

# Hebrews 12:1 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

CLICK VERSE

To go directly to that verse

- [Hebrews 12:1](#)
- [Hebrews 12:2](#)
- [Hebrews 12:3](#)
- [Hebrews 12:4](#)
- [Hebrews 12:5](#)
- [Hebrews 12:6](#)
- [Hebrews 12:7](#)
- [Hebrews 12:8](#)
- [Hebrews 12:9](#)
- [Hebrews 12:10](#)
- [Hebrews 12:11](#)
- [Hebrews 12:12](#)
- [Hebrews 12:13](#)
- [Hebrews 12:14](#)
- [Hebrews 12:15](#)
- [Hebrews 12:16](#)
- [Hebrews 12:17](#)
- [Hebrews 12:18](#)
- [Hebrews 12:19](#)
- [Hebrews 12:20](#)
- [Hebrews 12:21](#)
- [Hebrews 12:22](#)
- [Hebrews 12:23](#)
- [Hebrews 12:24](#)
- [Hebrews 12:25](#)
- [Hebrews 12:26](#)
- [Hebrews 12:27](#)
- [Hebrews 12:28](#)
- [Hebrews 12:29](#)

CONSIDER JESUS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST  
 Click chart to enlarge  
 Charts from Jensen's Survey of the NT - used by permission  
 Swindoll's Chart, Interesting Pictorial Chart of Hebrews, Another Chart

| The Epistle<br>to the Hebrews                    |                                                    |                                  |                                                   |                |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| INSTRUCTION<br>Hebrews 1-10:18                   |                                                    |                                  | EXHORTATION<br>Hebrews 10:19-13:25                |                |
| Superior Person<br>of Christ<br>Hebrews 1:1-4:13 | Superior Priest<br>in Christ<br>Hebrews 4:14-10:18 |                                  | Superior Life<br>In Christ<br>Hebrews 10:19-13:25 |                |
| BETTER THAN<br>PERSON<br>Hebrews 1:1-4:13        | BETTER<br>PRIESTHOOD<br>Heb 4:14-7:28              | BETTER<br>COVENANT<br>Heb 8:1-13 | BETTER<br>SACRIFICE<br>Heb 9:1-10:18              | BETTER<br>LIFE |

|                              |                          |                            |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| MAJESTY<br>OF<br>CHRIST      | MINISTRY<br>OF<br>CHRIST | MINISTERS<br>FOR<br>CHRIST |
| DOCTRINE                     |                          | DUTY                       |
| DATE WRITTEN:<br>ca. 64-68AD |                          |                            |

See [ESV Study Bible "Introduction to Hebrews"](#)  
(See also [MacArthur's Introduction to Hebrews](#))

Borrow [Ryrie Study Bible](#)

Hebrews 12:1 **Therefore**, since we **have so great a cloud** of **witnesses surrounding** us, let us **also lay aside every encumbrance** and the **sin** which so **easily entangles** us, and let us **run** with **endurance** the **race** that is **set before** us, ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [Toigaroun kai hemeis, tosouton echontes \(PAPMPN\) perikeimenon \(PMPNSA\) hemin nephos marturon, ogkon apothemenoi \(AMPMPN\) panta kai ten euperistaton hamartian, dia hupomones trechomen \(1PPAS\) ton prokeimenon \(PMPMSA\) hemin agona.](#)

**Amplified:** THEREFORE THEN, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [who have borne testimony to the Truth], let us strip off and throw aside every encumbrance (unnecessary weight) and that sin which so readily (deftly and cleverly) clings to and entangles us, and let us run with patient endurance and steady and active persistence the appointed course of the race that is set before us, ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses enveloping us, let us strip off every weight and let us rid ourselves of the sin which so persistently surrounds us, and let us run with steadfast endurance the course that is marked out for us and, as we do so... ([Westminster Press](#))

**NLT:** Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Surrounded then as we are by these serried ranks of witnesses, let us strip off everything that hinders us, as well as the sin which dogs our feet, and let us run the race that we have to run with patience, ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Therefore also, as for us, having so great a cloud of those who are bearing testimony [i.e., the heroes of faith of chapter 11] surrounding us, having put off and away from ourselves once for all every encumbrance and that sin which so deftly and cleverly places itself in an entangling way around us, with patience let us be running the race lying before us,

**Young's Literal:** Therefore, we also having so great a cloud of witnesses set around us, every weight having put off, and the closely besetting sin, through endurance may we run the contest that is set before us

| <b>CONSIDER JESUS<br/>OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST</b> |                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>INSTRUCTION</b><br>He 1:1-10:18              | <b>EXHORTATION</b><br>He 10:19-13:25 |
| <b>REVELATION</b><br>He 1:1-10:18               | <b>RESPONSE</b><br>He 10:19-13:25    |
| <b>PRECEPTS</b><br>He 1:1-10:18                 | <b>PRACTICE</b><br>He 10:19-13:25    |
| <b>DOCTRINE</b><br>He 1:1-10:18                 | <b>DUTY</b><br>He 10:19-13:25        |

|                                                              |                                                     |                                                                   |                                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>SUPERIORITY<br/>of<br/>CHRIST'S PERSON</b><br>He 1:1-7:28 |                                                     | <b>SUPERIORITY<br/>of<br/>CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD</b><br>He 8:1-10:18 | <b>SUPERIORITY<br/>of the<br/>CHRISTIAN'S PRACTICE</b><br>He 10:19-13:25 |
| <b>MAJESTY<br/>OF CHRIST</b><br>He 1:1-4:13                  |                                                     | <b>MINISTRY<br/>OF CHRIST</b><br>He 4:14-10:18                    | <b>MINISTERS<br/>FOR CHRIST</b><br>He 10:19-13:25                        |
| <b>Christ<br/>the<br/>Son of God</b><br>He 1:1-2:4           | <b>Christ<br/>the<br/>Son of Man</b><br>He 2:5-4:13 | <b>Christ<br/>the<br/>High Priest</b><br>He 4:14-10:18            | <b>Christ<br/>the<br/>Way</b><br>He 10:19-13:25                          |

This chart is adapted in part from Jensen's Survey of the NT and Wilkinson's Talk Thru the Bible

**THEREFORE SINCE WE HAVE SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES SURROUNDING US: Toigaroun hemeie tosouton echontes (PAPMPN) perikeimenon (PMPNSA) hemin nephos marturon:**

- He 11:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14ff
- Is 60:8; Ezek 38:9,16
- Lk 16:28; Jn 3:32; 4:39,44; 1Pe 5:12; Re 22:16
- Hebrews 12 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Hebrews 12:1-3 Faith to Run the Christian Marathon](#) - Steven Cole
- [Hebrews 12:1 Dealing with Habitual Sins](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-4 Run for Your Life](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-3 The Race of Faith](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-4 Running the Race That Is Set Before Us](#) - John MacArthur
- See revised commentary on 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Run the Race to Win!



**RUN THE RACE TO WIN**

**KEY WORDS IN HEBREWS - Click for complete list of Key Words in Hebrews**

**Irving Jensen** writes that "The main theme of Hebrews may be stated thus: The knowledge and assurance of how great this High Priest Jesus is should lift the drifting believer from spiritual lethargy to vital Christian maturity. Stated another way: The antidote for backsliding is a growing personal knowledge of Jesus (He 2:1-note, He 2:3-note). (Jensen, I. L. Jensen's Survey of the New Testament: Search and discover. page 418. Chicago: Moody Press)

Many expositors feel that the chapter break between 11 and 12 is a poor chapter division since **witnesses'** concludes the discussion of Hebrews 11.

As an aside remember that effective Biblical teaching makes frequent use of **figures of speech** (especially **simile and metaphor**) wherein the author compares the Christian life to familiar objects, events or practices. In the present discussion, the author is drawing the reader's mind to the competition in a Olympic sports stadium, and specifically comparing the Christian life to a foot race, which was usually the featured event in the Olympic games. This comparison would be very familiar to the reader.

**Westcott** - Christians in one sense had entered on the inheritance of the promises for which the fathers had waited (Heb 11:39); but the full enjoyment of possession was still delayed. In such a case the example of the earlier heroes of faith was of prevailing power. With less encouragement than the Hebrew Christians enjoyed they (Ed: Those described in Hebrews 11) had conquered. They had looked to a Christ imaged in prophecy: the Hebrews could look to a Christ Who had 'come in the flesh' (Jesus). ([Hebrews 12 Commentary](#))

**Therefore since** (for that very reason - see **terms of conclusion**) ([5105](#)) (**toigaroun** from **toi** = consequently + **gár** =therefore + **oun** = then, therefore) means by certain consequence or consequently. This triple compound word is used to draw a conclusion of emphasis. **Friberg** - "a particle strongly introducing an inference from preceding facts for that very reason therefore, therefore in the light of that." (Analytical Lexicon) The only other use in NT is 1Thes 4:8.

**Toigaroun** is a very strong Greek expression which could be translated something like "Mark you, for this reason, therefore let's run the race."

**Wuest** - The "**therefore**" (**toigaroun**) reaching back and gathering together all the heroes of 11:4–40, their faith, and their exploits, is an emphatic particle, strongly affirming the facts on which the following exhortation is based. The words "we also" are not to be construed with "are compassed about, etc.," but with "let us run." The Nestle Greek text so punctuates. The Old Testament saints, the witnesses of chapter 11, were not compassed about with a cloud of witnesses. They are the witnesses of whom the writer is speaking. ([Hebrews Commentary](#))

**Westcott** - *Therefore assuredly let us also*, who are under the new Covenant in the time of our trial. ([Hebrews 12 Commentary](#))

**Alford** says **toigaroun** "is an earnest and solemn inference, only found at the beginning of a sentence." ([Hebrews 12 - Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary](#))

A world of encouragement is bound up the examples of the saints who have run and finished the race. The writer sought to encourage the first century saints to endure and he would say the same to you and to me today.

**We have** ([2192](#))(**echo**) means to have and in the present context means to possess. Present tense indicates that this is their continual "possession." Note the plural pronoun "**we**" which indicates the writer "regards himself and his fellow Christians as placed in an arena and contending for a great prize... The writer identifies himself with those whose courage he desires to animate: Heb 10:39" ([Westcott](#))

**Expositor's Bible Commentary** notes that the plural pronoun "**we**" "links the writer to his readers. He is a competitor in the race as well as they and writes as one who is as much caught up in the contest as they are. ([Gaebelein, F. Editor: Expositor's Bible Commentary 6-Volume New Testament. Zondervan Publishing](#))

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith but the remainder of the chapter demonstrates faith. Based on this pattern, the writer is saying in essence "Faith in God is to be demonstrated, not defined." (Tozer) Therefore because of the successful examples of faith in action in Hebrews 11, we are not just to walk by faith, but to run by faith, demonstrating our faith to the skeptical, watching world.

**So great** ([5118](#)) (**tosoutos**) is a strengthened form of **tósos** meaning so much and translated in this verse "so great".

**Tosoutos** - 20x in the NT - all(1), as much(1), great many(1), price (1), same degree(1), so great(1), so long(1),so long\*(1), so many(4), so many people(1), so many things(1), so much(1), such(1), such a price (1), such great(4).

Matt. 8:10; 15:33; Lk. 7:9; 15:29; Jn. 6:9; 12:37; 14:9; 21:11; Acts 5:8; 1 Co. 14:10; Gal. 3:4; Heb. 1:4; 4:7; 7:22; 10:25; 12:1; Rev. 18:7, 17.

**A cloud** ([3509](#)) (**nephos**) literally refers to a shapeless mass covering the sky (a mass of clouds). Here in the only NT use **nephos** figuratively refers to a crowd or throng, especially emphasizing the number.

Aristophanes in his play, *The Frogs*, uses the concept of **clouds** as **witnesses**. The picture of a cloud describing a crowded group of people is a common classical figure and expresses not only the great number of people, but also the unity of the crowd in their witness.

**Wuest** - The word "**cloud**" here is not **nephele** which is a detached and sharply outlined cloud, but **nephos**, a great mass of cloud covering the entire visible space of the heavens, and therefore without definite form, or a single large mass in which outlines are not emphasized or distinguished. The use of "**cloud**" for a mass of living beings is familiar in poetry. Homer speaks of "**acloud** of footmen, a **cloud** of Trojans." Themistocles, addressing the Athenians, says of the host of Xerxes, "we have had the fortune to save both ourselves and Greece by repelling so great a **cloud** of men." ([Hebrews Commentary](#))

**Cambridge Bible** - A classical Greek and Latin, as well as Hebrew, metaphor for a great multitude. Thus Homer speaks of "a cloud of foot-soldiers." ([Hebrews 12 Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges](#))

**Westcott** - A '**cloud**' is used in all languages for a dense mass of living beings from the time of Homer downwards ([Hebrews 12 Commentary](#))

In the Greek world "**clouds** have a religious significance because of human dependence on them and the fear of sinister

thunderclouds. The Harpies personify storm clouds, and there is a goddess Nephele. The cult of the clouds does not occur in Greece, but Orphism includes invocation of the clouds at the offering of incense. Aristophanes parodies Orphic worship in his *Clouds*; the clouds represent the new gods of sophistry. The cloud is an attribute of deity; Orphism itself often places the clouds in the service of the supreme god. Gods watching battles hide in clouds. They hide their assistants of favorites in clouds. The cloud is also the chariot of the gods that leads the hero to them. In later Hellenism the cloud has a stylized part in divine appearances or journeys. ([Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Eerdmans](#))

There are 25 uses of **nephos** (17 in Job!) in the **Septuagint (LXX)** (Job 7:9; 20:6; 22:14; 26:8f; 30:15; 35:5; 36:28; 37:11, 16, 21f; 38:1, 9, 34, 37; 40:6; Ps. 104:3; Prov. 3:20; 8:28; 16:15; 25:14, 23; Eccl. 11:3; 12:2). Most OT **Septuagint (LXX)** uses are literal but some are figurative...

**Job 30:15** "Terrors are turned against me, They pursue my honor as the wind, And my prosperity has passed away like a cloud.

**Proverbs 16:15** In the light of a king's face is life, And his favor is like a cloud with the spring rain.

**Adam Clarke** commenting on the meaning of "**cloud**" writes that " Both the Greeks and Latins frequently use the term **cloud**, to express a great number of persons or things; so in Euripides,... a **dense cloud** of shields; and Statius, Thebiad... a **cloud** of spearmen. The same metaphor frequently occurs. ([Commentary](#)) (Bolding added)

The picture of a **cloud** then would describe a crowded group of people and express not only the **great number** of people, but also the **unity** of the crowd in their witness - they all gained God's approval by faith as recorded: "And **all** these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised (Hebrews 11:39)

**B F Westcott** writes that "The image of the amphitheater with the rising rows of spectators seems to suggest the thought of an encircling cloud. ([Hebrews 12 Commentary](#))

**John Calvin** derives an excellent application from "**cloud**" writing that "Had they (the witnesses) been a few in number, yet they ought to have roused us by their example; but as they were a vast throng, they ought more powerfully to stimulate us. He says that we are so surrounded by this dense throng, that wherever we turn our eyes many examples of faith immediately meet us. ([Commentary on Hebrews](#))

**Witnesses** ([3144](#)) ( **martus/martys** > root of our English "martyr") is one who has information or knowledge of something and hence can bring to light or confirm something.

**Martus** - 35x in the NT - Mt. 18:16; 26:65; Mk. 14:63; Lk. 11:48; 24:48; Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 6:13; 7:58; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 22:15, 20; 26:16; Rom. 1:9; 2 Co. 1:23; 13:1; Phil. 1:8; 1Thess. 2:5, 10; 1Ti 5:19; 6:12; 2Ti 2:2; Heb. 10:28; 12:1; 1 Pet. 5:1; Rev. 1:5; 2:13; 3:14; 11:3; 17:6

According to **B F Westcott** "There is apparently no evidence that **martus** is ever used simply in the sense of a **spectator**." At the same time it is impossible to exclude the thought of the spectators in the amphitheatre. The passage would not lose in vividness though it would lose in power if theaton were substituted for marturon. These champions of old time occupy the place of spectators, but they are more than spectators. They are spectators who interpret to us the meaning of our struggle, and who bear testimony to the certainty of our success if we strive lawfully (2Ti 2:5). ([Hebrews 12 Commentary](#)) (Bolding added)

**The Bible Knowledge Commentary** agrees noting that **witnesses** "This does not mean that they watch believers today. ([Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

**Witnesses** who are former participants have just been presented. The witnesses are like a coach who exhorts his team onward crying out...

**Others have done it, and so can you!**

They overcame and gained the victory, so there can be no excuse for us who have far more light (the complete revelation of God's Word) and greater advantages (the indwelling Spirit of Christ), to fail or fall by the way to "suffer loss," and be "saved so as by fire."

**Warren Wiersbe** comments that the men and women of Hebrews 11 "are the **cloud**" that witnesses to us, "God can be trusted! Put your faith in His Word and keep running the race!" When you read the Old Testament, your faith should grow, for the account shows what God did in and through people who dared to trust His promises (Ro 15:4-note). When you read the Gospels, you see the greatest example of endurance in Jesus Christ. ([Wiersbe, W. With the Word: Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Handbook. Nelson](#))

**Tertullian**, (an early church father), commenting on the witnesses of Hebrews 11 wrote that "You can judge the quality of their faith from the way they behave. Discipline is an index to doctrine."

