

Focussed Athletes — Hebrews 12:1–2
James Muldoon - Carey Baptist Church - 6 January 2008

Hebrews 12:1–2 likens the Christian life to a race. It's a marathon. And the whole thrust of Hebrews 12 is to tell us to keep on running the race to the end. Here are four instructions about how to do so.

i Strip off hindrances

v1 takes us on from Hebrews 11 to Hebrews 12. It reminds us of the great heroes of faith of the previous chapter, whom it likens to supporters at a race. Then it moves us on to the competitors in the race, people like the Hebrews, people like Christians today. Immediately the writer gives us the first instruction about running the race which is the Christian life: strip off hindrances. Just as an athlete would remove anything which might hinder him in a race, so we're to throw off anything which hinders us from making spiritual progress.

Such hindrances are not necessarily sinful things. But there are things which, though not sinful in and of themselves, can stop our spiritual progress being what it should be. For some, it could be the Playstation if it pushes out time which should be spent for God. For some, it could be Saturday night television if it makes us too tired to worship well at church. For some, it could be some daydream if it occupies us so much that it pushes the Lord out.

Is there something which is hindering you from following the Lord as you should? It's not a sinful thing; just a diversion. As a Christian, you need to be ruthless. You need to throw away everything which hinders you from making spiritual progress.

ii Shed your sin

v1 also tells us to shed our sin. Sin is the great impediment to living a Christian life. You must make it the contest of your life to fight against sin every day.

That will involve serious heart-searching and confession on a daily basis. It will involve prayer. It will involve hard work, relying on the Holy Spirit. Strive to be just as holy as a justified sinner can be.

iii Stay in the running

v1 gives a third instruction for running the Christian race. Don't give up! Stay in the running! Persevere!

And **v1** gives us every encouragement to do so. Notice that we run **"the race marked out for us"**. The race has been marked out for us by our loving, heavenly Father. He is the one who directs our course. Will there anything there that we can't cope with with his help? Will there be anything there which he can't enable us to do? Will there be anything there that is not for our good? Of course not! He loves us too much for that. We can stay in the running, because our God is in control of the race!

Some of us are finding the race hard at the moment. But remember that it is God who has laid out the race for you. Your loving, heavenly Father is in control. He has promised that he won't let you go through things which are too much for you with his help. So look to him. And stay in the running.

iv See Jesus

The fourth instruction about how to run the race is the most important. You can find it in **v2**. **"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus,"** says the writer. And that, above all else, is what you and I must do.

The most important thing in all the world is to keep looking by faith at Christ. You will not persevere in the race which is the Christian life if you do not fix your eyes on him.

The writer then gives us two reasons as to why this is so important.

Firstly, Jesus is **“the author and perfecter of our faith”**. From start to finish, Christ is all! He is the author, the originator, the founder, of our faith. Were it not for him, there would be no faith. Were it not for him, there would be no Christianity. And he is also the perfecter of our faith. Literally, he is the one who brings the faith to completion. He is the one who brings out the full meaning of the Christian faith. From start to finish, Christianity revolves around Jesus Christ. Christ is all. Without him, there is nothing.

So you must see him. You must fix your eyes on him. You must take your eyes off everything else and just look at Jesus. That's the secret of the Christian life. If he is at the centre of your life, everything else will fall into place.

The second reason why it's so important to see Jesus is that he is the perfect example. Think about how he persevered in his life. Consider the cross, for example, with its physical anguish, with its shame, with its poured-out wrath of God. That is suffering which no Christian will ever have to experience.

Christ endured all that. How? By looking forward. He looked forward to the joy set before him, to sitting down at the right hand of God, to glory after suffering. And that is that same lesson we learnt at least a couple of times in Hebrews 11. It's looking forward to glory which sustains Christians through the hard times.

The Lord Jesus Christ, then, is the perfect example. Keep your eyes fixed on him. Immerse yourself in the Gospels. Study his life. And seek to follow the glorious example set by him.

If you're not a Christian, you need to see Jesus too. If you look to him, he will save you. Have the courage to see yourself as a sinner. See Jesus, the Saviour, the one who died and rose to save sinners, the one who died to bring Christianity into being. And then entrust yourself into his hands. Confess your sin to him. Trust in him. Follow him. If you do that, you'll be joining the race which ends up in heaven.