

Sermon or Lesson: Hebrews 12:1 (NIV based)

[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: What's Your Status In The Race?

INTRO: When you are traveling to a place you have never been to before, how do you determine what course to take of the many options that become apparent or available? Follow a map? Follow a compass? Ask directions as you go? Follow G.P.S. (Global Positioning System)? Phone a friend for directions? Taking some of these approaches can lead to wasting time, wasting money, getting lost, getting stranded, going to the wrong location, never arriving at the destination, etc.

TRANSITION: In life as a whole as it goes along, what guidance do you use to determine your direction? Do you take a spiritual perspective and use a spiritual approach? God tells us to use a spiritual approach in the following verse.

READ: Hebrews 12:1

[Lesson Question: In this verse, what are the dynamics of the main objective that we believers are to pursue?]

SECTION POINT: Like running a long-distance marathon race, in a similar way we believers are to pursue living life and doing everything along the way that God has designated for us.

"let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us":

"perseverance" = Strong's #5281 "cheerful (or hopeful) endurance, constancy";
'constancy' = (AHD) "steadfastness, as in purpose or affection; faithfulness; the condition or quality of being constant; changelessness."

- - God has marked out the race we believers are to run; i.e. He has already determined and designated how we are to live our lives.
- - Furthermore, God has already determined what specific obstacles, difficulties, challenges, setbacks, and etc. that each of us is to encounter along the way through life.
- - Foremost though, God has specific ministry work for each of us to do along the way through life (like Jesus had specific ministry work to do - vv.2-3).
- - All of these functions God has for each of us to do are activities - they require our taking action, exerting energy and effort, working at it, putting in time in order to do what God has designated for each of us to do.
- - Like running a marathon race, we are to exert long-distance endurance and perseverance and stamina, while steadfastly maintaining God-oriented purpose and goals.
- - We are to "run", keep moving forward and making consistent progress in the direction God has specified, without wandering around, or coasting, or stopping, or going backwards.

- - By faith, we are to proceed along the course that has been marked out for each one of us, even though we may not be able to see what obstacle or change of direction is coming next.
- - By faith, we submit to following the course as God has laid it out, and we do not determine our own course or divert off-course.
- - God has customized the course for each of us, containing some variations specifically purposed for each of us to successfully encounter, engage, and traverse.
- - By faith, we trust that God knows what He is doing in the customizing of the course to fit each one of us, and that He has good purposes designed within each obstacle we encounter along the way.
- - An implication here is that we are being closely watched by God along the way, who herein is supportively encouraging us to run with perseverance and to be strengthened by keeping our focus on Jesus. (v.2)
- - And for additional encouragement and motivation, God has supplied accounts in previous chapter 11 of "such a great cloud of witnesses" who have been successful in running the race God had for them.
- - Therefore, God is especially concerned about and will judge each of us for how we conducted ourselves along the way, and not just whether we managed to finish the race or not.

 [Lesson Question: What are the implied characteristics of "throw off everything that hinders"?]

SECTION POINT: God does not desire nor approve of any thing that we allow to hinder us from properly living the life He has marked out for us.

"let us throw off everything that hinders":

"that hinders" - that is a "burden", that is "weighing you down" (Strong's #3591)

"hinders" = (AHD) "that is in the way or gets in the way; that obstructs or delays or interferes with action or progress"

- - God has a customized race for each of us to run, but we cannot run, or significantly engage in, or make progress if we are being weighted down or hindered in any way.

"throw off" - "lay it aside, put it away" from you (Strong's #0659)

"everything" - "every weight or burden" and "all of it, the whole, any thing, every thing" (Strong's #3591, #3956)

- - We are not to keep what hinders us from running the race God has marked out for us, not to store it for later, not to save some of it, not allow any of it to remain.
- - We are to get rid of it, push it to the side, toss it out of the way, and go on by it.
- - We are to dispose of every single thing that hinders us, in entirety, fully, completely, comprehensively - not keeping or holding on to some parts or aspects that hinder us.
- - So, if we are going to run in the manner that God desires, then we need to stay alert and watch for anything that may hinder us and then persistently get rid of it completely and permanently.

- - Some examples of hindrances are: too many commitments, activities, work responsibilities, social functions, hobbies, toys; too expensive of a lifestyle; too many vehicles or debt or property to support.

[Lesson Question: What is the nature of "the sin that so easily entangles" and in what way does that nature affect getting rid of sin or throwing it away?]

SECTION POINT: Our propensity toward personal sin is a formidable deterrent to our successfully running of the race, and therefore requires deliberate persistent resisting it.

"and let us throw off... "the sin that so easily entangles":

"so easily entangles" = Strong's #2139 "easily surrounding; well standing around, i.e. thwarting in every direction"; 'thwart' = (AHD) "to prevent the occurrence, realization, or attainment of; to oppose and defeat the efforts, plans, or ambitions of"

- - Our own propensity toward sin and love of sin have no difficulties comprehensively preventing, opposing, and defeating the righteous life God has for us to live.
- - Thus, we do not have to work at sinning - it comes natural and easy to us, and it easily encompasses or entangles or ensnares us.
- - We do however have to work at living righteously - this comes unnatural and difficult for us.
- - Therefore, we need to intentionally take distinct steps against any personal sin in order to throw it off or away from us.
- - Furthermore, all sin in some way hinders or entangles us from running the race God has marked out for us.
- - So, a major ongoing lifetime endeavor is to pursue and strive toward being victorious over and successful against all personal sin in one's life.

- - Some examples of sin that entangles are: lack of faith; disinterest; doubt; worldliness; selfish ambition; anxiety; fear; sensualities; apathy; laziness; depression; sinful indulgences; addictions; greed; and etc.

BIG IDEA: Throw off everything that hinders you from running God's race, and then run with perseverance.

IMPLICATIONS:

[Lesson Question: Using the 'running the race' analogy, what are some practical implications for the principles in this verse that you can think of, stated in the negative - i.e. what this is not?]

- - This is not just "trying to be a good Christian" - it is more than this.
- - This is not finishing before you actually reach the Finish Line - retirement years are not the finish line.

- - This is not selecting a low-effort bunny course of ease or comfort - it can involve God wanting you to take the tough road.
 - - This is not being carried or pushed in a wheelbarrow by someone else - you are to carry your own weight.
 - - This is not quitting, or dropping out, or being disqualified, or retiring from the race.
 - - This is not being merely a spectator - you are suppose to be an active participant, busy doing work for the Kingdom.
 - - This is not giving a half-effort, doing the bare minimum to scrimp by.
 - - This is not getting bitter or resentful because of mistreatment by others in the race.
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APPLICATIONS:

- - Expect obstacles to arise along the way.
 - - Be prepared to take on seemingly insurmountable obstacles.
 - - Inquire of the Lord to seek and find His course direction.
 - - Refer to the examples cited in Hebrews 11 for inspiration, motivation, encouragement, insights, etc.
 - - When you are on God's course, do not let your guard down or wander from God's goals and purposes.
 - - What is your current status?
 - - Are you on the course God has marked out for you?
 - - If not, make all necessary adjustments to get on His course right now today.
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