

## **Running to Finish: The Race Set Before Us**

There is something deeply stirring about the image the writer of Hebrews chose when he wanted to describe the Christian life. He did not reach for the picture of a stroll in a pleasant garden, nor a quiet meditation by still waters, though Scripture has room for both (Psalm 23:2). He reached instead for the image of a race. "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2). A race. With effort. With endurance. With a finish line.

We do well to sit with this picture, because so much of modern Christian thinking has softened it. We speak readily of being loved by God, and rightly so, for we are loved with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3). We speak of grace, and rightly so, for grace is the very ground we stand on (Ephesians 2:8). But the New Testament also speaks, and speaks often, of running, of striving, of pressing on, of finishing the course (1 Corinthians 9:24-26; Philippians 3:14). Paul did not say at the end of his life that he had felt blessed. He said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). And there was, waiting for him, a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, would give him in that day (2 Timothy 4:8).

A race demands something of us. It demands that we know what direction we are running in. The Christian race is not a wandering. It has a destination, and that destination is Christ Himself, the One who has gone before us (Hebrews 6:20), who has already crossed the line, and who now calls us forward. Every step we take in obedience, every prayer offered in weakness (Romans 8:26), every kindness done in His name (Matthew 10:42), every temptation refused (1 Corinthians 10:13), every burden borne in faith (Galatians 6:2), is a step further along the course He has appointed for us. We are not running aimlessly. We are not, as Paul put it, beating the air (1 Corinthians 9:26). We are running toward a Person.

A race also demands that we lay aside what hinders us. The writer of Hebrews is very practical here. He speaks of "the weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Hebrews 12:1). Some things are not sinful in themselves but they slow us down. They tangle our feet. They drain the energy we need for the long stretch ahead. Each of us, if we are honest before the Lord (Psalm 139:23-24), knows what those things are in our own lives. The racer who carries a backpack full of stones will not finish well, however sincere he is at the starting line. Part of running is letting go.

And a race demands endurance. This is perhaps the hardest word for our generation, because we are not a people much practised in endurance. We want quick results, immediate comfort, instant resolution. But the Christian life unfolds over decades, not minutes. There will be seasons of joy and seasons of sorrow (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4), seasons when the path is clear and seasons when the mist comes down and we can

see only the next step. In all of these, we are called simply to keep going (James 1:12), to keep trusting (Proverbs 3:5-6), to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2).

To finish well is not to finish fastest. It is not to finish with the loudest applause. It is to arrive, by the grace of God, still believing, still loving, still walking in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25), still pointing others to Christ. Some of the most beautiful saints I have known were not famous, did not write books, did not preach to thousands. They simply finished well. They came to the end of their days with their hand still in the hand of their Saviour, and that is the finest thing any of us could hope for.

So take heart, fellow runner. The track may be long and your legs may be weary, but the finish line is real, and the One who waits there is faithful (1 Thessalonians 5:24). Run with patience. Run with hope. Run with your eyes on Jesus. And by His grace, you will finish, and finish well.

### **Questions**

1. What weights are you carrying today that you need to lay aside in order to run with patience the race set before you? (**Hebrews 12:1**)
2. Where in your life are you tempted to grow weary in well-doing, and how might you take fresh courage to keep going? (**Galatians 6:9**)
3. Are your eyes truly fixed on Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith, or have they drifted to the trials around you? (**Hebrews 12:2**)
4. Can you say with Paul that you are pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus? (**Philippians 3:14**)
5. When your race is run, will you be able to say with confidence, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"? (**2 Timothy 4:7**)