**John Calvin** explains that through the examples of the witnesses it is as though the writer was saying "that faith is sufficiently proved by their testimony, so that no doubt ought to be entertained; for the virtues of the saints are so many testimonies to confirm us, that we, relying on them as our guides and associates, ought to go onward to God with more alacrity. ([Commentary on Hebrews](#))

**Hughes:** The scene is a great coliseum. The occasion is a footrace, a distance event. The contestants include the author and the members of his flock and, by mutual faith, us. The cloud of witnesses that fills the stadium are the great spiritual athletes of the past, Hall of Faith members - every one a Gold Medal winner. They are not live witnesses of the event, but "witnesses" by the fact that their past lives bear witness to monumental, persevering faith that, like Abel's faith, "still speaks, even though he is dead" (Heb. 11:4). ([Hebrews- An Anchor for the Soul, Volume 2 Preaching the Word- R. Kent Hughes](#))

**S Lewis Johnson** writes that in interpreting the **witnesses** "Many picture the saints who have gone before as spectators in the stadium. So we as Christians are running a race with the spectators observing us. Even your loved ones may be looking down and they are watching you carefully. This may be a motivation for you to run well. If I knew that Moses, and Paul and all the prophets were there watching, that would indeed be an incentive for me. **However, that is not what he is talking about.** Rather it is the lives which faithful men have lived and the stories found in the Scriptures which are witnesses to us. It is not what we see in our spectators that is to move us, but what we see in the Scriptures!... So as we look at these men and women, there should come to our minds this conviction - that the God of yesterday is also the God of today. In other words, the things that God did through Enoch, through Noah, through Abraham, through Jacob, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, the things that God did through them, **He is able** to do today (through you and through me beloved)!" (Bolding added)

One of the best ways to develop endurance and encouragement is to get to know the godly men and women of the Old Testament who ran the race and won. The author had alluded to these godly examples in Hebrews 6 writing:

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but **imitators (mimetes)** of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." (see notes Hebrews 6:11; 6:12)

The people of God from Bible days  
Can help us through life in many ways;  
Those saints of old can give direction  
To steer and lead us toward perfection.  
—Fitzhugh

#### **Imitate those who imitate Christ.**

In a parallel teaching **Paul** explained to the saints at Rome that "whatever was written in earlier times (referring to the Old Testament) was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Ro 15:4-note)

**B F Westcott** - The **witnesses** of whom the cloud is composed are unquestionably the countless heroes of faith whose deeds have been summarized in Hebrews 11. The testimony which they bear can only be the testimony which they bear to God, either by victorious achievements or by courageous sufferings, answering to that which He has wrought for and in them. In both respects, as conquerors and as sufferers, they witness to His power and faithfulness; and those who regard them cannot but be strengthened by their testimony. ([Hebrews 12 Commentary](#))

**A W Pink** goes so far as to add that "only then do we read the O. T. narratives unto profit when we draw from them incentives to practical godliness. In Hebrews 11 we have had described at length many aspects and characteristics of the life of faith. There we saw that a life of faith is an intensely practical thing, consisting of very much more than day-dreaming, or being regaled with joyous emotions, or even resting in orthodox views of the truth. By faith Noah built an ark, Abraham separated from his idolatrous neighbors and gained a rich inheritance, Moses forsook Egypt and became leader of Israel's hosts. By faith the Red Sea was crossed, Jericho captured, Goliath slain, the mouths of lions were closed, the violence of fire was quenched. A spiritual faith, then, is not a passive thing, but an active, energetic, vigorous, and fruitful one. ([Pink, A W: An Exposition of Hebrews](#))

**Wuest** - The question to which we must now address ourselves is as to just how we must regard these **witnesses**? The word is **martus**, "one who testifies, or can testify, to what he has seen or heard or knows by any other means." It is used in a legal way in the papyri in the sense of witnesses to a contract or legal document. In an ethical sense it was used in the early Church to designate those who have proved the strength and genuineness of their faith in the Lord Jesus by undergoing a violent death. The word does not include in its meaning, the idea of a person looking at something. Peter uses it of himself (I Pet. 5:1) as a witness of the sufferings of Christ, that is, one who has been retained and commissioned to testify to the sufferings of Christ which he has seen. The heroes of faith of Heb 11:4–40 are the cloud of witnesses, testifying to the efficacy of the faith way of salvation and

victory. The writer calls them, so to speak, to the witness stand to bear testimony to what they have seen and heard and felt as to what faith could and did do for them, so that this first century Jew might become convinced that the salvation which Messiah wrought out on the Cross, must be appropriated by faith, not works. As to the idea of these Old Testament saints looking down from heaven and watching the lives of the saints on earth, the following might be said: Vincent teaches it, Alford insists upon it, and Expositor's says that if the idea is there at all, which is very doubtful, it is only introduced by the words "running" and "race." ([Hebrews Commentary](#))

**W E Vine** writes that the **great cloud of witnesses** in Hebrews 11 "were spoken of as those who had witness borne to them (Heb 11:2, 3, 4, 5, 39); here they are themselves witnesses. Not that those who are now with Christ are spectators of earthly persons, but that, as to the persons mentioned in chapter 11, their lives of faith are so recorded in the Old Testament narratives that they seem to be living spectators urging us on to run as they did. The inspired record is like an amphitheater, and, as with the cloud of onlookers of old, so these heroes of faith utter their voices in the sacred page. As we read of their trials and triumphs, they, so to speak, "compass us about." The writer of the epistle is here testifying to the permanence and vividness of the records of Scripture. ([Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

And so if you think you're experiencing problems with your family, read about Joseph's problems in (Genesis 37:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6,7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16,, 17, 18ff)! If you think your job is too big for you, study the life of Moses (Exodus 3:11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16ff). If you are tempted to retaliate, see how David handled the problem the continual curses from Shimei of the house of Saul (2Samuel 16:5, 6, 7, 8ff). All of these examples, and specifically those in the Hebrews "hall of fame" [chapter 11](#) are given for our reference that we might be instructed, convicted and encouraged to run the race with endurance. For example commenting on Moses in Hebrews 11 (He 11:24, 25, 26, 27-see notes Hebrews 11:24; 25; 26; 27) **Vance Havner** once said that because he was a man of faith, Moses was able to

"see the invisible,  
choose the imperishable and  
do the impossible"

**John Piper** applies this teaching about **encumbrances** writing that "The word **"witness"** can have either meaning: the act of seeing something, or the act of telling something. Which is it here? I think it is the act of telling. The verb form of this word **"witness"** (**martureo**) is used five times in Hebrews 11 (Heb 11:2, 4 [twice], He 11:5, 39) and always refers to the giving of a (confirming) testimony rather than the mere watching of an event. **So I take the witnesses of Hebrews 12:1 to be the saints who have run the race before us, and have gathered, as it were, along the marathon route to say, through the testimony of their lives, "By faith I finished, you can too!...** This is the way all the witnesses of Hebrews 11 are helping us. They have gathered along the sidelines of our race and they hold out their wounds and their joys and give us the best high-fives we ever got: "Go for it! You can do it. By faith you can finish. You can lay the weights down and the sins. By faith, by the assurance of better things hoped for, you can do it. I did it. And I know it can be done. Run. RUN!"... There are dozens and hundreds and thousands of those who have gone before and who have finished the race by faith and surround us like a great cloud of witnesses who say: "It can be done! By faith it can be done." ([Running with the Witnesses](#)) (Bolding added)

**William Kelly** - The witnesses who lie all around are those described and summarised in the chapters before, not spectators of us as some have unintelligently imagined, but men that obtained testimony from God in virtue of faith. Now and then, here and there, mainly of the chosen people, but carefully shown to have lived and suffered in faith before Abraham, they form a grand cloud, each characterised by some proved fidelity to God's will, a few by more than one, none by more than "the friend of God." But what was he, variously tried and faithful, compared with "Jesus," as this Epistle often and with divine intent calls our Lord? In His path, in His testimony, for this is what is here in question, the light shone full and unrefracted. Its unwavering equality marks its unity of perfection. Yet never had been, never can there be again, such depths and such comprehensiveness of trial, apart from that which it was His alone to bear, in His suffering once for sins. to effect everlasting redemption. ([Hebrews 12 William Kelly Major Works Commentary](#))

**Joseph Parker** - This text has often been used for the purpose of cheering discouraged and faint-hearted saints, by the doctrine that we are all watched by the living dead; so to say, they are gathered in infinite circles around our earth, and are watching our conduct in the race of life: and the very fact that we are being looked upon by such a cloud of observers should stir our energy, illumine our hope, confirm our purposes, and turn our very weakness into strength. That animated exhortation is full of truth and wisdom: but it is not the truth or the wisdom of the text What are we to understand by "a cloud of witnesses"? certainly not a cloud of observers. Men say they witnessed such and such an event: that is to say, they looked upon it, they beheld it, they took note of it: but that is not the sense in which the word is used in this verse. The verse has no reference whatever to observance, inspection, or criticism of what other people are doing. The word "witnesses" is a right word, but it must be understood in its right and definite meaning as here employed. The right word would be "martyrs": "wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of martyrs"—that indeed is the literal word:  $\mu\alpha\rho\tau\upsilon\rho\iota\varsigma$  is the word which designates the witness as in the Epistle it was originally

written. The witness therefore, in this case, is one who bears witness, who testifies, who (so to say) stands forward and declares that he is prepared to make declaration concerning certain doctrines, truths, practices, claims, and demands. So the witness is not an observer, but a testifier, and a man so earnest in his testimony that he would die for it rather than contradict it. ([Hebrews 12 The People's Bible by Joseph Parker](#))

A number of well known, usually excellent expositors of Scripture such as **Marvin Vincent** (see his note below), **F B Meyer**, et al, seem to have missed the **context** and see these saints in [Hebrews 11](#) as spectators looking down from heaven observing the lives of those on earth. But the writer of Hebrews does not call them **spectators** (for which there was a specific Greek word) but **witnesses**. Even reference to the definition of **witnesses** as those who give an account of what they have seen by their words and by their actions would counter the interpretation of this cloud as indicative of spectators. **Witnesses** give testimony, offer evidence of actual events and generally present evidence based on their direct personal knowledge. It is as if the reader is sitting in a courtroom, and has just listened to the testimony of the witnesses of Hebrews 11.

**Marvin Vincent** at first seems to agree with the preceding discussion but then veers off course '**Witnesses** does not mean **spectators**, but those who have borne witness to the truth, as those enumerated in Hebrews 11. Yet the idea of **spectators** is implied, and is really the principal idea. The writer's picture is that of an arena in which the Christians whom he addresses are contending in a race, while the vast host of the heroes of faith who, after having borne witness to the truth, have entered into their heavenly rest, watches the contest from the encircling tiers of the arena, compassing and overhanging it like a cloud, filled with lively interest and sympathy, and lending heavenly aid (**Ed**: There is no Scriptural support for such an interpretation. In other words, although we commonly here references that the saints in heaven see and hear what we are doing on earth, that is by no means established in Scripture. Is it possible? Of course. But when Scripture is silent, we need to be cautious and avoid speculating!).

And furthermore whether the saints can see or not is a moot point and is far less significant than the fact that the omniscient Holy God **sees all** for "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good." (Pr 15:3)

## **Practical application of Great Cloud of Witnesses**

### **Meditate on lives of saints in Hebrews 11**

In short, the **context** as well as the definition of the Greek word **martus**, indicate that the **witnesses** in Hebrews 11 are not spectators looking on. Instead, the intent of the writer is that in view of the **faith** the lives of these men and women **bear witness to**, the reader is **exhorted** to finish the race exercising a similar faith and endurance. We have all begun by faith, are to daily walk by faith (Col 2:6-note) and must run to "finishing tape" by faith. Be encouraged by the witnesses of Hebrews 11, who all bear testimony that the race can be run successfully and that the rewards are great.

**F. F. Bruce** explains that those in Hebrews 11 are **witnesses** in the sense "that by their loyalty and endurance they have borne witness to the possibilities of the life of faith. It is not so much they who look at us as we who look to them -- for encouragement.

**Marcus Dods** - we in our turn, we as well as they, and with the added advantage of having so many testimonies to the good results of faith. Nephos (cloud) used frequently in Homer and elsewhere, as "nubes" in Latin and "cloud" in English to suggest a vast multitude. Marturon, "witnesses," persons who by their actions have testified to the worth of faith. The **cloud of witnesses** are those named and suggested in Hebrews 11; persons whose lives witnessed to the work and triumph of faith, and whose faith was witnessed to by Scripture, cf. Hebrews 11:2; Hebrews 11:4-5. This cloud is **surrounding**, because, as the writer has just shown, look where they will into their history his Hebrew readers see such examples of faith. It is impossible to take *martures* as equivalent to *theatai* (spectator). If the idea of "**spectator**" is present at all, which is very doubtful, it is only introduced by the words **run... the race**. The idea is not that they are running in presence of spectators and must therefore run well; but that their people's history being filled with examples of much-enduring but triumphant faith, they also must approve their lineage by showing a like persistence of faith. ([Hebrews 12 Commentary - Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**W G Pascoe** (Biblical Illustrator) adds that the **witnesses** in Hebrews 11 bear testimony... **(1)**. ... To the fact that their confidence in God was not misplaced. A man may fail, but God never. **(2)**. ... To the sufficiency of Divine grace. They had no more natural goodness than we; but they overcame it all, and it was in the strength of the Lord they did so. **(3)**. ... To the faithfulness of God to His promises.

**Surrounding** (4029) (**perikeimai** from **peri** = around + **keimai** = be laid down) literally means to lie around (as a millstone - Mk 9:42, Lk 17:2, as chains - Acts 28:20) and thus to be located around some object or area and thus to be around, to surround, to encircle and then to hamper.

**Perikeimai** was used in secular Greek of a crowd of people surrounding someone (Herodian 7, 9, 1)

**Perikeimai** is used figuratively in Hebrews 12:1 to depict the restraining, ensnaring power of our "darling" sin which trips us up and



thus hinders our progress in the Christian race.

**Westcott** - literally 'having spread about us.' The competitors feel the crowd towering about and above them... Believers are conscious of the surrounding host. ([Hebrews 12 Commentary](#))

The writer of Hebrews had earlier used **perikeimai** figuratively to describe the Levitical high priests as those who were also **'beset** (perikeimai) with weakness." (He 5:2-note)

**Perikeimai** - 5x in 5v in **NAS** - Mk 9:42; Lk. 17:2; Acts 28:20; He 5:2; He 12:1. **NAS** = beset(1), hung(2), surrounding(1), wearing(1). Not found in the Septuagint (although it is in the apocryphal book 4Macc 12:2).

**Perikeimai** is used literally by Jesus to describe the fate of those who cause one of the little ones to stumble declaring that "it would be better for him if with a heavy millstone **hung around** his neck, he had been cast into the sea." (Mk 9:42, cp Lk 17:2)

Paul uses **perikeimai** to describe his being **"bound "** with a literal chain for the sake of the hope of Israel (referring to the Messianic hope, incarnate in Christ) (Acts 28:20)

**Perikeimai** is in the **present tense** and thus describes that which continually surrounds. The point is that the Christian racer is to be continually mindful of the faithful crowd of Hebrews 11 towering about them as cloud.

**Steven Cole** - I would encourage you to study both the many interesting characters in the Bible and the great men and women who have run the race of faith over the course of church history. You'll learn how they failed, so that you don't have to make the same mistakes. And you'll learn how they ran well, so that you can imitate their faith (Heb 13:7). Many of the battles they fought, whether on a personal level or in their ministries, you will have to fight, too. Knowing that a godly like Jonathan Edwards got voted out of his church, and understanding the reasons why, can be a great source of encouragement to a who is battling in a difficult church ministry. Realizing all of the problems that Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission went through can help you to hang in there when problems multiply. I sometimes think about the disappointments, suffering, and persecution that Adoniram Judson endured in Burma and think, "I can endure a few hardships in the ministry." But the best help in the race of faith does not come from this cloud of witnesses. ([Hebrews 12:1-3 Faith to Run the Christian Marathon](#))

**Spurgeon's Exposition (compiled) on Hebrews 12:1** - In those games, those who ran and wrestled wore very little clothing, or often nothing at all. A runner might lose the race through being entangled by his scarf, so he laid aside everything that might hinder or hamper him. Oh, for that blessed consecration to our heavenly calling, by which everything that would hinder us shall be put aside, that we may give ourselves, disentangled, to the great gospel to race!

We can have no doubt about the great truths which we believe, for we are compassed about with a cloud of witnesses. The former chapter gives us the names of many of these glorious bearers of testimony, who all by faith achieved great wonders and so bore witness to the truth of God. Having therefore no room for doubt let us throw our whole strength into our high calling, and run with patience having our eyes always fixed upon him, the beginner and finisher of our faith, who has run the race himself and won the prize, and now sits down on the right hand of the throne of God.

The eyes of onlookers stimulate the runners in a race, therefore since all heaven looks on, let us not flag till the goal is reached.

It was no excitement to run if there were no onlookers. The spur to the racers and wrestlers in the Grecian games was found in the eyes of those who gazed, in the clapping of their hands, in the shouting of their applause, as we as in the prizes that awaited the winners. Behold, my brethren, even our most private acts are looked upon by the millions of eyes of the great cloud of witnesses. Angels tell the news of how we run the great race, and they rejoice when we prosper. Let us "run well" because so many are looking on at us, and just as the Grecian runner stripped himself of his clothes before he started, so "let us lay aside every weight," the weight of sin, the weight of care, the weight of grief, the weight of worldliness, and everything else that might hinder us Above all, let us beware of that sin which, like a trailing garment, might entangle our feet, and trip us up, for, if we fall, our opponent will certainly win the prize. Look well to that sin to which you are the most liable. We all have some besetting sin; let us especially be on the watch against that. While we keep all the wall with diligence, let us set a double guard at the most vulnerable point.

"And let us run with patience" or "endurance." There is to be a combination of the active and passive in the Christian; he must be able to endure and yet be able still to work. "Let us run with patience, " run when we are out of breath, run when our bones ache, run when the prize seems to be further off than ever, and to be hidden from our eyes, run when the hot sun makes us athirst,-still "let us run with patience the race that is set before us," for it is he that endureth unto the end who shall be saved;- not merely the starter in the race, for there are many who begin, and who begin not in the power of the Spirit of God, and who therefore do not persevere unto the end By this sign shall the true children of God be known, that they run with endurance unto the end, "looking unto Jesus." As the wife of the Persian nobleman said, when her husband asked her what she thought of Darius, that she had not looked at him, she had no eyes for any man but her husband, so the Christian has no eyes for any but Christ,- "looking unto Jesus,"-

keeping his eye always upon him, and so running the Christian race. (Spurgeon Exposition on Hebrews)

#### LET US ALSO LAY ASIDE: apothemenoi (AMPMPN):

- Matthew 10:37,38; Luke 8:14; 9:59, 60, 61, 62; 12:15; 14:26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33; 18:22, 23, 24, 25; 21:34; Romans 13:11, 12, 13, 14; 2Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 4:22, 23, 24; Colossians 3:5, 6, 7, 8; 1Timothy 6:9,10; 2Timothy 2:4; 1Peter 2:1; 4:2; 1John 2:15,16
- Hebrews 12 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Hebrews 12:1-3 Faith to Run the Christian Marathon](#) - Steven Cole
- [Hebrews 12:1 Dealing with Habitual Sins](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-4 Run for Your Life](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-3 The Race of Faith](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-4 Running the Race That Is Set Before Us](#) - John MacArthur

### PREPARATION TO RUN: A TWOFOLD LAYING ASIDE

**Ironside** - Here then the apostle begins with the familiar "Let us" of grace, so different from the "Thou shalt" of law. [Hebrews 12 - Ironside's Notes](#)

**Marcus Dods** on **lay aside... encumbrance** - The allusion therefore is to the training preparatory to a race by which an encumbering superfluity of flesh is reduced. The Christian runner must rid himself even of innocent things which might retard him. And all that does not help, hinders. It is by running he learns what these things are. So long as he stands he does not feel that they are burdensome and hampering. [\(Hebrews 12 Commentary - Expositor's Greek Testament\)](#)

**Spurgeon** observes how the author of Hebrews (he thinks it was Paul but that is doubtful) "includes himself, so that his warning may not sound like upbraiding. We cannot win if we are weighted: the pace will have to be very swift, and we cannot get to it, or keep it up, if we have weights to carry. Unloaded, we shall find the race taxing all our powers; but weighted, we shall be doomed to failure. Oh, to lay aside all carking (burdensome, annoying) care, fretfulness, ambition, anger, greed, and selfish desire! These were never worth the labor they have cost us; but now that we have become running men, we must have done with them. Down they must go, till the last ounce is on the ground. Like the Greek footman, we would strip; and instead of adding weight, we would diminish even our own bulk, that we may fly along the course. O ye that would win, heed the caution, and "lay aside every weight," whether it be great or small; and press towards the mark! Run for it, man! Thou hadst need do nothing else but run... Do I not hear you say, "May God help us"? This must be a tough race which requires such stripping as this. If every weight of care must be laid aside, and every rag of sin, who is sufficient for these things? 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 vigor, 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? Does not all this very admirably introduce the verse which is specially my text- "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith"? [\(The Rule of the Race\)](#)

**Let us lay aside** (659) (**apotithemi** from **apo** = away from + **tithemi** = put) means to put or take something away from its normal location and put it out of the way.

**Apotithemi** - 9x in the NT - Matt. 14:3; Acts 7:58; Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:22, 25; Col. 3:8; Heb. 12:1; Jas. 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:1 TheNAS renders **apotithemi** as laid aside(1), lay aside(3), laying aside(1), put(1), put aside(1), putting aside(2).

Here are all 12 "**let us**" exhortations in Hebrews (in the NAS) = Heb 4:1, 11, 14, 16; 6:1; 10:22, 23, 24; 12:1, 28; 13:13, 15.

**Apotithemi** literally was used to describe the laying aside of clothes or taking off one's clothes, as did the runners who participated in the Olympic Games. In fact the ancient Grecian runners ran in the stadium nearly naked.

Figuratively **apotithemi** means to cease doing what one is doing, to throw it off, be done with it or put it away. Stop doing it, "throw it off" and be done with it.

In this verse **lay aside** is in the **aorist tense** which speaks of an effective, once for all action. The **middle voice** speaks of the

subject initiating the action to lay aside and participating in the action. The middle voice conveys the "reflexive" sense, and so the idea is "you **yourself** lay aside". **Wuest** renders it "having put off and away from ourselves".

Note the preposition **apo** is a marker of dissociation, implying a rupture from a former association. This truth should help us picture what we as believers should do. The idea is that we should "place some distance between" the old life (the former lusts which were ours when we were ignorant of salvation" (see notes 1 Peter 1:14; 15). The writer is exhorting the readers to "travel light" spiritually speaking.

**Spurgeon** - We cannot win if we are weighted. The pace will have to be very swift, and we cannot get to it, or keep it up, if we have weights to carry. Unloaded, we shall find the race taxing all our powers; weighted, we shall be doomed to failure.

