds why don't you just accept the science why don't you keep not that there's anything wrong with much of the science but the accusation of those who reject the gospel and reject living a life of faith why don't you actually open your mind to reality why don't you give your mind why don't you think properly why don't you actually give your mind to things other than just the the unlikelihood of the things that are mentioned in the bible the miraculous the supernatural the incarnation the resurrection of christ just just put that aside and open your mind to the other possibilities how do you respond to that you respond to it in the way that hebrews 11 responds to it in chapter 11 verse 3 by faith we understand it doesn't say by understanding we come to believe it says by faith we understand that the world was created by the word of god it wasn't by chance it wasn't through a process of evolution it wasn't from the beginning of a speck in which there was a massive amount of power which then exploded of its own accord god created the universe god created all that exists and by faith we understand these things to be so faith isn't a leap in the dark faith isn't just launching out not knowing what to expect or where you're going

I know faith is running a race that's been set for us by god looking unto jesus considering jesus studying jesus living in fellowship with jesus praying to jesus speaking to him daily trusting in him having him as your friend knowing him as your companion that's what faith is that's the kind of life that faith sets about and what do we see when we look to jesus by faith well we see who he is you could say three facts i'm going to just finish by mentioning them i've got time to really enlarge on them but what do we see when we look to jesus when we look at himself especially when we consider him we'll see who he is he is the founder and perfecter of our faith he's the one who sets it the one who finishes it he's the pioneer the word is as he went out in chapter 2 verse 10 he's the pioneer of our faith he went out and opened this course for us he devised this course he set this course and he did it at the cost of his to have gone into this course and we follow him and he's the finisher he's the one we meet at the end of the course he's the one who comes to us and says either well done good and faithful friend or

God forbid for you and for me that he should say depart from me I never knew you but he's the author and finisher he is the beginning and the end of our faith who he is then how he ran his race who for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross despising the shame he had a race to run a race set him by God the father a course which took him through to the cross of Calvary and to the grave followed by his resurrection from the dead that was the course that was set for our he ran that race and for the joy that was set before him for that which awaited him at the end of his course especially that doesn't mean there was no joy in the course as he went through with it in this life remember he psalm 40 mentions words that are prophetic of

[60 : 27] Jesus then I said to do your will I have come it's written of me in the scroll I have come to do your will oh my God and it's mentioned here in Hebrews as well as it's quoted in Hebrews in chapter 10 and verse 7 where the quotation is that he has come to do his will that he's taken delight in doing the will life you have taken no pleasure in burnt offerings and sin offering then I said behold I the we can't anyway the devil did his utmost to deflect him to make him leave that path that route that

God has set out for him you remember in the temptations I know the time is gone but let me just again remind you of this when the devil came to tempt him in the wilderness he was tempted for these 40 days or fasting for these days at the end of which the temptations came with all the power that Satan could muster if you are the son of God command these stones to be made bread he wasn't suggesting to Jesus that he wasn't really the son of God or trying to get him to believe that actually he wasn't the son of God after all there may have been an element of that what he was getting at especially as the son of God saying you're the son of God why are you here why are you putting yourself willingly through all of this deprivation through all of this suffering why don't you command these stones that they be made bread and feed yourself and finish your hunger of course what he was trying to do was to get Jesus to move out of that route that God had set him that led to the cross the root of suffering and shame and that's why he came to him in the third of the temptations to say showing him all the kingdoms of the world all of these

I will give you and the glory of them if you will fall down and worship me what was that saying to Jesus it was the devil saying to him look you don't have yourself over to that death that awaits you at Calvary I can give you all the glory of these kingdoms and all you have to do is go on your knees and worship me many people have gone to a lost eternity on the basis of that lie don't you be one of them that's what he will suggest to you you can have it just as good without living a full Christian life you don't need to actually have sufferings in the way the Bible describes the sufferings as meaningful in a human life let us run with endurance looking unto

Jesus 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 these Hebrews were faltering they were beginning to slacken they were giving over to doubts they were thinking maybe this Christian life isn't such a good thing after all how does the writer address that well in different ways but in this particular passage he addresses it by drawing their minds to the Saviour himself and when you feel like giving up or even if you feel that you're drawing near to that stage if not quite there go to Jesus think of Jesus study

Jesus consider him let your mind dwell on him and ask yourself am I going to give up when I know what he went through am I going to step out of my lane when I know he didn't do such a thing even though the suffering for him was much greater than mine will ever be laying aside and looking forward and as we enter into this new year God willing in a few hours may that be our mindset may that be how we approach a new year that we lay aside every hindrance to running the Christian life and that we also keep looking to Jesus that especially we keep looking to Jesus the author and finisher the founder and perfecter of our faith let me say a word to anyone who's not yet in this race

[66 : 14] I've been in a way assuming that everyone here is taking part in this Christian marathon race but maybe you're not on the route yet maybe you know about it maybe you've heard much about it maybe you know many of its features maybe you learned about it since you were a child but are you running it are you in it have you accepted him have you come to him with your sins have you realized your deep need of having Jesus as your savior and turning to him and accepting him as he's offered to you freely in the gospel are you really meaningfully in this Christian race well if not friend why should you enter another year and still be unsaved why there's no logic to that is there the only logic there is to that is the illogicalness of our own sinful thinking that we can manage without him we can't and because we can't let's give over our life to him as the founder and perfecter of our faith let's pray eternal

God we do give thanks for every way in which your word directs us to yourself and as we do so Lord we come to be conscious more and more of our need of you more and more of the need we have of your grace to run throughout the course of our life and we pray oh Lord that you would enable us to run this race of faith to do so perseveringly to do so believing in Jesus and looking to him and to do so Lord as we come to end one year and enter another with a greater resolve to be faithful to the one who calls us bless any here oh Lord who are not yet meaningfully running this race for themselves we thank you that they are here we thank you that they are under the gospel we thank you that they know of the way that that route is set out in your own word bless them we pray draw them into your kingdom be merciful to them and in all of these things glorify your great name for

Jesus sake Amen let's conclude now this evening singing in Psalm 84 and we're singing from the sing psalms version that's page 112 we'll sing verses 1 to 7 verses that speak verses 5 to 7 especially of the strength that God gives to his people to run or to continue in the way that they are going onwards towards God in Zion how delightful are your dwellings O almighty Lord to me for your courts my soul is yearning in your house I long to be heart and flesh cry out aloud for the true and living God singing to the tune Ottawa these verses Russ How delightful are your queries, O almighty are to thee.

On your course my soul is journeying, In your house I long to thee.

Heart and flesh my love, O'er the true and living God.

[70 : 30] Even swallows find their dwelling, And the swallows find their dwelling, Hear your altar, Lord Almighty, Where thy offspring may harvest.

Bless those who are born, They are ever praising God.

Bless thy, those who stand this in you, Those who have a children's mind.

Those of autumn rains we crash there, Swings in make us hail divine.

Strength and pleasing, Sigh on fire, They go on their way to God.

[72 : 03] I'll go to the door to my left this evening after the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God the Father, And the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you, Now and evermore. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

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