



Open it

1. If you were to run a race, would you prefer to run a sprint or a marathon? Why?

Daily Devotions

Day 1

Today's Theme: Explore It

Read Hebrews 12:1–2

Whenever you see the word “therefore” in the Bible, it should prompt you to ask yourself “what is it there for?” The word “therefore” means “for that reason,” and it is a link between the verses you just read and the verses you’re about to read. You just need to glance back at the previous verses to gain a better understanding of the context, or what the passage means to say.

In this case, the previous chapter is all about the honored men and women of old who have lived, and died, by faith.

GET THIS!

The purpose for this passage is to let you know that spiritually speaking, your journey here on earth is not a casual faith-walk, but a serious faith-race!

And so, by linking chapter 11 with the first verse of chapter 12, you can understand that those “heroes of the faith” make up this “great cloud of witnesses” that surround those who are now running “the race that is set before us,” the course of life that God has set out for you to bring Him glory and grow you to be more like Him.

And now, Christians are receiving encouragement about their own journeys of faith and how to cross that finish line well. While writing these verses, the author had in his mind the ancient Greek races that were very popular in their time. These races were intense, both to train for and to run. The purpose for this passage is to let you know that spiritually speaking, your journey here on earth is not a casual faith-walk, but a serious faith-race!

2. What are we supposed to lay aside?
3. How are we supposed to run?
4. As we are running, who are we to be looking to?
5. What was set before Jesus that enabled Him to endure the cross?
6. Where is Jesus now?

Day 2

Today's Theme: No More Hindrances!

Read Hebrews 12:1

Times certainly have changed since this letter was written. If you were an athlete in the ancient Greek games or any other sporting event, you would have prepared for and competed in the events much differently than we do nowadays. There were some trainers who would attach weights to their athletes during training to strengthen the body. There were those who believed that training in the sand was best because it was harder work, thereby strengthening the body.

But when race day came, they didn't run with those weights or baggy clothing. On race day they wanted to be as fast as they possibly could so they would throw off *everything* that slowed them down, running in practically nothing. Yikes! Thank goodness we don't live in ancient times!

The author is encouraging you as a Christian to engage in your faith-race the same way that the Greek athletes committed to their races. In the same way, I can imagine some of those ancient runners taking off every single training weight before they competed. The author tells you to take off not just some of the things that weigh you down, but EVERY single weight. Would a serious athlete actually choose to carry any extra weight on race day?

In your faith-race, what qualifies as a "weight"? These could be different things for different people — things that may not be sins in and of themselves, but something that you know is not good for you and is not helping you to run your faith-race very effectively, things that keep you from doing what you know you ought to be doing.

7. **What are some "weights" in your life that you need to "lay aside," or cut out of your life, in order to help you run your faith-race better?**

Now sin is definitely a little different than the weight that slows you down, because sin is very serious and it separates you from God. But thankfully, God is right there when you are ready to recognize your sin and repent. Think back to some of our past lessons. You've learned about different warnings in the book of Hebrews, and sinning deliberately, and you've thought about areas in your life you need to change.

8. **Why is it necessary for you to lay aside sin in your life as you follow Jesus? What makes it easy to trip up in those areas? What makes it hard to obey Jesus in those certain circumstances? What do you need to "lay aside," or eliminate, from your life in order to help you run your faith-race?**

It's not always an easy thing, but it is pretty simple! When the Holy Spirit points out a sin in your life, go to God with the confidence we learned about in Hebrews 10:19 and confess it to Him! The less you are wrapped in sin the faster you can run your race!

Fun Fact:

The ancient Greek games have become our modern-day Olympics!

Day 3

Today's Theme: Stay the Course

Read Hebrews 12:1

In a movie I watched several years ago, there was a scene between two military men, one of whom was deeply discouraged and brokenhearted over the loss of one of his sons in a bloody battle. He was ready to give up, thinking that his son's death was punishment for things he had done in the past, and he could not bear any more sorrow. His superior, a colonel in the military, reminded him that there was hope and that victory in the war was within their grasp—if they did not give up.

The Colonel told his friend, "Stay with us. Stay the course." To which his discouraged friend replied, "I have run my course."

GET THIS!

But endurance is waiting patiently through those times, holding on to the truth that God is going to keep His promises to us and that He will help us to endure as we lean on Him.

And this was his attitude, right up until the moment that he noticed a piece of fabric hanging out of his deceased son's saddle bag. As he held that fabric in his hands, you could just sense the hope and determination returning to him, watching the realization come over his face that his son had been taking the time to painstakingly, stitch-by-stitch repair the symbol of hope and freedom that was precious to them, this beautiful flag that led them into battle and reminded them that they were indeed a nation worth fighting for!

In the next scene, a hopeless, dejected troop of militia are marching through a meadow to the drummer's beat and the sound of the musical fife, when suddenly, you catch a glimpse of this beautiful, beat up Colonial American flag flapping in the breeze high on a pole held by this captain, rejoining his troops on his horse, all fired up and filled with hope, determined to stay the course and finish what they started!

In much the same way, sometimes we need to be reminded to "stay the course"!

In all the past chapters we have studied, we know that there are tests, tribulations, hard times, sin, struggles, so many different things that could cause us to give up and stop running our faith-race. But endurance is waiting patiently through those times, holding on to the truth that God is going to keep His promises to us and that He will help us to endure as we lean on Him.

9. What does running with endurance look like?

10. What are some verses that remind you that our endurance comes from God?

Day 4

Today's Theme: Where is Your Focus?

Read Hebrews 12:2

When I was younger, I ran for a couple of our school's racing events. I didn't mind sprinting short distances...no problem. Long distance, however, was another story. Yet, one time, I found myself in a place where we were short a runner for a longer cross-country race and I had to fill in.

As I ran up and down hills, through river beds and gullies, my legs turning to jelly and my lungs feeling like I was breathing fire, the only thing that kept me going was setting a pace for myself by breathing one word over and over again under my breath. Everything in me was laser-focused on keeping with the rhythm of this one word. Of course, it wasn't that specific word that got me to the finish line. It was the *focus* that blocked out everything else that I was feeling and seeing and hearing in order to help me cross that finish line.

11. According to Hebrews 12:2, where should your focus be as a Christian?

When you read this verse, it might be easy to think it is suggesting to keep an eye on Jesus somewhere up ahead near the end of the finish line, to glance at Him from time to time so that you know about where the finish line is.

But that is not at all what these words mean in the language this letter was written in. The author is using language that means in order to run this spiritual race well, you shouldn't look to anyone or anything else, you should not be distracted by things that make you run off the race course; Jesus is the only thing you should be focused on!

GET THIS!
In order to run this spiritual race well, Jesus is the only thing you should be focused on!

12. Why is it that Jesus is the One you should focus on?

13. What are some practical ways you can make Jesus your focus as you run your faith-race?

14. Even though Jesus knew His race would be hard and He would sacrifice His life at the very end of His race, He ran it with great joy because He loves you so much and He knew it would bring such glory to God. How does this inspire you to become more serious about your own faith-race?

So, let's run together toward the finish line, and I pray that when we reach the end, we will each be able to say wholeheartedly and confidently, just like the apostle Paul did in 2 Timothy 4:7, "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful.*"

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