## SOME OTHER THINGS BELIEVERS ARE TO LAY ASIDE

(Each verse below also uses apothithemi)

Ro 13:12-note deeds of darkness (see notes)

Eph 4:22-note old self... lusts of deceit (see note)

Eph 4:25-note falsehood (see note)

Col 3:8-note anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech (see note)

Jas 1:21-note all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness

1Pe 2:1-note all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander (see note)

Like Olympic runners who are willing to gain any legitimate, legal advantage in order to win, we are to lay aside anything and everything that tethers us to this earth and run with our face set like flint toward the city Whose Builder is God. We should run to our heavenly Jerusalem, wherein dwells our great Reward, Christ Jesus!

Ancient as well as modern athletes would wear training weights to help them prepare for the events. However no athlete would actually participate wearing the weights because they would slow him down. Using the same principle modern baseball players swings a bat with a heavy metal collar on it before they step to the plate. This is not the best analogy in the present context because the weights the writer refers to exert only a negative effect.

What then are the "weights" that we should remove so that we might win the race? In general terms, anything and everything that hinders our spiritual progress. As discussed below such encumbrances might be "good things". Continuing with the athletic metaphor, a winning athlete does not choose between the good and the bad; he chooses between the better and the best. So strip off and cast away even harmless things if they hinder your progress, diverts your attention, saps your energy or dampens your enthusiasm the goal of the upward call in Christ Jesus.

In a parallel passage Paul explains to Timothy that a good soldier "travels light" writing that...

"No soldier in active service **entangles** (describes a sheep whose wool is caught in thorns!) himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier." (see **note 2** Timothy 2:4)

**John Calvin** - As he refers to the likeness of a race, he bids us to be lightly equipped; for nothing more prevents haste than to be encumbered with burdens. Now there are various burdens which delay and impede our spiritual course, such as the love of this present life, the pleasures of the world, the lusts of the flesh, worldly cares, riches also and honors, and other things of this kind. Whosoever, then, would run in the course prescribed by Christ, must first disentangle himself from all these impediments, for we are already of ourselves more tardy than we ought to be, so no other causes of delay should be added. ([Commentary on Hebrews](#))

In the context of this letter, the writer is addressing the Jews of the first century who had expressed interest in Christianity but were being tempted not to walk faithfully and persevere to the end. They were being tempted to go back to the traditions and ritual of Judaism rather than the Way, the Truth and the Life.

### EVERY ENCUMBRANCE: ogkon apothemenoi (AMPMPN) panta:

- Hebrews 12 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Hebrews 12:1-3 Faith to Run the Christian Marathon](#) - Steven Cole
- [Hebrews 12:1 Dealing with Habitual Sins](#) - John MacArthur

- [Hebrews 12:1-4 Run for Your Life](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-3 The Race of Faith](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-4 Running the Race That Is Set Before Us](#) - John MacArthur

## DISCARD "WEIGHTY" NON-ESSENTIALS

**Every** (3956) (**pas**) any and all encumbrances. Note there is no "exception clause" but every "ounce" of superfluous ("spiritual") weight is to be cast off and away from ourselves.

**Encumbrance** (3591) (**ogkos**) literally refers to a bulk or a mass. It is used metaphorically in this verse (the only use in Scripture) to refer to that which serves to hinder or prevent someone from doing something - a hindrance, an impediment.

**Ogkos** referred to a mass as bending or bulging because of the load, burden. It referred to the excess bodily weight athletes shed during training. An athlete would strip for action both by the removal of superfluous flesh through rigorous training and by the removal of all clothes. In addition the ancient writers sometimes used "weights" figuratively for vices but that does not appear to be the primary meaning in this verse.

**Westcott** says **ogkos** "is used for bulk of body (Galen)... The competitor in a race seeks by training to reduce all superfluity of flesh, and in the contest lays aside all undue confidence and every encumbrance of dress. There can be little doubt that the image is taken from the immediate preparation for the decisive effort, so that the first sense is inapplicable, and it is hardly possible that **lay aside every encumbrance** could be used of the effects of training. The last interpretation is in every way the most appropriate. The writer seems to have in his mind the manifold encumbrances of society and business which would be likely to hinder a Christian convert. The duty of the convert would be to free himself from associations and engagements which, however innocent in themselves, hindered the freedom of his action." ([Hebrews 12 Commentary](#))

**Wuest** - The recipients are exhorted to lay aside every weight. The word is **ogkos** "bulk, mass," hence, "a swelling, superfluous flesh." The allusion, therefore, is to the training period preparatory to a race in which encumbering superfluity of flesh is reduced. Expositor's says: "The Christian runner must rid himself even of innocent things which might retard him. And all that does not help, hinders. It is by running he learns what these things are. So long as he stands he does not feel that they are burdensome and hampering." Thus, the word "weight" has the idea of "encumbrance." ([Hebrews Commentary](#))

The Christian life is a race that requires discipline and endurance. We must strip ourselves of everything that would impede us. Weights are things that may be harmless in themselves and yet hinder progress. Thus **encumbrances** could include material possessions, family ties, the love of comfort, lack of mobility, etc. In the Olympic races, there was no rule against carrying a supply of food and drink, but the runner who wanted to win would never run in such a ridiculous manner. **How sad that so many Christian runners choose to run weighed down with all manner of paraphernalia! What do you need to strip off that you might run unimpeded?**

**Marvin Vincent** in his discussion of **ogkos** adds that it was often used in the classics = "Sometimes metaphorically of a person, dignity, importance, pretension: of a writer's style, loftiness, majesty, impressiveness. Rend. "encumbrance," according to the figure of the racer who puts away everything which may hinder his running. So the readers are exhorted to lay aside every worldly hindrance or embarrassment to their Christian career. (Vincent, M. R. Word studies in the New Testament: Vol. 4, Page 537)

An **encumbrance** is whatever deadens your soul, and holds you back when thou should be pressing forward to the upward call. In the case of the Jews who had believed the **encumbrance** would include old associations of their former life, lingering Jewish and legal attachments and the tendency to compromise with the fulfilled rituals and ceremonialism of the law. Paul addressed similar "encumbrances" in his letter to the saints in Galatia explaining that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything (Nothing done or not done in the flesh makes any difference in one's relationship to God - in Christianity the external is immaterial and worthless, unless it reflects genuine internal righteousness), but faith working through love. You were **running well**; who **hindered** (cut in on causing you to break stride and stumble, who threw obstacles in your way of or cut up the road so that normal movement was impossible?) you from obeying the truth (legalism of the Judaizers was preventing the unsaved from coming to Christ in faith and the saved from following Him in faith)? (Gal 5:6-7)

**J Vernon McGee** gives us an illustration of the importance of laying aside whatever encumbers us "I remember years ago when Gil Dodds, a very fine Christian, was a famous runner in this country. Some of us went out to the track at the University of Southern California, to watch him run. He ran around the track a couple of times with tennis shoes on. Then he stopped and changed into some other shoes. One of the fellows there asked why he needed to change shoes. He took one of the tennis shoes and one of the lighter pair of shoes and tossed them both to the man who had asked the question. Believe me, there was not much difference in the weight of the shoes, but just enough, he said, to cause him to lose the race. In the Christian life there are a lot of things that are not wrong in and of themselves, but Christians should not be carrying those weights around. Why? Because you won't win the race.

([McGee, J V: Thru the Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#)) (Or [listen to an Mp3](#) from Thru the Bible)

**Jamieson**, et al write that encumbrance refers to "As corporeal (bodily) unwieldiness (extra body fat) was, through a disciplinary diet, laid aside by candidates for the prize in racing; so carnal and worldly lusts, and all, whether from without or within, that would impede the heavenly runner, are the spiritual weight to be laid aside. "Encumbrance," all superfluous weight; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, and even harmless and otherwise useful things which would positively retard us (Mk 10:50, the blind man casting away his garment to come to Jesus; Mk 9:42-48)

Each runner must honestly judge what hinders faith for him or her and resolutely lay it aside, even though others seem to be unhindered by the same thing. One cannot run well in an overcoat! What are the things that hinder? The indulgence in innocent pleasures of life may become a hindrance and in fact, any legitimate enjoyment can become a weight if every spare moment is given to that enjoyment. Or it might be a habit, one that in itself is not sin. For example, let's say every evening after work you watch four hours of television. Now television can have some edifying, educational shows. But if all you do in your spare time is sit before the television, television has become to you an **encumbrance**. And "couch potatoes" don't tend to race very well! In short if anything makes you so busy that you have no time for prayer, Bible study and spiritual service, you are too busy.

What "encumbers" one believer may be of no consequence to another believer. The point is that we must not let anything hamper us.

**M R De Haan** calls believers to a serious, self evaluation regarding **encumbrances** - "Let me ask you, how much time did you spend this past week reading the magazines, trade journals, newspapers, novels, market reports and other secular literature? And how much time did you spend feeding your soul on the Word? Oh, Christians, awake! You are in a race which calls for the best that is in you. What is the weight which is slowing you down in your Christian life? I may not have put my finger on your particular deposit of excess fat, but you know what it is. Ask yourself in everything you do, Does this help or hinder my spiritual life? It really isn't hard if we are only willing to face it. What a disappointment it will be when we meet the Judge of the race and miss the crown and our Lord's commendation. Athletes today as well as in ancient times would deny themselves everything, submit to the severest discipline in training, observe the strictest abstinence and separation from everything which might prevent them from being at the very peak of condition. (De Haan, M. R. Studies in Hebrews. Page 167)

Tis' only one life,  
Will soon be past.  
Only what's done in Christ  
Will last!

**A W Pink** - The principal thoughts suggested by the figure of the "race" are rigorous self-denial and discipline, vigorous exertion, persevering endurance. The Christian life is not a thing of passive luxuriation, but of active "fighting the good fight of faith!" The Christian is not called to lie down on flowery beds of ease, but to run a race, and athletics are strenuous, demanding self-sacrifice, hard training, the putting forth of every ounce of energy possessed. I am afraid that in this work-hating and pleasure-loving age, we do not keep this aspect of the truth sufficiently before us: we take things too placidly and lazily... let us be aroused by the howlings of fierce animals, let us be pursued by hungry wolves, and methinks that none of us would have much difficulty in understanding the meaning of those words "let us lay aside every weight!... Many erroneously suppose they would make much more progress spiritually if only their "circumstances" were altered. This is a serious mistake, and a murmuring against God's providential dealings with us. He shapes our "circumstances" as a helpful discipline to the soul, and only as we learn to rise above "circumstances," and walk with God in them, are we "running the race that is set before us.""

In another note **Pink** writes encumbrances are "Inordinate care for the present life, and fondness for it, is a dead weight for the soul, that pulls it down when it should ascend upwards and pulls it back when it should press forwards" (Matt. Henry). It is the practical duty of mortification which is here inculcated, the abstaining from those fleshly lusts "which war against the soul" (1Pet. 2:11-note). The racer must be as lightly clad as possible if he is to run swiftly: all that would cumber and impede him must be relinquished. Undue concern over temporal affairs, inordinate affection for the things of this life, the intemperate use of any material blessings, undue familiarity with the ungodly, are "weights" which prevent progress in godliness. A bag of gold would be as great a handicap to a runner as a bag of lead! (Pink, A W: An Exposition of Hebrews)

**Expositor's Commentary** - "The Christian runner must rid himself even of innocent things which might retard his pressing on to maturity. **And all that does not help, hinders. It is by running he learns what these things are** So long as he stands he does not feel that they are burdensome and hampering. (Bolding added)

**John Piper** applies this teaching about encumbrances writing that "the race of the Christian life is not fought well or run well by asking, "what's wrong with this or that?" but by asking, "is it in the way of greater faith and greater love and greater purity and

greater courage and greater humility and greater patience and greater self-control? Not ; Is it a sin? But: Does it help me run! Is it in the way?... Don't ask about your music, your movies, your parties, your habits: What's wrong with it? Ask: **Does it help me RUN the race!?** **Does it help me RUN - for Jesus?"** Hebrews 12:1 is a command (to run) to look at your life, think hard about what you are doing, and get ruthless about what stays and what goes... Note the seemingly innocent weights and encumbrances that are not condemned explicitly in the Bible, but which you know are holding you back in the race for faith and love and strength and holiness and courage and freedom. Note the ways you subtly make provision for these hindrances (Romans 13:14-note): the computer games, the hidden alcohol or candy, the television, the videos, the pull-tab stop on the way home, the magazines, the novels. In addition, note the people that weaken you. Note the times that are wasted, thrown away. When you have made all these notations, pray your way through to a resolve and a pattern of dismantling these encumbrances, and resisting these sins, and breaking old, old habits. And don't rise up against the Bible at this point and say, "I can't change." ([Running with the Witnesses](#)) (Bolding added)

### **HOW TO RUN THE RACE**

Find a trainer: Rely on the Holy Spirit for His help.

Follow a game plan: Read God's Word.

Work out regularly: Put your faith into action.

**No pain, no gain.**

**Know pain, great gain..**

**F B Meyer** has the following sage advice regarding **encumbrances...**

Every believer must be left to decide what is his own special weight. We may not judge for one another. What is a weight to one is not so to all. But the Holy Spirit, if he be consulted and asked to reveal the hindrance to the earnestness and speed of the soul's progress in divine things, will not fail to indicate it swiftly and infallibly. And this is the excellence of the Holy Spirit's teaching: it is ever definite. If you have a general undefined feeling of discouragement, it is probably the work of the great enemy of souls; but if you are aware of some one hindrance and encumbrance which stays your speed, it is almost certainly the work of the divine Spirit, who is leading you to relinquish something which is slackening your progress in the spiritual life... There would be little difficulty in maintaining an intense and ardent spirit if we were more faithful in dealing with the habits and indulgences which cling around us and impede our steps. Thousands of Christians are like water-logged vessels. They cannot sink; but they are so saturated with inconsistencies and worldliness and permitted evil that they can only be towed with difficulty into the celestial port. Is there anything in your life which dissipates your energy from holy things, which disinclines you to the practice of prayer and Bible study, which rises before you in your best moments, and produces in you a general sense of uneasiness and disturbance? something which others account harmless, and permit, and in which you once saw no cause for anxiety, but which you now look on with a feeling of self-condemnation? It is likely enough a weight.

Is there anything within the circle of your consciousness concerning which you have to argue with yourself, or which you do not care to investigate, treating it as a bankrupt treats his books into which he has no desire to enter, or as a votary of pleasure treats the first symptoms of decaying vitality which he seeks to conceal from himself? We so often allow in ourselves things which we would be the first to condemn in others. We frequently find ourselves engaged in discovering ingenious reasons why a certain course which would be wrong in others is justifiable in ourselves. All such things may be considered as weights. It may be a friendship which is too engrossing; a habit which is sapping away our energy as the taproot the fruit bearing powers of a tree; a pursuit, an amusement, a pastime, a system of reading, a method of spending time, too fascinating and too absorbing, and therefore harmful to the soul-which is tempted to walk when it should run, and to loiter when it should haste.

But, you ask, Is it not a sign of weakness, and will it not tend to weakness, always to be relinquishing these and similar things? Surely, you cry, the life will become impoverished and barren when it is stripped in this way of its precious things. Not so. It is impossible to renounce anything at the bidding of the inner life without adding immensely to its strength; for it grows by surrender, and waxes strong by sacrifice. And for every unworthy object which is forsaken there follows an immediate enrichment of the spirit, which is the sufficient and unvarying compensation. The athlete gladly foregoes much that other men value, and which is pleasant to himself, because his mind is intent on the prize; and he considers that he will be amply repaid for all the hardships of training if he be permitted to bear it away, though it be a belt he will never wear, or a cup he will never use. How much more gladly should we be prepared to relinquish all that hinders our attainment, not of the uncertain bauble of the athlete, but the certain reward, the incorruptible crown, the smile and "well-done" of our Lord!

There is an old Dutch picture of a little child dropping a cherished toy from its hands; and, at first sight, its action seems unintelligible, until, at the corner of the picture, the eye is attracted to a white dove winging its flight toward the emptied outstretched hands. Similarly we are prepared to forego a good deal when once we catch sight of the spiritual acquisitions which beckon to us. And this is the true way to reach consecration and surrender. **Do not ever dwell on the giving-up side, but on the receiving side** Keep in mind the meaning of the old Hebrew word for consecration, to fill the hand. There will not be much trouble in getting men to empty their hands of wood, hay, and stubble if they see that there is a chance of filling them with the treasures which gleam from the faces or lives of others, or which call to them from the page of Scripture. The world pities us, because it sees only what we give up; but it would hold its sympathy if it could also see how much we receive "good measure, pressed down, and running over given into our bosoms." (Meyer, F B: [Way into the Holiest: Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews](#)) (Bolding added)

**Richard Baxter**, the great Puritan theologian, writes that "It is a most lamentable thing to see how most people spend their time and their energy for trifles, while God is cast aside. He who is all seems to them as nothing, and that which is nothing seems to them as good as all. It is lamentable indeed, knowing that God has set mankind in such a race where heaven or hell is their certain end, that they should sit down and loiter, or run after the childish toys of the world, forgetting the prize they should run for. Were it but possible for one of us to see this business as the all-seeing God does, and see what most men and women in the world are interested in and what they are doing every day, it would be the saddest sight imaginable. Oh, how we should marvel at their madness and lament their self-delusion! If God had never told them what they were sent into the world to do, or what was before them in another world, then there would have been some excuse. But it is His sealed word, and they profess to believe it. ([Reference](#))

**Keener** writes that "The image would represent anything that would hinder his readers from winning their race (ancient writers sometimes used "weights" figuratively for vices); this encouragement is significant, for like Israel of old in the wilderness, they may be tempted to turn back. ([The IVP Bible Background Commentary](#))

**Illustration** of laying aside the good in order to attain to the best: Film maker Walt Disney was ruthless in cutting anything that got in the way of a story's pacing. Ward Kimball, one of the animators for Snow White, recalls working 240 days on a 4.5 minute sequence in which the dwarfs made soup for Snow White and almost destroyed the kitchen in the process. Disney thought it was funny, but he decided the scene stopped the flow of the picture, so out it went. When the film of our lives is shown, will it be as great as it might be? A lot will depend on the multitude of "good" things we need to eliminate to make way for the great things God wants to do through us. (Kenneth Langley)

**ENCUMBRANCE ILLUSTRATED** - The army of Alexander the Great was advancing on Persia. At one critical point, it appeared that his troops might be defeated. The soldiers had taken so much plunder from their previous campaigns that they had become weighted down and were losing their effectiveness in combat. Alexander immediately commanded that all the spoils be thrown into a heap and burned. The men complained bitterly but soon came to see the wisdom of the order. Someone wrote, "It was as if wings had been given to them—they walked lightly again." Victory was assured.

**ILLUSTRATION** - The latest fad for runners is known as "Ultrarunning" which features such extreme running events as a 100 mile marathon. The sport takes such a degree of commitment that some participants have permanently removed their toenails in order to eliminate one of the potential sources of runners' discomfort. A sports podiatrist told the New York Times that many "ultras" consider their toenails, "useless appendages, remnants of claws from evolutionary times." Not all ultrarunners agree. Another runner commented, "You know any sport has gone off the rails when you have to remove body parts to do it." --One Ultrarunning Problem, Solved For Good; Illustration by Jim L. Wilson and Jim Sandell. While this sounds a bit extreme to me, it does remind me that one dedicated to win a race will remove any encumbrance. (Jim Wilson)

**ILLUSTRATION** - Comparisons between two mutual fund families have turned up some interesting statistics. The Vice Fund (VICEX) is a mutual fund that invests in industries like distillers, casino operators, and cigarette companies. Meanwhile the Ave Maria Growth (AVEGX) is a mutual fund that limits its investments to companies that comply with certain Roman Catholic values. Side by side, the Vice Fund has lost 42 percent of its value over the past year, while the Ave Marie Fund has lost 33 percent of net value. When those figures compare with the Standard and Poor's 500 Index, it shows the Vice Fund has averaged 4 percent worse than the S & P average. The Ave Maria Fund fared 9 percentage points better than VICE and 5 points better than the S&P. Charles Norton, manager of the Vice Fund says stocks have been dumped overboard this year, and one of first stocks to be abandoned was casinos. Ave Maria's better numbers were produced not only by the companies they own, but also by what they avoid. The fund's rules kept them away from problem companies such as AIG, Bank of America, Citigroup, and General Motors. Jim Bashan , manager of the Ave Maria Growth fund says not only has the fund beaten the average this past year, but it done well since it started six years ago. In that period, the average loss in the S&P has been 7 percent while Ave Maria investors have seen a 23 percent gain. --In this recession, Sin is a loser. Now I don't pretend to be a genius about investments—a quick glance at my 401K would prove the opposite, but one thing I know for sure, sin never pays off. I'm not talking about the stock market now. I'm talking

about spiritual matters.

**ILLUSTRATION - DISTRACTIONS** - When drivers are distracted behind the wheel. Most people think the culprit must be a cell phone. New research says while cell phones are a concern, more drivers are distracted by things like playing with the radio, eating, or combing their hair behind the wheel. The study is the first to use in-car video cameras to record driving habits. A research group funded by the American Automobile Association found 70 percent of motorists were distracted at some point by conditions inside or outside the automobile. Highway safety figures show that 25 percent of all traffic crashes are caused by distractions. Almost all of the drivers studied manipulated the music or audio controls, 71 percent ate or drank, and about half groomed themselves. About 40 percent of the drivers read or wrote behind the wheel, but most of the reading and writing, and a third of the grooming occurred while the vehicle was stopped. Previous research found that cell phones, children, rubbernecking, and adjusting the radio or CD player created distractions that contribute to accidents. Surveys for the national Highway Traffic Safety Administration last year found that few drivers considered those activities potentially dangerous. Peter Kissinger, president of the AAA traffic safety foundation says, "People often underestimate the seriousness of distractions because not every distraction leads to a crash." He added, "But if you are distracted just when someone pulls out in front of you, your lack of attention can be catastrophic." —Reuters, US drivers distracted by phones, eating, grooming, August 6, 2003. Illustration by Jim L. Wilson and Jim Sandell Any distraction that averts our attention from our mission will have catastrophic results. I'm not talking about driving now, I'm talking about the work that God has called us to.

**FINISHING WELL** - According to Professor Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary, there are 100 or so leaders in the Bible, two-thirds of whom did not finish well. (Go the Distance p. 4 Illustration by Jim L. Wilson)

**David Holwick** - Our lives are filled with clutter. The danger of being overwhelmed. Have you ever been "splashed"? I'm not talking about having water splashed on you in or near a swimming area. "Splashing" was the word used for what occurred often in the 1990 "locker room wars" of the Chicago Bears. The smaller defensive backs and huge defensive linemen engaged in a good-natured but weighty battle of intimidation. Following an exchange of verbal assaults, the big guys would try to circle and isolate one of the defensive backs or as they called them, the "Brat Pack." On most occasions, the smaller, faster defensive backs were able to strike and quickly escape. But if they were captured, they paid a huge price. Defensive back David Tate, who weighed 180 pounds, was once splashed. He was dropped to the ground and the 300 pound William "Refrigerator" Perry collapsed on top of him. 270 pound Richard Dent, 275 pound Dan Hampton, and 270 pound Steve McMichael jumped on top -- 1,115 pounds of pain. "It hurts," said David Tate. "I don't think they know how heavy they are. Once you've gotten 'splashed,' you avoid it at all costs --even if it means backing down." Have you been "splashed" recently? Splashing is a great picture of the overloaded lives most of us are experiencing. It's not surprising the March 6, 1995, issue of Newsweek had a cover story entitled, "Exhausted."

**THE STRAW THAT BROKE THE CAMEL'S BACK** - Dr. Richard Swenson has written a book about it. He says the spontaneous tendency of our culture is to unceasingly add detail to our lives: ... one more problem, one more commitment, one more expectation, one more one more debt, one more change, one more job, one more decision. We must now deal with more 'things per person' than at any other time in history. Yet we can comfortably handle only so many details in our lives. Exceeding this threshold will result in disorganization or frustration. Overloading occurs whenever the requirements upon us exceed that which we are able to bear. For example, camels are able to carry great loads. If, however, a mere straw is placed on a camel maximally loaded down, its back will be broken. The back is not broken by the proverbial straw, it's broken by overload." "Centrum" vitamins sells lots of drugs by portraying a candle burning at both ends. But we need more than drugs to solve the over-commitment problem. We need to make some big changes in our lives. - David Holwick

**UNLOADING THE BAGGAGE** - **Joe Stowell** - I boarded the plane in Chicago with too much baggage. Not the kind of baggage you stow in the overhead compartment or squash under the seat in front of you. Not even the kind you check in at the airline desk. This was the kind of baggage that weighs your heart down and that, if carried around, leaves you emotionally and spiritually exhausted. An unexpected attack from a trusted friend had left me deeply upset and really confused about how to respond. ([Read the Entire Devotional](#))

#### THE SIN WHICH SO EASILY ENTANGLES US: ten euperistaton hamartian:

- Heb 10:35, 36, 37, 38, 39; Ps 18:23
- Hebrews 12 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Hebrews 12:1-3 Faith to Run the Christian Marathon](#) - Steven Cole
- [Hebrews 12:1 Dealing with Habitual Sins](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-4 Run for Your Life](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-3 The Race of Faith](#) - John MacArthur



- [Hebrews 12:1-4 Running the Race That Is Set Before Us](#) - John MacArthur

## ENTANGLING SIN

- that sin which so readily (deftly and cleverly) clings to and entangles us (Amplified)
- the sin which so persistently surrounds us (Barclay)
- especially the sin that just won't let go (CEV)
- the sin which holds on to us so tightly (GNT)
- the sin that clings so closely (NET)
- especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress (NLT)
- as well as the sin which dogs our feet (Phillips)
- especially those sins that wrap themselves so tightly around our feet and trip us up (TLB)
- that sin which so deftly and cleverly places itself in an entangling way around us (Wuest)
- and the closely besetting sin (Young's Literal)

**Sin** (266) (**hamartia**) originally had the idea of missing a mark as when hunting with a bow and arrow. It then began to mean missing or falling short of any goal, standard, or purpose. (see below for discussion of what this **sin** might be).

**Hamartia** - 173x in the NT -

Matt. 1:21; 3:6; 9:2, 5f; 12:31; 26:28; Mk. 1:4f; 2:5, 7, 9f; Lk. 1:77; 3:3; 5:20f, 23f; 7:47, 48, 49; 11:4; 24:47; Jn. 1:29; 8:21, 24, 34, 46; 9:34, 41; 15:22, 24; 16:8f; 19:11; 20:23; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 7:60; 10:43; 13:38; 22:16; 26:18; Rom. 3:9, 20; 4:7f; 5:12f, 20f; 6:1f, 6f, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22f; 7:5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13f, 17, 20, 23, 25; 8:2f, 10; 11:27; 14:23; 1 Co. 15:3, 17, 56; 2 Co. 5:21; 11:7; Gal. 1:4; 2:17; 3:22; Eph. 2:1; Col. 1:14; 1 Thess. 2:16; 1 Tim. 5:22, 24; 2 Tim. 3:6; Heb. 1:3; 2:17; 3:13; 4:15; 5:1, 3; 7:27; 8:12; 9:26, 28; 10:2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 11f, 17f, 26; 11:25; 12:1, 4; 13:11; Jas. 1:15; 2:9; 4:17; 5:15f, 20; 1 Pet. 2:22, 24; 3:18; 4:1, 8; 2 Pet. 1:9; 2:14; 1 Jn. 1:7, 8, 9; 2:2, 12; 3:4f, 8f; 4:10; 5:16f; Rev. 1:5; 18:4, 5

**Ridout** well says here: "We often hear, alas, the question: What is the harm or the sin in my doing this or that thing; engaging in this business, or indulging in that pleasure? The question is answered just here. Is the thing a weight, or is it a wing? Is it that which speeds you on your course or does it hold you back? ... Weights are not necessarily external: they are first of all in the heart. Duties are never weights. But the moment a thing gets a place in my heart and mind which is not in God's mind for me, it becomes a weight, no matter what it is." ([Quoted by William Newell in his Verse by Verse Commentary on Hebrews](#))

**Newell** - Now as to the sin which doth so easily beset us--some make this the flesh, which is with the believer, although he is not "in the flesh" but "in the Spirit," Who gives him the victory. Others regard the sin which so easily besets as unbelief, that terrible temptation which these Hebrew believers were ever beset with, of letting go heavenly things for an earthly worship. ([Ibid](#))

**Spurgeon** - Even when the weights are laid aside, there is a garment about us that will assuredly twist about our feet and throw us down. Sin, as well as care, must be laid aside. It easily besets us, and therefore we must be more careful to be rid of it. Our original sin, our natural tendencies, our constitutional infirmities—these must be laid aside as garments unsuitable for men who are running the heavenly race. Heaven is for the holy: "Every unclean thing and one who practices detestable things and falsehood will never enter into it" (Rev 21:27). Darling sins must go first: these, as they are most loved, will have the most power to hinder. Every kind of sin must be watched against, struggled against, and mastered. "Sin will not be master over you" (Rom 6:14). We hope to see all our tendencies to sin killed and buried—buried so deep that not even a bone of a sin shall be left above ground. This will be heaven to us.

**Easily entangles** (2139) (**euperistatos** from **eú** = easily, readily, deftly, cleverly + **periistemi** = to surround, to place itself around - **peri** = around + **statos** = standing) means literally that which is easily standing around (a competitor) thwarting (a racer) in every direction (figuratively here referring to sin).

The picture is that of something which is easily encompassing or easily besetting (besetting = constantly present or persistently attacking, tempting, harassing, assailing. Surrounding or attacking from all sides). There are a dozen possible renderings of **euperistatos**.

The Latin Vulgate is translated "**the sin standing around us**" ("circumstans nos peccatum") and this appears to be the idea in this verse. Thus one could render it "the easily encompassing or surrounding sin."

**Wuest** - Not only are the readers to lay aside every general encumbrance which would slacken their speed in the Christian race, but also any particular, specific one. The words "easily beset" are the translation of euperistatos, eu meaning "readily, deftly, cleverly,"

and the verbal form of the rest of the word, "to place itself around." It speaks of a sin which readily or easily encircles the Christian runner, like a long, loose robe clinging to his limbs. The sin may be any evil propensity. Here the context suggests the sin of unbelief which was the thing keeping the unsaved recipients of this letter from putting their faith in Messiah as High Priest. ([Hebrews Commentary](#))

**Newell** - "**Easily**" is a Greek word often translated plausibly, and meaning literally, "well-standing, around." The sin easily besets us. One well says, "Let us never forget that; nor think for a moment that we can get in a position in which sin will not be natural to the flesh, or where we do not need to be on our guard. Sin is as natural to the flesh as it is for an animal to breathe. And the moment the eye is taken off Christ, you have the certainty of the sin besetting you." ([Ibid](#))

#### See Related Resources:

- Backsliding
- Drifting
- See in depth discussion on the Deceitfulness of sin
- Illustrations of Deceitfulness of sin

**Vincent** comments that **euperistatos** refers to "Hence, of a sin which readily or easily encircles and entangles the Christian runner, like a long, loose robe clinging to his limbs. **Beset** is a good rendering, meaning to surround. In earlier English especially of surrounding crowns, etc., with jewels. So Gower, Conf. Am. i. 127: "With golde and riche stones **beset**." Shakespeare, Two Gent. Ver. v. 3: "The thicket is **beset**; he cannot 'scape." The sin may be any evil propensity. The sin of **unbelief** naturally suggests itself here."

So here he describes **the sin** that stands well, or is favorably situated, ever surrounding the person and soliciting his or her acquiescence. Sin forms a crippling hindrance to good running. The sin wraps itself around us so that we trip and stumble every time we try to read the Word, pray or otherwise move on for the Lord. This picture of surrounding sin reminds one of the ring of wild beasts in the jungle that encircle the camp-fire at night each ready to pounce upon a careless victim. (cf Ge 4:6, 7, 8)

What is the **easily besetting, encompassing or surrounding sin**? Although there is not complete agreement, most agree that he is referring to the sin of unbelief, especially in light of the context of the emphasis on "by faith" in Hebrews 11. This interpretation would also fit well with the overall exhortation of the author to not drift but to press on to genuine faith, faith that holds fast until the end of the race.

**Steven Cole** adds that we must lay aside every sin that so easily entangles us explaining that "In biblical times people wore long robes. You can't run with a long robe entangling your legs. You must either pull it up and tuck it in your belt or cast it totally aside. In the case of sin, you must totally get rid of it if you want to run the Christian race. **This doesn't refer only to certain besetting sins, but to all sins.** Sin always begins in the mind, and so we must judge all sin at the thought level. Pride, lust, envy, greed, anger, grumbling, selfishness—all of these things originate in our thought life. If you cut it off there, it goes no farther. If you entertain these things, they incubate and develop into sinful words and actions (Jas 1:14, 15). But the author's point is, you can't run the Christian race if you keep tripping over your sins." ([Hebrews 12:1-3 Faith to Run the Christian Marathon](#))

## BESETTING SIN

As an aside **Puritan writer Thomas Watson** has some interesting points regarding the nature of a "**besetting sin**" ([see similar notes by Watson](#))

Take heed of your **besetting sin**, that which your nature and constitution most incline to. As in the hive there is a master bee—so in the heart there is a master sin. "I kept myself from my iniquity." Ps 18:23. There is some sin that is a special favorite, the darling sin which lies in the bosom—and this bewitches and draws away the heart. O beware of this!

**[1] That sin which a man most nourishes, and to which all other sins are subservient—is the sin which is most tended and waited upon.** The Pharisees' darling sin was vainglory, all they did was to feed the sin of pride. When they gave alms they sounded a trumpet, that they might be admired by others. Matthew 6:2. If a stranger had asked why this trumpet sounded? The answer was, the Pharisees are going to give alms to the poor. Their lamp of charity was filled with the oil of vainglory. Matthew 23:5. All their works they did to be seen by men. Pride was their bosom sin. Oftentimes covetousness is the darling sin; all other sins are committed to maintain this. Why do men equivocate, oppress, defraud, take bribes—but to uphold covetousness?

**[2] The sin which a man hates to be reproved—is the darling sin.** Herod could not endure to have his incest spoken against; if John the Baptist meddles with that sin, it shall cost him his head.

**[3] That sin which has most power over a man, and most easily leads him captive—is the beloved of the soul.** There are some sins which a man can better put off and repulse; but there is one sin which he cannot deny—but is overcome by it: this is the bosom sin. The young man in the gospel had a besetting sin which he could not resist, and that was the love of the world; his silver was dearer to him than his Savior. It is a sad thing a man should be so bewitched by a lust—that he will part with the kingdom of heaven to gratify it!

**[4] The sin which men use arguments to defend—is the darling sin.** To plead for sin, is to be the devil's attorney. If the sin is covetousness, and we vindicate it; if it is rash anger, and we justify it, saying (as Jonah 4:9), "I do well to be angry," this is the besetting sin.

**[5] That sin which most troubles a man, and flies in his face in an hour of sickness and distress—is the beloved sin.** When Joseph's brethren were distressed, their sin in selling their brother came to remembrance. Gen 45:3. So, when a man is upon his sick-bed, conscience says, "Do not you remember how you have lived in such a sin, though you have been often warned—yet you would not leave it?" Conscience reads a secret lecture upon the darling sin.

**[6] The sin which a man is most unwilling to part with—is the darling sin.** Jacob could of all his sons, most hardly part with Benjamin. "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and you will take Benjamin away." Gen 13:36. So says the sinner, "this and that sin have I parted with; but must Benjamin go? Must I part with this delightful sin? That pierces my heart!" It is the Delilah, the beloved sin. Oh, if sin is such a deadly evil, dare not to indulge any bosom sin, which is the most dangerous of all; and, like a cancer striking to the heart, which is mortal. One darling sin lived in, sets open a gap for Satan to enter. ([Lords Prayer](#) or listen to the pithy, practical Mp3 by Watson on the phrase "Deliver us from evil")

**Other quotes from Thomas Watson** - The prophet David felt this weight, Psalm 38:4, "My iniquities are gone over mine head as an heavy burden, they are too heavy for me!" If we do not throw off this weight of sin by sincere repentance—it will sink us... A man cannot run a race with a heavy burden upon his back. An immoral person cannot run the race of holiness; a proud man cannot run the race of humility; a self-willed man cannot run the race of obedience. Oh, Christian, unburden your soul of sin! Throw off this weight—if you intend to lay hold on the crown! ([The Heavenly Race - Recommended article](#)) A beloved BESETTING sin. "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." Hebrews 12:1. There is usually one sin that is the favorite—the sin which the heart is most fond of. A beloved sin lies in a man's bosom as the disciple whom Jesus loved, leaned on his bosom (John 13:23). A godly man will not indulge a darling sin: "I kept myself from my iniquity" (Psalm 18:23). "I will not indulge the sin of my constitution, to which the bias of my heart more naturally inclines." "Fight neither with small nor great—but only with the king" (1Kings 22:31). A godly man fights this king sin. The oracle of Apollo answered the people of Cyrrha that if they would live in peace among themselves, they must make continual war with those strangers who were on their borders. If we would have peace in our souls, we must maintain a war against our favorite sin and never leave off until it is subdued. ([The Godly Mans Picture](#))

**GREAT ILLUSTRATION OF A "BESETTING SIN"** - A well-known author once told this story of an account he had with sea gulls: "Several years ago our family visited Niagara Falls. It was spring, and ice was rushing down the river. As I viewed the large blocks of ice flowing toward the falls, I could see that there were dead fish embedded in the ice. Gulls by the score were riding down the river feeding on the fish. As they came to the brink of the falls, their wings would go out, and they would escape from the falls. "I watched one gull which seemed to delay and wondered when it would leave. It was engrossed in the fish, and when it finally came to the brink of the falls, out went its powerful wings. The bird flapped and flapped and even lifted the ice out of the water, and I thought it would escape. But it had delayed too long so that its claws had frozen into the ice. The weight of the ice was too great, and the gull plunged into the abyss." How sad that even though the bird had plenty of time to fly away, because it delayed it paid the price. Now think of this story in terms of the Christian life. When we become overly enthralled with the things of this world, they can bring us down and cause our spiritual death. The finest attractions of this world become deadly when we become overly attached to them. If we cannot give up the things of this world and focus on Christ, we cannot be used by Him. Our eyes must be upward on Christ rather than downward on this world.

**THE WATER HYACINTH** - Sin is one of the most destructive forms of clutter. It was 1884. The New Orleans Cotton Exposition wanted to make an even bigger splash than the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia a few years before. And New Orleans did come up with something never seen before. All the ladies oohed and ahed over an exotic water flower with an orchid-like bloom that came from Venezuela. Even the name sounded good--the water hyacinth. Thousands of lady visitors sneaked little slips of the plant into their handbags and took them home, praying they would take root in some spot of their own damp Louisiana yards. The prayers were answered. Before many years, it became evident that the water hyacinth was not only going to survive--it might even take over every water channel in the South! Soon rivers and canals were solid water hyacinths from bank to bank. A little too late, horticulturists found that each plant produces a thousand little water hyacinths every 2 months! Because pieces break off and float

down the river, they can even transplant themselves with no help at all. What a profound parallel to the way sin comes into our lives. A simple phone call. A drink at a party. Growing resentment over a tiny slight. A callused attitude toward people with less opportunities than you or I have. Such small, insignificant things. But watch out when they take root. The human heart is fertile soil for everything that is twisted, distorted, evil. Every student of human behavior knows it is true. - **David Holwick**

**Spurgeon** - In those games, those who ran and wrestled wore very little clothing, or often nothing at all. A runner might lose the race through being entangled by his scarf, so he laid aside everything that might hinder or hamper him. Oh, for that blessed consecration to our heavenly calling, by which everything that would hinder us shall be put aside, that we may give ourselves, disentangled, to the great gospel to race!

Most conservative commentaries would be in general agreement with **John MacArthur's** interpretation of **the sin** - "Obviously all sin is a hindrance to Christian living, and the reference here may be to sin in general. But use of the definite article (*the sin*) seems to indicate a particular sin. And if there is one particular sin that hinders the race of faith it is **unbelief**, doubting God. Doubting and living in faith contradict each other. Unbelief entangles the Christian's feet so that he cannot run. It wraps itself around us so that we trip and stumble every time we try to move for the Lord, if we try at all. It easily entangles us. When we allow sin in our lives, especially unbelief, it is quite easy for Satan to keep us from running. ([MacArthur, John: Hebrews. Moody Press](#)) (Bolding added)

**John Angell James** - Like a ball and chain around his ankle! (John Angell James, "Christian Progress" 1853)

"Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin which so easily besets you." Hebrews 12:1

Besetting sins are powerful hindrances to Christian progress. In the case of most people, there is some one sin to which, either from their situation, taste, constitution, or other circumstances—they are more powerfully tempted than to others.

Satan knows very well what in every case this is, and skillfully adapts his temptations to it. He is an expert angler, and never chooses his bait, or throws his line, at random! Independently, however, of him, the very tendency of the heart is in that direction.

That one sin, whatever it is, while indulged, will hold you back! You cannot make progress in holiness, until it is mortified. Even its partial indulgence, though it may be considerably weakened, will hinder you!

Study then your situation, circumstances, and constitution. You cannot be ignorant which temptation and sin, you are most liable to succumb to. You must know in what way you have most frequently wounded your conscience, and occasioned to yourself shame and sorrow.

Is it an unsanctified temper?

Is it an impure imagination?

Is it a proud heart?

Is it a vain mind?

Is it a taste for worldly company?

Is it a proneness to envy and jealousy?

Is it a love of money?

Is it a tendency to exaggeration in speech?

Is it a fondness for pleasure?

Is it a disposition to censoriousness and backbiting?

Study yourselves! Examine your own heart! You must find out this matter, and it requires no great pains in order to know it. It floats upon the surface of the heart, and does not lie hidden in its depths. There, there, is your danger! As long as that one sin, be it what it may, is indulged, you cannot advance in the Christian life! Other sins are like unnecessary clothing to the racer. Besetting sins are like a ball and chain around his ankle!

Direct your attention more fixedly, and your aim more constantly, to the destruction of besetting sins. You know what they are, whether ... lusts of the flesh, or lusts of the mind, or bad tempers toward man, or sinful dispositions toward God, or violations of piety.

Let us be distinguished by a great mortification of besetting sins, which, more than anything else ... distress us, disgrace us, and hindered us in our progress heavenward.

No sins require ... such severe mortification, such incessant labor, such earnest prayer, such strong faith for

their destruction as besetting sins. But all this is necessary, for if they are not destroyed, they will probably destroy us.

**Stedman** writes that "Since the writer does not specify what this is, it may be taken for granted that it is the sin continually warned about in Hebrews --persistent unbelief Do not take God's Word lightly. Do not excuse any sin as all right for you, but forbidden to others. Do not feel you can evade God's discipline or judgment. Remember: "God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows". (Gal 6:7-note). Unbelief often looks trivial to us, but Moses was kept out of the Promised Land because he treated God's word lightly on one occasion (Deut 32:51, 52; Ps 106:33). David apparently felt that his twin sins of adultery and murder could be overlooked because he was king, but God felt otherwise and sent Nathan the prophet to expose his wickedness and to announce his punishment. ([IVP NT Commentary - Hebrews](#))

In one sense every sin we commit has at its root the sin of unbelief. And most believers have one sin that tends to trip them up more often than others. This may not be the writer's primary meaning but it is certainly a reasonable application that we each earnestly seek to lay aside that one sin that so often and so easily entangles us. Along this same line **W G Pascoe** writes that "the sin that so easily besets us is that to which we are most liable. Very often, indeed mostly, it is that sin to which we were most given before our conversion: as when a breach is made in a wall, it is easier to effect another breach in that place, although it may be built up again, than where stone has never been dislodged. With different constitutions, and with different ages, there are different easily besetting sins. With youth it is often passion — evil desire. With age it is often fretfulness — peevishness. With the rich it is often pride and grasping of power; with the poor it is often repinings against providence. With the healthy it is often forgetfulness of God, and of their latter end; with the sick it is often rebellion against Him who lays on the rod." (Biblical Illustrator)

To run the race of life **in Christ**,  
This must become your daily goal:  
Confess your sins, trust God for strength,  
Use discipline and self-control.  
—Sper

**Those who wait on the Lord**  
**Run without the weight of sin.**  
cp Isaiah 40:29, 30, 31-note

**See studies on the significance of the phrase in Christ and in Christ Jesus and in Christ**

**F B Meyer** in *Way into the Holiest*, agrees that the primary **sin** referred to in this verse is **unbelief**. He explains it this way:

We often refer to these words ("the sin"); but do we not misquote them in divorcing them from their context? We should read them as part of the great argument running through the previous chapter. That argument has been devoted to the theme of faith. And surely it is most natural to hold that the sin which so closely clings to us is nothing else than the sin of unbelief, which is the opposite pole to the faith so highly eulogized.

If that be a correct exegesis, it sheds new light on unbelief. It is no longer an infirmity, it is a sin. Men sometimes carry about their doubts, as beggars a deformed or sickly child, to excite the sympathy of the benevolent. But surely there is a kind of unbelief which should not meet with sympathy, but rebuke. It is sin which needs to be repented of as sin, to be resisted as sin, and to receive as sin the cleansing of Christ.

Unbelief may, as in the case of Thomas, spring from intellectual and constitutional difficulties. But these will not lead the soul to vaunt itself as surpassing others in insight; or to relinquish the society of others with happier constitutions; or, above all, to forego the habit of secret prayer. It will rather induce a temper of mind the very opposite of that self-confident, arrogant spirit which prevails so much in the unbelievers of our time.

But much unbelief springs from moral causes. The soul gets wrong with God, and says that it is not sure whether there is a God. The windows are allowed to be covered with grime, and then it doubts whether the sun is shining. The faculties of the inner life are clogged with neglect, and refuse to do their appointed office in revealing the spiritual and the unseen. We should be wiser if we dealt with much of the unbelief of our time as a disease of the spiritual life, rather than of the intellectual. Its source is largely moral. Do not set agnostics to study evidences; but show them that their temper of heart is the true cause of their darkness and unbelief. God has given each of us powers of discerning his truth, which will certainly perceive and love it; and where the reverse is the case, it is often due to some moral obliquity, to some beam in the eye, to some secret indulgence, which is destructive of all spiritual perception. Put away known sin. Read the Bible, even though you doubt its inspiration. Wait. Pray. Live up to all the light you have. And unbelief will drop away as the old leaves from the evergreens in spring. (Meyer, F B: [Way into the Holiest: Exposition of the Epistle to the](#)

**Spurgeon** once wrote these words on the danger of a besetting sin - "There was but one crack in the lantern, and the wind has found it out and blown out the candle. How great a mischief one unguarded point of character may cause us!"

**Ensnared by Sausages!** - The St. Petersburg Times once carried a news item about a hungry thief who grabbed some sausages in a meat market, only to find they were part of a string fifteen feet long. Tripping over them, he was hindered in his getaway and the police found him collapsed in a tangle of fresh sausages. So it is with sin: we always come away with more of it than we expected, and it tends to entangle us until it brings us down (cp Pr 5:22-note). (Illustrations for Biblical Preaching)

---

### **Thomas Watson - The harlot in your bosom!**

"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." Heb. 12:1

There is usually one sin that is the favorite—the sin which the heart is most fond of. A godly man will not indulge his darling sin: "I kept myself from my iniquity."

Psalm 18:23. "I will not indulge the sin to which the bias of my heart more naturally inclines."

"Fight neither with small nor great—but only with the king." 1 Kings 22:31. A godly man fights this king sin. If we would have peace in our souls, we must maintain a war against our favorite sin, and never leave off until it is subdued.

#### **Question: How shall we know what our beloved sin is?**

**Answer 1:** The sin which a man does not love to have reprov'd—is the darling sin. Herod could not endure having his incest spoken against. If the prophet meddles with that sin—it shall cost him his head! "Do not touch my Herodias!" Men can be content to have other sins reprov'd—but if the minister puts his finger on the sore, and touches this sin—their hearts begin to burn in malice against him!

**Answer 2:** The sin on which the thoughts run most, is the darling sin. Whichever way the thoughts go, the heart goes. He who is in love with a person cannot keep his thoughts off that person. Examine what sin runs most in your mind, what sin is first in your thoughts and greets you in the morning—that is your predominant sin.

**Answer 3:** The sin which has most power over us, and most easily leads us captive—is the one beloved by the soul. There are some sins which a man can better resist. If they come for entertainment, he can more easily put them off. But the bosom sin comes as a suitor, and he cannot deny it—but is overcome by it. The young man in the Gospel had repulsed many sins—but there was one sin which soiled him, and that was covetousness.

Mark what sin you are most readily led captive by—that is the harlot in your bosom! It is a sad thing that a man should be so bewitched by lust, that if it asks him to part with the kingdom of heaven—he must part with it, to gratify that lust!

**Answer 4:** The sin which men most defend, is the beloved sin. He who has a jewel in his bosom, will defend it to his death. The sin we advocate and dispute for, is the besetting sin. The sin which we plead for, and perhaps wrest Scripture to justify it—that is the sin which lies nearest the heart.

**Answer 5:** The sin which a man finds most difficulty in giving up, is the endeared sin. Of all his sons, Jacob found most difficulty in parting with Benjamin. So the sinner says, "This and that sin I have parted with—but must Benjamin go! Must I part with this delightful sin? That pierces my heart!" A man may allow some of his sins to be demolished—but when it comes to one sin, that is the taking of the castle; he will never agree to part with that! That is the master sin for sure.

**The besetting sin is, of all others, most dangerous.** As Samson's strength lay in his hair—so **the strength of sin, lies in this beloved sin.** This is like a poison striking the heart, which brings death. A godly

man will lay the axe of repentance to this sin and hew it down! He will sacrifice this Isaac; he will pluck out this right eye—so that he may see better to go to heaven.

### Thomas Watson - One sin lived in

A godly man considers the mischief which one sin lived in, will do.

1. One sin lived in, gives Satan as much advantage against you as more sins. The fowler can hold a bird by one wing. Satan held Judas fast by one sin.

2. One sin lived in, proves that the heart is not sound. He who hides one rebel in his house is a traitor to the crown. The person who indulges one sin is a traitorous hypocrite!

3. One sin lived in, will make way for more—as a little thief can open the door to more. Sins are linked and chained together. One sin will draw on more. David's adultery made way for murder. One sin never goes alone! If there is only one nest egg—the devil can brood on it!

4. One sin lived in, is as much a breach of God's law as more sins. "Whoever keeps the entire law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of breaking it all" James 2:10. The king may make a law against felony, treason and murder. If a man is guilty of only one of these—he is a transgressor.

5. One sin lived in, prevents Christ from entering. One stone in the pipe keeps out the water. One sin indulged in, obstructs the soul and keeps the streams of Christ's blood from running into it!

6. One sin lived in, will spoil all your good duties. One dead fly will spoil the whole box of precious ointment. A drop of poison will spoil a glass of wine. Abimelech, a bastard-son, destroyed seventy of his brethren, Judges 9:5. One bastard-sin will destroy seventy prayers.

7. One sin lived in will be a cankerworm to eat out the peace of conscience. "Alas! What a scorpion lies within!" (Seneca). One sin is a pirate—to rob a Christian of his comfort. One jarring string puts all the music out of tune. One sin lived in—will spoil the music of conscience.

8. One sin lived in, will damn as well as more sins. One disease is enough to kill. If a fence is made ever so strong, and only one gap is left open; the wild beast may enter and tread down the corn. If only one sin is allowed in the soul, you leave open a gap for the devil to enter! A soldier may have only one gap in his armor—and the bullet may enter there. He may as well be shot there—as if he had no armor on at all. So if you favor only one sin, you leave a part of your soul unprotected—and the bullet of God's wrath may enter there—and shoot you! One sin lived in, may shut you out of heaven! What difference is there, between being shut out of heaven for one sin—or for many sins? One millstone will sink a man into the sea—as well as a hundred!

Therefore, beware of cherishing one sin! Give a certificate of divorce to every sin. Kill the Goliath sin! "Let not sin reign over you." Romans 6:12. In the original it is "Let not sin king it over you." Grace and sin may be together—but grace and the love of sin cannot. Therefore parley with sin no longer—but with the spear of mortification, spill the heart-blood of every sin!

"For if you live after the flesh, you shall die: but if you through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live." Romans 8:13.

"So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you." Colossians 3:5

### LET US RUN: trechomen (1PPAS):

- 1 Co 9:24, 25, 26, 27-see notes; Gal 5:7; Php 2:16-note; Php 3:10, 11-note, Php 3:12, 13-note, Php 3:14-note; 2Ti 2:6-note, 2Ti 4:7-note
- Hebrews 12 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Hebrews 12:1-3 Faith to Run the Christian Marathon](#) - Steven Cole

- [Hebrews 12:1 Dealing with Habitual Sins](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-4 Run for Your Life](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-3 The Race of Faith](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-4 Running the Race That Is Set Before Us](#) - John MacArthur

## EXHORTATION TO UN WITH ENDURANCE

**John Piper** writes that this strong exhortation "does not come out of the blue. This is the point of the whole book. Endure, persevere, run, fight, be alert, be strengthened, don't drift, don't neglect, don't be sluggish, don't take your eternal security for granted. Fight the fight of faith on the basis of Christ's spectacular death and resurrection. And show your faith the way the saints of Hebrews 11 did—not by coasting through life, but by counting reproach for Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt (He 11:26-note). So the main point of this text is the one imperative: RUN! (He 12:1). Everything else supports this—explains it or gives motivation for it. Run the race set before you! Don't stroll, don't meander, don't wander about aimlessly. Run as in a race with a finish line and with everything hanging on it. ([Running with the Witnesses](#))

**Run** ([5143](#)) (**trecho**) refers to moving forward rapidly. Running was a favorite figure of speech even among secular Greek writers. **Trecho** means to run (like an athlete competing in the ancient Greek games and figuratively to advance speedily, as an athlete moves forward by full effort and directed purpose (1Cor 9:24). This verb depicts one intensely intent on getting to the goal as quickly as possible.

See discussion of metaphor of an Athlete

- [Metaphors of Paul - Hastings Dictionary of the New Testament](#)

**Trecho** is in the **present tense** which pictures a lifelong race which ultimately can be run only in His strength. The mood is what Robertson calls volitive subjunctive which can be translated "let us keep on running" and it carries the force of an imperative or command. The idea is run the race set before you! Don't stroll, don't meander, don't wander about aimlessly. It is interesting that "run" is in the present tense but "lay aside" is in the aorist tense suggesting that this action must be carried out before one begins to run. This interpretation correlates well with the Greek custom of the runners stripping clothes prior to running so that they might be able to run unencumbered.

All those who are born again **must** run. From the moment we believe in Jesus Christ, we are enrolled in the race. The new birth gets us to the starting line, but it does not get us to the finish line. Unfortunately, many Christians are merely "jogging", some are walking slowly, and some are sitting or even lying down. Yet the biblical standard for holy living is a race, not a morning constitutional. Race is the Greek agon (see below), from which we get agony. A race is not a thing of passive luxury, but is demanding, sometimes grueling and agonizing, and requires our utmost in self-discipline, determination, and perseverance.

The **New Manners and Customs** explains that in the Ancient Greco-Roman world "**Running** was one of the most popular of the Olympic games. The place prepared for the race was called the **stadium** because its length equaled a **stadion**, or six hundred Greek feet. The stadium was an oblong area, with a straight wall across one end, where the entrances were, the other end being round and entirely closed. Tiers of seats were on either side for the spectators... The starting place was at the entrance end and was marked by a square pillar. At the opposite end was the goal, where the judge sat and held the prize. The eyes of the competitors remained fixed on him: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2). The goal, as well as the starting point, was marked by a square pillar, and a third was placed midway between the two... The competitors, through severe training, had no superfluous flesh, and ran unclothed. Flesh and clothing were laid aside as a "weight" that might hinder them in the race. (Freeman, J. M., & Chadwick, H. J. The New Manners and Customs of the Bible: Page 545)

## SPIRITUAL RUNNING CALLS FOR AN "OLYMPIC" MINDSET

Writing to the **Olympic** (actually the Isthmian games) **mind**ed **Corinthians**, Paul asked them rhetorically (note the preceding context is Paul's willingness to do anything in order to win lost souls)...

**1Co 9:24-note** "Do you not know (rhetorical because every Corinthian was certainly acquainted with the races at the Isthmian games in Corinth) that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way (by setting aside anything that might hinder your witness) that you may win. (every Christian can win if he or she runs with self-discipline, strenuous effort, definiteness of purpose) **25-note** And everyone who **competes** (see study of agonizomai - present tense) in the games exercises self-control (present tense) in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath (see study of ofstephanos), but we



an imperishable (the prize is a reward for faithful service and is not salvation which is a gift). **26-note Therefore** (term of conclusion) I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air (the single minded focus, specific aim, desire for every action to count); **27-note but** (term of contrast) I **buffet** my body (literally = hit under the eye and figuratively knock out the bodily impulses to keep them from preventing Paul from winning souls to Christ) and make it my slave (Spirit empowered self denial - are you a "slave" to your body? Does your body give the orders?), lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be **disqualified**. (1Co 9:24-27-see notes)

**Disqualified** is **adokimos** [see also bema] = means to test something or someone and find they do not pass the test. Please note that this does not = losing one's salvation - even disqualified athletes did not lose their citizenship - those who failed to meet requirements could not participate at all - in context this seems to refer especially to fleshly sins, especial sexual immorality, that disqualify an individual. A disqualified believer might be "*put on the shelf*" no longer be useful to the Lord (cp 2Ti 2:21-note, 2Ti 2:22-note) in addition to suffering loss of one's eternal reward (see 1Co 3:11,12, 13, 14, 15; see also 2Cor 5:10-note)! **Meditate** deeply on this warning beloved, that you might be "blameless and... acquitted of great transgression." (Ps 19:13-note)

And so Paul describes the kind of self-discipline necessary in order to be a winning spiritual athlete. We must bring our bodies into subjection so that our flesh, with its evil desires, does not dominate us and lead us into sin that will divert us from the goal of godliness and Christ-likeness and winning others to Christ. When we honor the Lord Jesus Christ and focus on the eternal reward that awaits those who run with faith, this eternal perspective will bring out our best efforts - and make no mistake - it will require effort, but as Paul has emphasized to Timothy it is possible **ONLY** by being continually strengthened with the grace that is in Christ Jesus (2Ti 2:1-note).

**F B Meyer** commenting on "**let us run**" writes that "We must not sit still to be carried by the stream. We must not loiter and linger as children returning from a summer's ramble. We must not even walk as men with measured step. The idea of a race is generally competition; here it is only concentration of purpose, singleness of aim, intensity... we ought not to be languid, but devoted, eager, consumed with a holy love to God, and with a passion for the souls of men. Then should we make progress in the knowledge of the Word of God, and enter into the words of one of the greatest spiritual athletes that ever lived (Php 3:14-note)

**G Campbell Morgan** sums up this section: "These words catch up and apply all that had been said as to the service rendered in the past by those who had "received the promises," and had died, not having "received the promise." If they so endured with courage and cheerfulness, we also should be prepared to endure with patience, and run the race toward the glorious goal without wavering, however hopeless the enterprise may seem, when judged by the circumstances of the hour. The ultimate strength of this appeal, however, lies in the contrast which it suggests between these men of the past and ourselves. They had the promises; we have Jesus. They look for the City; we look off unto Jesus. This means that in Him we have a clearer revelation of the glory of the City, and of the travail through which alone it can be built. Through Him our understanding of what the tabernacling of God with men means, is more perfect. In Him the call is to yet profounder suffering and to greater patience. But He is Himself the File-leader of the Faithful; that is, in His own life and service He takes precedence of all others. And so He is supremely the Vindicator of faith in the promises of God as the one principle which moves toward the fulfilment of those very promises. He also is waiting for the consummation, waiting till His enemies shall be made the footstool of His feet, but waiting in the perfect assurance of the final victory. Then we are called upon to rest in His assurance, to have fellowship with His sufferings, and so to hasten the coming of the Day of God. (Morgan, G. C.: Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible).

**Dr. Joseph Stowell** says that running well involves at least three forms of preparation:

First, we need to **unload the baggage**, getting rid of things in our lives that distract us from the business of living for Christ.

Second, we must **shed the sin** which blocks our fellowship with Christ and disqualifies us from the race.

Third, we must **stay at it**, running with a commitment to hang in there when it gets tough and finish the race.

Hebrews 11 is a great chapter because it teaches us that faith pleases God, and shows us what He can do with people who are determined to live faithfully before Him. But the encouragement doesn't stop there. In Hebrews 12 we discover what it takes to live a life of faith that doesn't quit. The plan isn't quick or easy, and there are no shortcuts on God's cross-country race course. We are called to "endure hardship" and accept discipline that is often painful. But the blessing of "righteousness and peace" and God's crown of victory (2Ti 4:8-note) are more than worth the sacrifice. ([Copyright Moody Bible Institute. Used by permission. All rights reserved](#)) (Bolding added)

**How much greater is the race believers are called to run!** One of the most grueling of all bicycle races is the Tour De France. A contestant in that event, Gilbert Duclos-Lassalle, describes it in a National Geographic article titled, "An Annual Madness.? The race

covers about 2000 miles, including some of France's most difficult, mountainous terrain. Eating and drinking is done on the run. And there are extremes of heat and cold. To train for the event, Lassalle rides his bicycle 22,000 miles a year. What kind of prize makes people endure so much hardship and pain! \$10,000? \$100,000? No. It's just a special winner's jersey. What then motivates the contestants? Lassalle sums it up: "Why, to sweep through the Arc de Triomphe on the last day. To be able to say you finished the Tour de France."

**Illustration** - Spiros Louis was a humble water carrier who, in 1896, found himself the bearer of unprecedented esteem with a permanent place in the history of his nation. He represented his nation of Greece, the host of the first modern Olympics, in the inaugural running of the race from Marathon to Athens. When he entered the stadium, first of all competitors, the home crowd showered him with cheers. The Crown Prince Constantine and Prince George joined his side for the completion of the arduous race. A man who began the day a commoner finished it as a companion of royalty.

**Illustration** -Near the end of the third century ad, Saint Anthony's parents died and he inherited a rather large fortune. But rather than enjoy the pleasures such riches would give him, Anthony took the opposite approach. He gave away all he had and withdrew himself completely from the world and all its pleasures. The converted emperor Constantine had popularized Christian faith and put an end to the rampant persecution of the church. Although some of his practices may have been extreme, Anthony stood out in an era of comfortable Christianity. He became one of the first monks to impose a level of suffering on himself. He withdrew from the routines of a typical daily life, not to escape the responsibility and pain, but to resist the delights of "under the sun" living. What a stark contrast to what we've studied in Ecclesiastes! In terms of personal satisfaction, Anthony's approach was an attempt to mirror Christ's suffering and sacrifice. Today's passage compels us to make such an attempt ourselves.

**Illustration** - It sounded like something straight out of the Jetsons. For this year's Boston Marathon, one of the runners participated from outer space. U.S. Navy Commander Suni Williams, age 41, qualified for the Boston race by completing the Houston Marathon in 3 hours, 29 minutes and 57 seconds. However, in December she blasted into space on the space shuttle Discovery and would not return in time to run in Boston. Instead, Williams ran the equivalent distance on a treadmill located in the international space station—210 miles above earth. Because of the lack of gravity, Williams was tethered by bungee cords. Her sister, Dina, ran the race at the same time in Boston. Although separated by miles and space, the sisters expressed their desire to encourage one another to finish well. As believers, we also run a race and can be encouraged by our co-runners to keep the faith and to finish well. We may be separated by age, by location, and even by centuries. In both the Old and the New Testaments, we read of men and women who ran the race steadfastly. Hebrews 12:1-2 records those examples of faithfulness: "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith." Runners usually have some personal motivation for enduring a grueling race. We, too, must find motivation to have faith that endures earthly suffering. Hebrews tells us not to look to ourselves, but to Jesus. "Fixing our eyes on Jesus," says Heb 12:2, "the author and perfecter of our faith." Jesus is the author, the reason we run. Through Him, we are able to finish. The apostle Paul relied on God's power to finish well. Paul says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). Sometimes the race is difficult. When we feel weak or stumble, we can be encouraged by that "great cloud of witnesses"—those who have triumphed over adversity and doubt. Through the pages of Scripture, we read their stories and are encouraged by God's final reward. Paul encourages us to finish the race well: "In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8 ).

**Illustration** - After operations on both of his Achilles' tendons, Olympic athlete Derek Redmond was running well in the preliminary heats for the 400 meters race. But in the finals, Derek turned and fell to the track as a sharp pain stabbed his right leg. He struggled to his feet in intense pain and began hobbling toward the finish line. His father Jim, who was in the stands for the race, ran to his son's aid. Derek leaned on his father's shoulder as the two finished together, well after the other competitors had finished the race. Thousands of people remained in the stands, and rewarded Derek and his father Jim with a standing ovation. That dramatic example illustrates the essence of today's reading from the book of Hebrews. The witnesses in heaven don't come out of the grandstands to help us literally, but their example is meant to inspire us as we run our race. We can draw strength from the godly lives of Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Rahab, or Moses, or any other biblical hero, as we read of their faith and perseverance and commit ourselves to the same high standard.

#### **WITH ENDURANCE: di hupomones:**

- Heb 6:15; 10:36; Matthew 10:22; 24:13; Luke 8:15; Romans 2:7; 5:3, 4, 5; 8:24,25; 12:12; Jas 1:3; 5:7, 8, 9, 10, 11; 2Pe 1:6; Re 1:9; 3:10; 13:10
- RBC booklet [Finishing Well](#)
- Hebrews 12 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

- [Hebrews 12:1-3 Faith to Run the Christian Marathon](#) - Steven Cole
- [Hebrews 12:1 Dealing with Habitual Sins](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-4 Run for Your Life](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-3 The Race of Faith](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-4 Running the Race That Is Set Before Us](#) - John MacArthur

**Wuest** - "patience" (hupomone) includes both passive endurance and active persistence.

**Spurgeon** - All through the chapter he keeps up the idea of the great Olympic games, and represents the saints as occupied with spiritual athletics in the presence of God, the angels, and glorified men. In those games, those who ran and wrestled wore very little clothing, or often nothing at all. A runner might lose the race through being entangled by his scarf, so he laid aside everything that might hinder or hamper him.

**Marcus Dods on run with endurance** - This let us run, not waiting for a pleasanter, easier course, but accepting that which is appointed and recognizing the difficulties as constituent parts of the race. Success depends on the condition attached, fixing our gaze on Him who sets us the example of faith (Heb 12:2), and exhibits it in its perfect form, who leads us in faith and in whom faith finds its perfect embodiment. ([Hebrews 12 Commentary - Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**Run with endurance (perseverance)** - The older I grow in age and in Christ, the more I recognize my continual need of dependence (on God's grace, His Spirit), before I can even hope to pursue perseverance or endurance. In fact we cannot hope to grow in perseverance until we have learned the lesson of continual dependence (surrender, submission, yieldedness, humility, Christ increasing, me decreasing Jn 3:30-note, etc). One might be able to drive a dog sled to the North Pole purely by a self-energized indomitable spirit, but one cannot run this Christian race with "self" energy! If we are going to run God's race (and finish well!), doing the Father's will, then we must learn the "secret" of running the race in His strength, not ours. Jesus made it abundantly clear using the metaphor of horticulture that "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). Similarly, Paul said, "I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength" (Php 4:13-note). As you undoubtedly noticed, our Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul have presented two sides of the same truth which says in essence that without God's supernatural strength (His Holy Spirit, His Holy Word, His amazing grace) we can do absolutely nothing of eternal value, but that with His supernatural enablement we can do all we need to do and all He has called us to do. And here in Hebrews 12, the writer is calling his weary, potentially lagging readers to persevere in the Christian race and to do God's will despite the obstacles and discouragements, but doing so in God's strength and His alone.

**Newell** - This "patience" (endurance) is illustrated in Abraham in Hebrews 6:15: "And thus, having patiently endured, he obtained the promise." God could take each believer up to Heaven as soon as he believes. But then all would be babes, would they not? God sets before. ([Ibid](#))

**Endurance** ([5281](#)) (**hupomone** [**word study**] from **hupó** = under + **méno** = abide) means literally "to abide under" and has to do primarily with difficult circumstances whereas longsuffering ([3115](#)) (**makrothumia**) has to do more with difficult people. The root idea of **hupomone** is that of remaining under some discipline, subjecting one's self to something which demands the acquiescence of the will to something against which one naturally would rebel. It portrays a picture of steadfastly and unflinchingly bearing up under a heavy load and describes that quality of character which does not allow one to surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial. The picture is that of steadfastness, constancy and endurance. It has in it a forward look, the ability to focus on what is beyond the current pressures, the premier example being of course Jesus "Who for the joy set before Him **endured** [verb form hupomeno] the Cross despising the shame (He 12:2-note).

**Hupomone** does not describe a grim resignation or a passive "grin bear" attitude but a triumphant facing of difficult circumstances knowing that even out of evil God guarantees good. And so hupomone is not a passive acceptance but strong fortitude in the face of opposition or difficulty. It is the opposite of despondency and is never used in reference to God, for God does not face difficult circumstances. It describes that spirit which bears things not simply w resignation, but with blazing hope. In other words, if something happens in your life that is hard and painful and frustrating and disappointing, and, by grace, your faith looks to Christ and to His power and His sufficiency and His fellowship and His wisdom and His love (equating with "abiding in the Vine"), and you don't give in to bitterness and resentment and complaining, then your faith endures and perseveres, enabling you to "run" with a steady determination to keep going, regardless of the temptation to slow down or give up. As someone has well said "It's always too soon to quit!"

**Hupomone** - 32x in 31v - endurance(7), patient enduring(1), perseverance(21), steadfastness(3).

Lk 8:15; 21:19; Ro 2:7; 5:3-4; 8:25; 15:4-5; 2Cor 1:6; 6:4; 12:12; Col 1:11; 1Th 1:3; 2Th 1:4; 3:5; 1Ti 6:11; 2Ti 3:10; Titus 2:2; Heb 10:36; 12:1; Jas 1:3-4; 5:11; 2Pe 1:6; Rev 1:9; 2:2-3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12

**J Vernon McGee** writes that the author challenges his first century readers as well as modern readers to "We are challenged to run

with patience, having laid aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us. God has saved us from sin. He has brought us into the heavens, actually, into the holy place, and He has made us to sit in heavenly places. He's given to us His Holy Spirit. But in spite of all that He has provided, the average Christian falls down and stumbles and wanders like a man lost in the dark. What is wrong with the Christian life as it is being lived at the present time? I will come back to the same string which I play on all the time, because I think this is the answer: the problem is that Christians do not go on with God. They get saved, give a testimony of their salvation, and that's all they ever have. They never maintain a serious study of the Word of God, which is essential to growth. They are like the little girl who fell out of bed one night. When the little girl began to cry, her mother rushed in and said, "Honey, how come you fell out of bed?" The little girl replied, "I think I stayed too close to the place where I got in." That is the problem of the Christian today. We stumble and falter and fail because we are staying too close to the place where we got in. We need to go on—this is a race, you see. ([McGee, J V: Thru the Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#)) (Or [listen to an Mp3](#) from Thru the Bible)

As **Expositor's** comments "The author is not thinking of a short, sharp sprint but of a distance race that requires endurance and persistence. Everyone has from time to time a mild inclination to do good. The author is not talking about this but about the kind of sustained effort required of the long-distance runner who keeps on with great determination over the long course. That is what the heroes of faith did in their day, and it is that to which we are called. ([Gaebelein, F. Editor: Expositor's Bible Commentary 6-Volume New Testament. Zondervan Publishing](#))

It is as true in our spiritual life as it is in Olympic running: Only the most focused, disciplined and determined athletes achieve their goals. Olympic medals don't go to the out of shape athlete who has neglected his or her training. Eric Liddell, as portrayed in the excellent film "[Chariots of Fire](#)," illustrates this principle. Just before the first turn in a 400-meter race, Liddell was shoved off balance, and he stumbled onto the infield grass. As he looked up, he saw the field pulling away, but with intense determination, Eric jumped to his feet, and with his back cocked and his arms flailing he flew like the wind. He was determined not only to catch up with the pack, but to win, which is exactly what he did! This is the kind of spiritual determination that the apostle Paul brought to his ministry and desires all believers.

To win over sin and self, we must endure God's loving discipline (He 12:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 -- see notes Hebrews 12:5;12:6;12:7;12:8;12:9;12:10;12:11). But knowing we're winning instead of sinning makes the pain of discipline worthwhile.

**No pain, no gain.  
Know pain, great gain.**

**George Matheson** wrote "'We commonly associate patience with lying down. We think of it as the angel that guards the couch of the invalid. Yet there is a patience that I believe to be harder—the patience that can run. To lie down in the time of grief, to be quiet under the stroke of adverse fortune, implies a great strength; but I know of something that implies a strength greater still: it is the power to work under stress; to have a great weight at your heart and still run; to have a deep anguish in your spirit and still perform the daily tasks. It is a Christlike thing! The hardest thing is that most of us are called to exercise our patience, not in the sickbed but in the street."

Why do we need endurance (ultimately supplied by God's Spirit and His grace)? - "Is it not human nature that if something takes us a long time to complete, we are inclined to become impatient. Or if a journey is long, we are generally inclined to grow weary and loiter by the way. But if the road is long and dusty, we are to be patient. If the trial is severe, we are to be patient, and not allow our souls to be agitated. Sometimes the blessing we expect may be delayed, but we are to be patient in waiting for it. Sometimes our persecutions may be fierce indeed, but we are to be patient whilst we endure them. This grace is like the rivet that binds all the machinery together. (Pascoe, W G: Biblical Illustrator)

**TODAY IN THE WORD** - Anyone who has participated in competitive sports knows that days early in the season can be some of the most difficult. The coach pushes prospective team members to run faster and longer than they have ever run before. He may even have them perform the same drills over and over again. At the end of the first week there is a noticeable difference in the number of participants. Those who had thought they wanted to be part of the team now have second thoughts. In fact, some of those who thought about joining the team could summarize their feelings in two words, "I quit!" Christians who have been living out the faith for awhile can understand why athletes sometimes feel like quitting. Being a Christian isn't always easy. Facing hostility from family members and friends can be intimidating indeed. That's why the writer to the Hebrews calls readers to one of the most significant virtues that any believer could pursue--the virtue of perseverance. Perseverance is that attitude of mind and soul whereby we make a decision to be faithful to Jesus Christ and His Word no matter what obstacles we are facing. It doesn't mean that we have to live out the faith in our own strength, because that would be virtually impossible. Instead, we are told to live in the power of the Holy Spirit in all that we say and do as Christians (Gal. 5:16). **TODAY ALONG THE WAY** - One of the ways that you can grow in perseverance is to take a good look at the context that surrounds Hebrews 12. The writer refers to "a great cloud of witnesses." These are individuals mentioned in the preceding chapter who persevered in their faith and service to God even when it was difficult. But there are probably people in your own life who have served as models of faith and perseverance. Take some time today to write

a short note telling one such individual how much his or her example has meant to you.

**Remember that we each will be...**

**... judged by how we finish,  
not by how we start!**

## THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US: ton prokeimenon (PMPMSA) hemin agonā

- Hebrews 12 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Hebrews 12:1-3 Faith to Run the Christian Marathon](#) - Steven Cole
- [Hebrews 12:1 Dealing with Habitual Sins](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-4 Run for Your Life](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-3 The Race of Faith](#) - John MacArthur
- [Hebrews 12:1-4 Running the Race That Is Set Before Us](#) - John MacArthur

**The race** - The definitive article makes the point that we each have a specific race. It calls to mind the idea of an Olympic race where each runner has a specific lane in which to run.

**Spurgeon** - If every weight of care must be laid aside, and every rag of sin, who is sufficient for these things? 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 how we are driven to free grace, how we are driven to the power of the Holy Spirit! The race that has been set before us most clearly reveals our helplessness and hopelessness apart from divine grace. The race of holiness and patience, while it demands our vigor, 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 do not dare to retreat from the contest, but how can we begin a struggle for which we are so unfit? Who will help us? To whom shall we look? Does not all this very admirably introduce the next verse—"Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the originator and perfecter of faith"?

**Steven Cole** elaborates on "the (specific) race" calling our attention to the fact that "God sets the course. If you're running a marathon, you can't make up your own course. If you stray from the course, you'll be disqualified. The race is "set before us," just as Jesus had "the joy set before Him." God is the Sovereign One who sets the course for each of us, just as He set the course of the cross for Jesus. To finish the Christian marathon, it's important to keep in mind at all times that the Sovereign God sets the course. You may not like parts of the course. You may be prone to grumble, "Why did the course have to go over this hill, or through this swamp?" The answer is, "Because the Sovereign God planned it this way." You won't be able to run by faith unless you submit your will to His will (**Ed**: Beloved, this is a lifelong process. No man, other than Christ, ever submitted his will perfectly, totally to the will of the Lord. This is part of our progressive sanctification, of learning to die to self daily, surrendering our will to that of the Spirit, trusting Him, allowing Him to control us, walking by faith not sight.) ([Hebrews 12:1-3 Faith to Run the Christian Marathon](#))

**The race** (73) (**agon [word study]**) means to engage in an intense struggle. **Agon** was the picture of an intense contest for victory as in the Olympic games, and describes physical or nonphysical force against strong opposition. Agon can describe the place of the contest, such as an arena or stadium. This word emphasizes that the Christian race is a struggle involving conflict, contention and strife. Christians must understand that the "race" we are called to run is not easy. If we do not understand this truth, we may be surprised and even overwhelmed by the conflict. Beloved, forewarned is forearmed!

**Agon** - 6x in **NAS** - Phil. 1:30; Col. 2:1; 1Th. 2:2; 1Ti. 6:12; 2Ti 4:7; Heb 12:1. **NAS** = conflict(1), fight(2), opposition(1), race(1), struggle(1).

**Agon** gives us our English word "**agony**" (intense pain of mind or body, a violent struggle, the struggle that precedes death [think "death to self"!], In strictness, pain so extreme as to cause writhing or contortions of the body, similar to those made in the athletic contests in Greece). From the definitions of our English word "agony" you should be constructing a more clear picture of our present Christian life, which not a picnic but a demanding, grueling, albeit joyful (the ultimate finish line is heaven), effort like that of an Olympic athlete. Furthermore, our **race** is not a sprint or a 100 meter dash but a lifelong "endurance" race. If you try to "run" your Christian life like a dash, you will likely soon grow weary and be "benched". One of the greatest mistakes we can make in this agonizing race is not to pace ourselves properly (learning to live in the power of the Spirit rather than the "power" of the flesh, remembering that the latter profits nothing - Jn 6:63). Many young Christians start out "*on fire*" for Jesus, but by the "100 meter mark", they begin to fade. Or perhaps they forget that they entered the race by grace through faith and begin to run by trying to keep rules, etc (eg, they become entrapped by "**Legalism**"- [recommended message by Ray Stedman](#)). Or we may lose sight of the goal of our "running" which is the glory of the Lord (Mt 5:16) in this life and then one day in the presence of His glory when our race

on earth is finished (cp Rev 14:13, Rev 22:12).

Paul uses **agon** in his charge to Timothy to **'Fight (agonizomai - present imperative - command calling for a continual fight of faith. Faith obeys, so we fight daily by obeying the Spirit and denying the flesh) the good fight (agon) 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. (1Ti 6:12)**

In some of Paul's last recorded words he encourages Timothy with the fact that he had run the race and thus Timothy could also run with endurance: "I have fought (**agonizomai**) the good fight (**agon**), I have finished the course, I have kept the faith (2Ti 4:7, 8-note)

In sum, **agon** pictures an intense struggle in a contest. What truth should encourage us to keep on running with endurance? We can "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, **for (term of explanation) He who promised is faithful** (can be trusted to do what He promised He would do!) (Hebrews 10:23-note)

What other truth should motivate us to endure? Because "you have for yourselves **abetter possession** and an **abiding one** (one that cannot be stolen or lost!). Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a **great reward**. (Hebrews 10:34; 35-note)

How long will we have to endure? Just a little while (relative to eternity!) "FOR YET IN A **VERY LITTLE WHILE** (Greek = mikron > "micron"! = a very small amount of time!) , HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME ("be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" James 5:8), AND WILL NOT DELAY. (Hebrew 10:37-note)

**Newell** has a pithy comment - -First we have the preparation for the race, then the running. This running our course is in view, as we have said, of the great examples of faith of the preceding chapter. (How dare you or how dare I count ourselves exempt from this race? Christendom is full of **professing Christians** who are not running this race, but are weighted down, and have never even considered laying aside cares, riches, pleasures, and "lusts of other things," as our Lord puts it in Mk. 4:19--"weights," all of them. Let us not dare to be like these!) Paul said to the Ephesian elders, "I hold not my life of any account as dear unto myself, so that I may accomplish my course" (Acts 20:24). (**Ibid**)

**Set before (4295) (prokeimai** from **pros** = in front of + **keimai** = lie outstretched) means to be set before one and figuratively means to be present to the mind as an example or reward. The idea is that the race lies before us in full view.

**Wuest** - The words "set before us" (prokeimai) give one the idea that a certain type of race is placed before the Christian. The idea in the word prokeimai is that of something lying before one. It is like a road that stretches out before one's gaze.

**Prokeimai** - 5x in the NT - exhibited(1), present(1), set before(3)

- 2 Co. 8:12; Heb. 6:18; 12:1-2; Jude 1:7.

Both Greeks and the Romans were keenly interested in athletic contests, not only for their physical well-being, but also for the honor of their towns and countries. It was a patriotic thing to be a good athlete and to bring glory to your country. In the minds of his readers, these two themes of competing in the games and the idea of citizenship would go together; for no one could take part in the official games unless he was a citizen of the nation. We too can end the Christian race well, even if we began late, started slow, or faltered along the way. The secret is to stay true to Christ to the last moment.

Just live your life before your Lord,  
Rise to that higher, nobler plane--  
With single eye His glory seek,  
And you shall His approval gain.  
--Rae

The idea in the word prokeimai is that of something lying before one. It is like a road that stretches out before one's gaze.

**A W Pink** comments that "The **race** is that life of faith and obedience, that pursuit of personal holiness, to which the Christian is called by God. Turning from sin and the world in penitence and trust to Christ is not the finishing-post, but only the starting-point. The Christian race begins at the new birth, and ends not till we are summoned to leave this world. The prize to be run for is heavenly glory. The ground to be covered is our journey through this life. The track itself is "set before us": marked out in the Word. The rules to be observed, the path which is to be traversed, the difficulties to be overcome, the dangers to be avoided, the source and secret of the needed strength, are all plainly revealed in the holy Scriptures. If we lose, the blame is entirely ours; if we succeed, the glory belongs to God alone. The prime thought suggested in the figure of running the race set before us is not that of speed, but of self-discipline, whole-hearted endeavor, the calling into action of every spiritual faculty possessed by the new man. ([Hebrews 12:1 The Demands of Faith](#))

**F B Meyer** writes regarding the specific race we are each called to run that...

There will, of course, be difficulties in all our lives to impede our heavenward progress: difficulties from the opposition of our foes; difficulties from within our own hearts. We shall need patience and long forbearance as we tread our appointed track. But there are two sources of comfort open to us. Let us remember that the course is set before us by our heavenly Father, who therefore knows all its roughness and straitness, and will make all grace abound toward us, sufficient for our need. To do his will is rest and heaven.

Let us "look off unto Jesus." Away from **past failure** and **success**; away from **human applause** and **blame**; away from the gold pieces scattered on the path, and the flowers that line either side. **Do not look now and again, but acquire the habit of looking always**, so that it shall become natural to look up from every piece of daily work, from every room, however small, from every street, however crowded, to His dear, calm, sweet face; just as the sojourner on the northern shores of Geneva's lake is constantly prone to look up from any book or work on which the attention may have been engaged, to behold the splendor and glory of the noble range of snowcapped summits on the further shores. And if it seems hard to acquire this habitual attitude, trust the Holy Spirit to form it in your soul.

Above all, remember that where you tread there your Lord once trod, combating your difficulties and sorrows, though without sin; and ere long you shall be where he is now. Keep your eye fixed, then, on him as he stands to welcome and reward you; and struggle through all, animated by his smile, and attracted to his side, and you will find weights and unbelief dropping off almost insensibly and of themselves.

This is the only way by which souls can be persuaded. Argue with them; urge them; try to force them-and they will cling the closer to the encumbrances which are clogging their steps. But present to them Jesus in the beauty and attractiveness of his person and work, and there will be a natural loosening of impediments; as the snow which had been bending the leaves to the earth drops away when the sun begins to shine. And God never takes aught from us, without giving us something better. He removes the symbol, to give us the reality; breaks the type, to give the substance; releases us from the natural and human, to give us the divine. Oh, trust him, soul: and dare to let go, that thou mayest take; to be stripped, that thou mayest become clothed! (Meyer, F B: [Way into the Holiest: Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews](#)) (Bolding added)

And so God has prepared a "lane" for each of his children to run in and a goal for each one to reach. Paul explains that "we are His workmanship (Greek **poiema** ~ His "poem", His "masterpiece"!), created in Christ Jesus for good works, which **God prepared beforehand**, that we should walk (or "run") in them. (Eph 2:10-note)

The **Biblical Illustrator** adds the following warning regarding running in the "lane" God has prepared for each of His children...

Go ahead" was only half of David Crockett's motto — and not the most important half. "Be sure you are right" precedes. The faster the ship goes ahead, the greater the danger, if there is not a good watch on the bow and a strong hand on the wheel. To run well is of importance; to start right is of prime importance. "Let us run with patience **the race** that is **set before us**," says the sacred writer. A great many men lose the prize by dropping out of the text altogether the clause which we have put in **italics**. Every man must find **his own race** before he begins to run. God has a work for every man that no other man can do quite as well; and he succeeds best who quickest finds what that work is, and sets himself to do it. Many a good writer has been spoiled to make an insolvent merchant; not a few good housekeepers to make execrable poets; now and then an execrable mechanic to make a poor preacher. **A race has been set before me; and it is my duty to find out what that race is, and run it, and not waste life in regrets that I cannot run a different one, or life's energies in unsuccessful attempts to do so.**

**A W Pink** - the Christian life, the life of faith and obedience, is presented under the figure of a "race," which denotes that so far from its being a thing of dreamy contemplation or abstract speculation, it is one of activity, exertion, and progressive motion, for faith without works is dead. But the "race" speaks not only of activity, but of regulated activity, following the course which is "set before us." Many professing Christians are engaged in multitudinous efforts which God has never bidden them undertake: that is like running round and round in a circle. To follow the appointed track means that our energies be directed by the precepts of Holy Writ. The order presented in Hebrews 12:1 is the negative before the positive: there must be the "laying aside" of hindering weights, before we can "run" the race set before us. This order is fundamental, and is emphasized all through Scripture. There must be a turning from the world, before there can be a real turning unto the Lord (Isaiah 55:7); self must be denied before Christ can be followed (Matthew 16:24). There must be a putting off the old man, before there can be any true putting on of the new man (Ep 4:22-note, Ep 4:23, 24-note). There has to be a "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts," before we can "live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:13-15-note). There has to be a "cleansing of ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit," before there can be any "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2Corinthians 7:1-note). We must "be not conformed to this world," before we can be "transformed by the renewing of our mind," so that we may "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect

will of God" (Ro 12:1; 2-see notes [Ro 12:1; 2](#)) ([The Object of Faith](#))

**William Barclay** - This is one of the great, moving passages of the New Testament; and in it the writer has given us a well-nigh perfect summary of the Christian life.

**(i) In the Christian life we have a goal.** The Christian is not an unconcerned stroller along the byways of life; he is a wayfarer on the high road. He is not a tourist, who returns each night to the place from which he starts; he is a pilgrim who is for ever on the way. The goal is nothing less than the likeness of Christ. The Christian life is going somewhere, and it would be well if, at each day's ending, we were to ask ourselves: "Am I any farther on?"

**(ii) In the Christian life we have an inspiration.** We have the thought of the unseen cloud of witnesses: and they are witnesses in a double sense. For they have witnessed their confession to Christ and they are now witnesses of our performance. The Christian is like a runner in some crowded stadium. As he presses on, the crowd looks down; and the crowd looking down are those who have already won the crown. Longinus, in his great work *On The Sublime*, has a recipe for greatness in literary endeavour. "It is a good thing," he writes, "to form the question in our souls, How would Homer perhaps have said this? How would Plato or Demosthenes have lifted it up to sublimity? How would Thucydides have put it in his history? For when the faces of these people come before us in our emulation they will, as it were, illumine our road and will lift us up to those standards of perfection which we have imagined in our minds. It would be still better if we were to suggest this to our minds. 'What would this that I have said sound like to Homer, if he were standing by, or to Demosthenes, or how would they have reacted to it?' In truth it is a supreme test to imagine such a judgment court and theatre for our own private productions, and, in imagination, to submit an account of our writings to such heroes as judges." An actor would act with double intensity if he knew that some famous dramatic master was sitting in the stalls watching him. An athlete would strive with double effort if he knew that a stadium of famous Olympic athletes was watching him. It is of the very essence of the Christian life that it is lived in the gaze of the heroes of the faith who lived, suffered and died in their day and generation. How can a man avoid the struggle for greatness with an audience like that looking down upon him?

**(iii) In the Christian life we have a handicap.** If we are encircled by the greatness of the past. We are also encircled by the handicap of our own sin. No man would seek to climb Mount Everest with a pantechicon of lumber weighing him down. If we would travel far, we must travel light. There is in life an essential duty of discarding things. There may be habits, pleasures, self-indulgences, associations which hold us back. We must shed them as the athlete sheds his track suit when he goes to the starting-mark; and often we will need the help of Christ to enable us to do so.

**(iv) In the Christian life we have a means.** That means is steadfast endurance. The word is *hypomone* which does not mean the patience which sits down and accepts things but the patience which masters them. It is not some romantic thing which lends us wings to fly over the difficulties and the hard places. It is a determination, unhurrying and yet undelaying, which goes steadily on and refuses to be deflected. Obstacles do not daunt it and discouragements do not take its hope away. It is the steadfast endurance which carries on until in the end it gets there.

**(v) In the Christian life we have an example. (Hebrews 12:2)** That example is Jesus himself. For the goal that was set before him, he endured all things; to win it meant the way of the Cross. The writer to the Hebrews has a flash of insight--despising the shame, he says. Jesus was sensitive; never had any person so sensitive a heart. A cross was a humiliating thing. It was for criminals, for those whom society regarded as the dregs of humanity--and yet he accepted it. St. Philip of Neri bids us "to despise the world, to despise ourselves, and to despise--the fact that we are despised" (*spernere mundum, spernere te ipsum, spernere te sperni*). If Jesus could endure like that, so must we.

**(vi) In the Christian life we have a presence, the presence of Jesus.** (Hebrews 12:2) He is at once the goal of our journey and the companion of our way; at once the one whom we go to meet and the one with whom we travel. The wonder of the Christian life is that we press on surrounded by the saints, oblivious to everything but the glory of the goal and forever in the company of him who has already made the journey and reached the goal, and who waits to welcome us when we reach the end ([Barclay's Daily Study Bible - Hebrews](#))

It would be well to reiterate that the writer in presenting the picture of a race, is **not** saying that we are to run (or work) our way to heaven "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not as a result of works, that no one should boast." (Ephesians 2:8,9-note)

And again **Paul** says "it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who **runs**, but on God who has mercy." (Ro 9:16-note)

We are not competing with each other. We are competing in a sense with ourselves and striving with our eyes fixed on Christ as we run the race. **To reiterate, we are not running the race in order to get to heaven.** You might think this disclaimer would be unnecessary but even respected sources (freely available on the internet, and even listed in my resources - another reason to always do your own study before you read the commentaries!) such as Adam Clarke's commentary have statements like the one



below:

This is a race which is of infinite moment to us: the prize is ineffably great; and, if we lose it, it is not a simple loss, for **the whole soul perishes**. ([Clarke, Adam: Commentary on Hebrews 12](#)) (Bolding added)

The race in Hebrews 12 is categorically not a race to obtain or receive salvation. Yes, rewards will be forfeited but not salvation. We begin the race by faith and faith alone. Without saving faith we are disqualified from running in the race of Hebrews 12. It is only through faith in Jesus Christ that our sins are forgiven and we have the assurance of heaven (John 14:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; Ep 2:8, 9-note). In the Greek and Roman games, the contestants had to be citizens and no slaves or outsiders were permitted to compete. In the Christian race, each runner already possesses "citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Php 3:20-note) and we are running not to be saved but so that our "light (might) shine before men in such a way that they may see (our) good works, and glorify (our) Father Who is in heaven." (Mt 5:16-note)

Look not to the people around you,  
Nor wait for their laurels of praise;  
Enough that the Savior has found you  
And taught you to serve all your days.

--Hess

---

**J C Philpot Devotional** - October 1 Hebrews 12:1 - Every fervent desire of your soul after the Lord Jesus Christ; every inward movement of faith, and hope, and love toward his blessed name; every sense of your misery and danger as a poor, guilty, lost, condemned sinner, whereby you flee from the wrath to come; every escaping out of the world and out of sin for your very life, with every breathing of your heart into the bosom of God, that he would have mercy upon you and bless you--all these inward acts of the believing heart in its striving after salvation as a felt, enjoyed reality, as the prize of our high calling, are pointed out by the emblem--"running the race set before us."

The Christian sees and feels that there is a prize to be obtained, which is eternal life; a victory to be gained, which is victory over death and hell; and he sees the certain consequences if this prize is not obtained, this victory not won--an eternity of misery. He sees, therefore, let others think and say what they may, he must run if all others stand still, he must fight if all others are overcome. But to do this or any part of this a man must have the life of God in his soul. To begin to run is of divine grace and power; to keep on he must have continual supplies communicated out of the fullness of a covenant Head; and to be enabled to persevere to the end so as to win the prize, he must have the strength of Christ continually made perfect in his weakness. But he does win; he is made more than conqueror through Him who loved him. Jesus has engaged that he shall not be defeated; for the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong; but the lame take the prey; and not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.

---

**J C Philpot Devotional** - January 30 - "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Hebrews 12:1 - None can run this race but the saints of God, for the ground itself is holy ground, of which we read that "no unclean beast is to be found therein." None but the redeemed walk there; and none have ever won the prize but those who have run this heavenly race--as redeemed by precious blood.

Now no sooner do we see by faith the race set before us than we begin to run; and, like Christian in the "Pilgrim's Progress," we run from the City of Destruction, our steps being winged with fear and apprehension. All this, especially in the outset, implies energy, movement, activity, pressing forward; running, as it were, for our life; escaping, as Lot, to the mountain; fleeing, as the prophet speaks, "like as you fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah" (Zech. 14:5); or as the manslayer fled to the city of refuge from the avenger of blood.

As, then, the runner stretches forward hands, and feet, and head, intent only on being first to reach the goal, so in the spiritual race there is a stretching forth of the faculties of the new-born soul to win the heavenly prize. There is a stretching forth of the spiritual understanding to become possessed of clear views of heavenly truth. There is a stretching forth of the desires of the heart to experience the love of God; to feel acceptance with him through the blood of sprinkling; to know the way of salvation for ourselves, and to have clear evidences that our feet are in it; to receive tokens for good, and manifestations of the pardoning love of God; to walk in his fear, live to his praise, and enjoy union and communion with the blessed Lord. And there is a stretching forth of the affections of the heart after Jesus and the truth as it is in Jesus, with many longings, breathings, earnest cries, and fervent wrestlings at the throne of grace, that we may know the truth and by the truth be sanctified and made free. So that when you look at the word "race" as emblematic of a Christian's path, you see that it is not any movement of the body, what the Apostle calls "bodily exercise," that is intended, but an inward movement of the soul, or rather of the grace that God has lodged in your bosom, and to which are communicated spiritual faculties, whereby it moves forward in the ways of God, under the influences of the blessed Spirit.

---

**J C Philpot Devotional - The heavenly runner** - The heavenly runner looks wholly to the incarnate Son of God. Jesus draws him onward with His invincible grace—and as he runs and looks—and looks and runs—every fresh look gives renewed strength! And every time we view His beauty and glory we see more to believe, to admire, and to love Him. Every glance at His beautiful Person renews the flame of holy love! And every touch of His sacred finger melts the heart into conformity to His suffering image. This is the life of a Christian—daily to be running a race for eternity—and, as speeding onward to a heavenly goal, by continually breathing forth the yearnings of his soul after divine realities, and to be pressing forward more and more toward the Lord Jesus Christ as giving him a heavenly crown when he has finished his course with joy.

But as he runs he is bowed down with weights—many trials and sorrows—many cares and wearying anxieties—many powerful temptations—many bosom sins—many inward idols—many doubts and fears—many sinkings and tremblings—many hindrances from his felt coldness and darkness—hang upon him and press him down—so that at times he is utterly unable to move a single foot forward. But in spite of hindrances from without and within, every now and then he sees Jesus at the end of the race holding out the crown—and seeing Him, he is encouraged and enabled once more to run looking unto Him—that he may derive strength and virtue out of His fullness.

He cannot run the race with any hope of success but as he looks unto Jesus—and derives supplies of strength and power out of His fullness. Though faint, be still pursuing. Run on and run through every difficulty. The blessed Jesus, who is drawing you on by looks of love, will never let you go—nor cease His gracious work upon your heart! He will maintain the faith and hope He has given to you—and will never allow you to fall out of the race—but will certainly bring you off a winner, and crown you with eternal victory!

---

**Octavius Winslow Devotional** - Hebrews 12:1 - The Bible is rich in its illustrations of this principle of the Divine government, that all that occurs in the Lord's guidance of His people conspires for, and works out, and results in, their highest happiness, their greatest good. Take, for example, the case of Jacob. Heavy and lowering was the cloud now settling upon his tabernacle. Severe was the test, and fearful the trembling of his faith. His feet were almost gone. The sad recollections of his bereavement still hovered like clinging shadows around his memory; gaunt famine stared him in the face; and a messenger with tidings of yet heavier woe lingered upon the threshold of his door. And when those tidings broke upon his ear, how touching the expression of his grief!—"Me have you bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and you will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me." But lo! the circumstances which to the dim eye of his faith wore a hue so somber, and an aspect so alarming, were at that moment developing and perfecting the events which were to smooth his passage to the grave, and shed around the evening of his life the halo of a glorious and a cloudless sunset. All things were working together for his good!

Joseph, too, reviewing the past of his chequered and mysterious history, arrives at the same conclusion, and confirms the same truth. Seeking to tranquilize his self-condemning brothers, he says, "But as for you, you thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." The envy of his brethren, his being sold as a slave, his imprisonment, were all working out God's purpose and plan of wisdom and love. And yet, who could have foreseen and predicted, that from those untoward events, the exaltation, power, and wealth of Joseph would spring? Yet all things were working together for good.

Thus is it, too, in the history of the Lord's loving corrections. They are all the unfoldings of a design, parts of a perfect whole. From these dealings, sometimes so heart-crushing, what signal blessings flow! "You have chastised me, and I was chastised." And what was the result? It awoke from Ephraim this precious acknowledgment and prayer—"Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yes, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." Oh, who can compute the good, the real, the permanent good, that results from the trying dispensations of God?—from the corrections of a Father's love? The things that appear to militate against the believer, unfolding their heaven-sent mission, turn out rather for the furtherance of his best welfare and his highest interest.

---

**Winning, Not Sinning** - Hebrews 12 is about running the race of faith successfully, yet the word winning isn't mentioned once. Rather, the writer emphasized endurance and discipline. Without these qualities, the race can't be won.

Winning a race is pleasurable, but running is often painful. To be spiritual athletes, we must get rid of every weight and sin that ensnares us. That takes discipline. We must accept the "burn" of endurance for the joy that is set before us--finishing the race.

Our family took in an addict named Derek, who for years had been ensnared by drugs. Derek began his race of faith by accepting Christ and His forgiveness. Formerly he had been ruled by the law of Satan's kingdom: Enjoy an unruly life now and pay the cost later. Now he was learning the law of Christ's kingdom: Pay the cost of God's discipline now and enjoy the fruit of righteousness later (He 12:11-note). One day Derek said, "It's amazing what you can endure when you know you're winning!"

The race of faith is unique because we're competing against ourselves, not others. To win over sin and self, we must endure God's loving discipline. But knowing we're winning instead of sinning makes the pain of discipline worthwhile. —Joanie Yoder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

#### HOW TO RUN THE RACE

Find a trainer: Rely on the Holy Spirit for His help.

Follow a game plan: Read God's Word.

Work out regularly: Put your faith into action.

**No Pain, no gain.**

**Know Pain, great gain.**

---

**Weighed Down Or Way Up?** - A former commander of the Imperial Russian Navy said that he went to London during World War I for training. There he learned how to fly one of three dirigibles that Russia had bought from England.

But first he had to learn to fly a balloon. He recalled getting into the gondola and seeing all four sides covered with sandbags. To begin the ascent, sand was released until the huge balloon slowly lifted off the ground. As more sand went over the side, the craft ascended higher.

The man then applied this to our relationship with the Lord:

"Now that I'm a Christian, I understand that when God begins to clean up my heart, I get closer and closer to Him."

Hebrews 12:1 and 1Jn 2:15-note express that same spiritual truth. Carrying this world's weight hampers our fellowship with the Lord and keeps our hearts from rising in love for Him. John wrote that we cannot love the world and love God at the same time. How often we have proven from experience just how true that is!

Selfish attitudes, besetting sins, and worldly cares keep us from getting off the ground spiritually. But when we lay them aside, we experience the uplifting joy of fellowship with the Father. —Mart De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

I want to live above the world,  
Though Satan's darts at me are hurled;  
For faith has caught the joyful sound,  
The song of saints on higher ground. --Oatman

**If you're not as close to God as you used to be,  
guess who moved.**

---

**Running Well** - A computer study of 5,000 racehorses has revealed a way to predict whether or not a young horse will develop into a good runner. A professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology used computers and high-speed cameras to find out how a good horse runs. He discovered that the legs of a fast horse operate much like the spokes of a wheel. Each leg touches down only as the leg before it pushes off. The effect is peak efficiency of effort and speed.

In the Old Testament, Isaiah talked about running well in the course of life. He said that the person who runs the best is the one who learns to "wait on the Lord" (Isaiah 40:31-note). He doesn't waste energy trying to do things on his own. He looks to the Lord for his strength and hope.

In the New Testament, the Christian life is likened to a race. The apostle Paul indicated that those who run well are characterized by self-control and self-discipline (1Co 9:24, 25, 26, 27-see notes 1Co 9:24-27). The author of Hebrews said, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).

Do you want to earn an imperishable crown? Then wait on the Lord. Practice self-control. Lay aside sinful burdens. These are the secrets of running well. —Mart De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

To run the race of life in Christ,  
This must become your daily goal:  
Confess your sins, trust God for strength,  
Use discipline and self-control.  
—Sper

**Those who wait on the Lord  
run without the weight of sin.**

---

**The Great Overcomer** - Who is not inspired by the competitor who makes a comeback after being down and seemingly out of the running! The runner who stumbles while coming off the starting blocks but moves gradually into the lead stirs the imagination of us all. The team that can come from behind in the last moments to win excites us even more than the team that constantly wins by scoring big in the first part of the game.

Jesus made the most amazing comeback the world has ever seen. After being humiliated, insulted, spit upon, whipped, beaten, and nailed to a cross, His executioners claimed victory and declared Him dead. A military guard secured His tomb. How could anyone be more down and out than that?

Yet the struggle was not over; it was only the beginning. Three days later, He rose from the grave and reappeared as the victor over sin, death, and hell—a comeback like no other in all of history.

Are you feeling out of the running today? Have you stumbled badly? Think about Jesus' suffering. Ponder His resurrection. Ask Him to give you the victory. Just imagine what He has to offer you, no matter how far down you are now!

No one has overcome like our Lord. — Mart De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The great example is our Lord  
Of overcoming power;  
The strength that brought Him from the grave  
Gives hope in life's dark hour. —Branon

**Jesus died to save us and lives to keep us.**

---

**Winning The Race**- On May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister became the first man in history to run a mile in less than 4 minutes. Within 2 months, John Landy eclipsed the record by 1.4 seconds. On August 7, 1954, the two met together for a historic race. As they moved into the last lap, Landy held the lead. It looked as if he would win, but as he neared the finish he was haunted by the question, "Where is Bannister?" As he turned to look, Bannister took the lead. Landy later told a Time magazine reporter, "If I hadn't looked back, I would have won!"

One of the most descriptive pictures of the Christian life in the Bible is of an athlete competing in a race. First Corinthians 9:24-27+ tells us that discipline is the key to winning. In Hebrews 12:1-2+, we are encouraged to lay aside anything that might hinder our spiritual advancement and to stay focused on Christ. And in Philippians 3:12, 13+, the apostle Paul said, "I press on, ... forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead."

Lord, give us endurance as we run this race of life. Help us not to wallow in past failures, but to be disciplined and to shun sinful ways. May we fix our eyes on the eternal goal set before us and keep looking unto Jesus. — Henry G. Bosch ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)) (**ED**: [Play the video of this famous race](#) and listen to the announcer say Landy "looked the wrong way" just as Roger Bannister passes him on the right side!)

Run the straight race through God's good grace,  
Lift up thine eyes and seek His face;  
Life with its way before us lies,  
Christ is the path and Christ the prize. --Monsell

**You can't make spiritual progress by looking back.**

---

**Unsung Heroes** - They may never be publicly applauded. Only a handful of people may praise them. In fact, they may be criticized and written off as foolish or even weak-minded. Yet they are the unsung heroes who serve as the salt that saves society from total corruption.

Michael Weed of the Institute for Biblical Studies in Austin, Texas, identifies some of these individuals who won't get TV coverage but who ought to be in humanity's Hall of Fame. One such person, "though viciously slandered and misunderstood, refuses to become discouraged or to fight back." Another is the "person who, in spite of bitter disappointments, still praises God as the Giver of all good gifts."

God has many heroes who are unsung on earth. Hebrews 11:35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40 (notes) lists some of the unidentified heroes. The author does not give their names, but they are recorded individually in the Book of Life (Php 4:3-note).

We may not be called on to spend our days in sacrificial service or to suffer courageous martyrdom. But in our places of responsibility we can choose to be faithful followers of Christ. We may not hear the applause of this world, but we will someday be rewarded in heaven. — Vernon C. Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Look not to the people around you,  
Nor wait for their laurels of praise;  
Enough that the Savior has found you  
And taught you to serve all your days. --Hess

**Your name in heaven  
is not based on your fame on earth.**

---

**How Are You Running?** - Millions of people came to know Eric Liddell through the prize-winning film Chariots of Fire. It depicted this Scottish athlete's devotion to Jesus Christ and his refusal under severe pressure to violate his spiritual convictions--even at the expense of Olympic glory.

Ian Charleston, who played the role of Eric Liddell in the film, had to learn to run with his head tilted back in the style of that Olympic champion. On the sixth day of filming, Charleston concluded that Eric's unconventional running style was inspired by trust. He "trusted to get there," said Charleston. "He ran with faith. He didn't even look where he was going."

That trust carried over into Eric's spiritual life. It was trust that took him to China as a missionary. Head up, trusting his Savior, he died young in a Japanese concentration camp, still faithfully serving God.

"Let us run," Hebrews 12:1 exhorts us. Run as Paul did as he copied his example Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1). Run head up, trusting our Coach to get us to the goal He has set before us. Run not to gain the approval and applause of people nor to win any of this world's trophies. Run so as to win "an imperishable crown" (1 Cor 9:25). How are you running? —Vernon C Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Run the straight race through God's good grace,  
Lift up your eyes and seek His face;  
Life with its way before us lies,  
Christ is the path and Christ the prize. --Monsell

**Expect great things from God;  
attempt great things for God. --Carey**

---

**Board Of Directors** - All corporations have a board of directors. So do most churches, schools, and nonprofit organizations. But do you have one?

Richard Leider, a career consultant, encourages individuals to choose a personal "board of directors" as part of a plan for maintaining health and vitality. They can be people who are alive today or who lived in the past, known to you personally or only through their writings and accomplishments. They are people from whom you would seek advice.

Wouldn't it be interesting to select a board of directors from the Bible? What counsel would you seek from people like Abraham, Deborah, David, Luke, Peter, or Mary Magdalene? How could their experiences help you make wise choices today?

In Hebrews 11 we read about many heroes of faith from whom we can learn. Their example challenges us to "run with endurance the race that is set before us" (12:1-2). Within the circle of God's people of faith, past and present, is a wealth of help and encouragement for us all.

The chairman of our board of directors must be the Lord Jesus. First and foremost, we look to Him for wisdom and direction. But the other spots are open for appointment. Why not choose your board of directors today? —David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The people of God from Bible days  
Can help us through life in many ways;  
Those saints of old can give direction  
To steer and lead us toward perfection. —Fitzhugh

### **Imitate those who imitate Christ.**

---

**A Lifelong Journey** - The trip from Magadan, Siberia, to Grand Rapids, Michigan, seemed to take forever. In actuality it took 30 hours, four stops, three different airplanes, and one border entry.

After a while, I was tired of the journey. The seat became uncomfortable. The drone of the engines was distracting. The airports all started to look alike. What helped me to endure it was focusing on the end of the trip--my arrival home.

Yet my journey across nine time zones was nothing compared with travel in the 1800s. Back then, it took several days to go from New York to Philadelphia. The voyage from England to the Far East took many weeks.

The journey to spiritual maturity is also a long one, but it's no faster today than it was in the first century. No new technology can shorten the trip. It's easy to grow impatient. When the way is difficult and dangerous, we tire. It seems as if there is no rest for our weary souls.

That's why we must be like Abraham, who focused on the promised destination (Heb. 11:8, 9, 10-note). We need to keep our spiritual eyes on the "heavenly country" that awaits us (He 11:16), and our Lord who has gone before us (He 12:2). When we remember where we are going and that Christ awaits us, we can endure anything along the way. — David C. Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Let us then be true and faithful,  
Trusting, serving every day;  
Just one glimpse of Him in glory  
Will the toils of life repay. --Hewitt

### **Keep your eyes on the prize.**

---

**The Race** - In 1992 the Summer Olympic Games were held in Barcelona, Spain. One of the runners in the 400-meter race was an English athlete named Derek Redmond. He had trained for years to compete in the Olympics. But while sprinting in a qualifying heat, he suddenly pulled a hamstring and crumpled to the track in pain.

Determined to go on, Derek struggled to his feet. He was hobbling toward the finish line when his father scaled the retaining wall and jumped onto the track. Before anyone could stop him, Jim Redmond reached his son. The young runner leaned on his father's shoulder as he staggered to complete the race. The entire crowd stood and cheered the two men on. When they crossed the finish line, it was as if the runner, his father, and the spectators had done it together.

The writer of Hebrews encourages us to run the race of faith and persevere to the end, following the example of those who have gone before us. It takes all of our spiritual stamina to complete it, but we don't run the course alone. Christ Himself helps us toward the finish line. Therefore, "let us lay aside every weight, and ... run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1). — Haddon W. Robinson ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Run the straight race thru God's good grace,  
Lift up thine eyes and seek His face;  
Life with its way before us lies,  
Christ is the path and Christ the prize. —Monsell

**We are judged by how we finish,  
not by how we start.**

---

**Keep Running!** - You may have heard the story of John Stephen Akhwari, the marathon runner from Tanzania who finished last at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. No last-place finisher in a marathon ever finished quite so last.

Injured along the way, he hobbled into the stadium with his leg bloodied and bandaged. It was more than an hour after the rest of the runners had completed the race. Only a few spectators were left in the stands when Akhwari finally crossed the finish line.

When asked why he continued to run despite the pain, Akhwari replied, "My country did not send me to Mexico City to start the race. They sent me here to finish."

The attitude of that athlete ought to be our attitude as we grow older. There is a "race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1), and we are to keep running until we reach the finish line.

No one is too old to serve God. We must keep growing, maturing, and serving to the end of our days. To idle away our last years is to rob the church of the choicest gifts God has given us to share. There is service to be rendered. There is still much to be done.

So let's keep running "with endurance." Let's finish the course—and finish strong. —David H. Roper ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

It will be worth it all when we see Jesus,  
Life's trials will seem so small when we see Christ;  
One glimpse of His dear face all sorrow will erase,  
So bravely run the race till we see Christ. —Rusthoi

**It's always too soon to quit.**

---

**Proper Perspective** - Many a Christian has almost lost his spiritual footing by getting his eyes focused on other people instead of fixing them on the Lord Jesus. All human idols have feet of clay, and sooner or later they may fall and seriously disappoint us.

Until we give our full attention to Jesus, we will stumble and be a disappointment to ourselves and others, and especially to the Lord.

John McNeil tells the story of a young eagle he had raised with a flock of chickens. The out-of-place bird had never learned to fly. One day McNeil thought he would teach this bird how, so he tried throwing it up in the air. But each time the bird would look down and fall to the ground. Then he had an idea. Lifting the eaglet's head, he made it catch a glimpse of the bright sun above. That did it! The eagle pushed out its wings. Then, lifting its head with a shriek, it jumped from his hand and began to soar higher and higher until it was lost to sight in the face of the sun.

Many Christians find themselves in a similar state. If they could just get their eyes off the things of this earth and off other people and on the Son, they would soar on the wings of the Spirit to higher levels of spiritual maturity and blessing. — Henry G. Bosch ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of His glory and grace. --Lemmel  
© Renewal 1950 Singspiration, Inc.

**To soar spiritually,  
look to the Son.**

---

**Still Climbing** - Few experiences match the challenge and exhilaration of mountain climbing. Those who participate in this exercise of endurance and skill like to compare peaks and share experiences. When European climbers get together to swap stories, they often tell of passing a certain grave along the trail to a famous peak. On the marker is a man's name and this inscription: He died climbing.

To me, mountain climbing is a picture of the life of faith. Throughout our lives we are to continue moving upward--learning more about God, growing in our relationship with Christ, becoming stronger in our battle with temptation, pushing ahead in telling the lost about Christ.

The author of Hebrews put it this way: "Let us run with endurance." The words with endurance may be translated "with perseverance," or more commonly, "to the end."

Joshua was just such a man of God. His "climb" began in Egypt and ended in the Promised Land. He won great battles. We are told that "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua" (Josh. 24:31). At the close of his life, Joshua was still urging Israel to serve God faithfully (Joshua 24:23).

Lord Jesus, help us to serve You faithfully. May we still be climbing to the very end. — David C. Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

I want to scale the utmost height  
And catch a glimpse of glory bright;  
But still I'll pray till heaven I've found,  
"Lord, lead me on to higher ground." --Oatman

**Faith grows stronger as we climb higher.**

---

**Shark Tonic** - Have you ever heard of shark "tonic"? It isn't a serum that prevents shark attacks or a medicine given to sharks. The actual term is "tonic immobility," described as "a natural state of paralysis that animals enter... Sharks can be placed in a tonic immobility state by turning them upside down. The shark remains in this state of paralysis for an average of 15 minutes before it recovers."

Imagine, a dangerous shark can be made vulnerable simply by turning it upside down. The state of tonic immobility makes the shark incapable of movement.

Sin is like that. Our ability to honor our Lord, for which we are created in Christ, can be put into "tonic immobility" by the power and consequences of sin. To that end, the writer of Hebrews wants us to be proactive. He wrote, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).

If we are to run the race of the Christian life effectively, we must deal with sin before it immobilizes us. We need to lay aside the sin that hinders us from pleasing Him—starting today. — Bill Crowder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Start early today to run in the race  
That Christians are told they can win;  
First wait on the Lord for the strength He will give,  
Then lay aside every known sin. —Branon

**We must face up to our sins  
before we can put them behind us.**

---

**Foolish Baggage** - In 1845, the ill-fated Franklin Expedition sailed from England to find a passage across the Arctic Ocean.

The crew loaded their two sailing ships with a lot of things they didn't need: a 1,200-volume library, fine china, crystal goblets, and sterling silverware for each officer with his initials engraved on the handles. Amazingly, each ship took only a 12-day supply of coal for their auxiliary steam engines.



The ships became trapped in vast frozen plains of ice. After several months, Lord Franklin died. The men decided to trek to safety in small groups, but none of them survived.

One story is especially heartbreaking. Two officers pulled a large sled more than 65 miles across the treacherous ice. When rescuers found their bodies, they discovered that the sled was filled with table silver.

Those men contributed to their own demise by carrying what they didn't need. But don't we sometimes do the same? Don't we drag baggage through life that we don't need? Evil thoughts that hinder us. Bad habits that drag us down. Grudges that we won't let go.

Let's determine to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us" (Hebrews 12:1). — David C. Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The world has lost its transient lure—  
Its evil spell I shun;  
I've set my course for higher things  
Till earth's brief race is run.  
—Bosch

**Keep out of your life anything  
that would crowd Christ out of your heart.**

---

**Weight Loss** - The army of Alexander the Great was advancing on Persia. At one critical point, it appeared that his troops might be defeated. The soldiers had taken so much plunder from their previous campaigns that they had become weighted down and were losing their effectiveness in combat.

Alexander commanded that all the spoils be thrown into a heap and burned. The men complained bitterly but soon saw the wisdom of the order. Someone wrote, "It was as if wings had been given to them—they walked lightly again." Victory was assured.

As soldiers of Christ, we must rid ourselves of anything that hinders us in the conflict with our spiritual enemy. To fight the battle effectively, we must be clad only with the armor of God (Ephesians 6:11-17).

The Bible also likens Christians to runners. To win the race, we must "lay aside every weight" that would drag us down and rob us of our strength and endurance (Hebrews 12:1). This weight may be an excessive desire for possessions, the captivating love of money, an endless pursuit of pleasure, slavery to sinful passions, or a burdensome legalism.

Yes, if we are to fight the good fight of faith and run the spiritual race with endurance, the watchword must be: Off with the weight!—Richard De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Fight the good fight with all thy might!  
Christ is thy strength and Christ thy right;  
Lay hold on life and it shall be  
Thy joy and crown eternally. —Monsell

**If your Christian life is a drag,  
worldly weights may be holding you back.**

---

**Too Soon To Quit** - Chris Couch was only 16 years old when he first qualified to play golf at its highest level on the PGA Tour. He was quickly declared the next golfing prodigy and a surefire success for years to come.

Life, however, turned out to be more of a grind. Chris did not enjoy a sprint to success but endured a marathon that would take 16 years and 3 different stints on "mini-tours." Tempted to quit, Couch persevered and finally, at age 32, became a Tour winner for the first time when he captured the New Orleans Open in a thrilling finish. His persistence had paid off, but it had not been easy.

In his book *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, Bible teacher Eugene Peterson reminds us that the Christian life has much more in common with a marathon than with a 100-meter dash. Peterson says we are called to persevere in "the long run, something that makes life worth living."

With the grace and strength of Christ, we too can “run with endurance” this race of life (Heb. 12:1). And, with our Lord’s example to help and encourage us, we can, like the apostle Paul, run to win the prize of “an imperishable crown” (1 Cor. 9:25 -note).

It’s always too soon to quit. —Bill Crowder

O for a faith that will not shrink,  
Though pressed by every foe,  
That will not tremble on the brink  
Of any earthly woe. —Bathurst

**Run the race with eternity in view.**

---

**The Power Of Sin** - I was having lunch with a pastor-friend when the discussion sadly turned to a mutual friend in ministry who had failed morally. As we grieved together over this fallen comrade, now out of ministry, I wondered aloud, “I know anyone can be tempted and anyone can stumble, but he’s a smart guy. How could he think he could get away with it?” Without blinking, my friend responded, “Sin makes us stupid.” It was an abrupt statement intended to get my attention, and it worked.

I have often thought of that statement in the ensuing years, and I continue to affirm the wisdom of those words. How else can you explain the actions of King David, the man after God’s own heart turned adulterer and murderer? Or the reckless choices of Samson? Or the public denials of Christ by Peter, the most public of Jesus’ disciples? We are flawed people who are vulnerable to temptation and to the foolishness of mind that can rationalize and justify almost any course of action if we try hard enough.

If we are to have a measure of victory over the power of sin, it will come only as we lean on the strength and wisdom of Christ (Ro 7:24, 25-note). As His grace strengthens our hearts and minds, we can overcome our own worst inclination to make foolish choices.  
—Bill Crowder

The price of sin is very high  
Though now it may seem low;  
And if we let it go unchecked,  
Its crippling power will grow. —Fitzhugh

**God’s Spirit is your power source—  
don’t let sin break the connection.**