



Big Idea: God calls us to get off the sidelines and follow Him actively.

Main Scripture: Hebrews 12:1-2

[Leader Note: Walk up carrying a backpack that looks visibly heavy. In the backpack, have a few heavy objects (books, water bottles, weights, etc.). Also, have a few small items to represent distractions (phone, game controller, snacks, etc.). Say something like: *“Imagine I’m about to run a race, but I decide to wear this the whole time.”* Try to jog in place or take a few slow steps, acting clearly slowed down and uncomfortable. Then pause and ask: *“How far do you think I’d get in a real race like this?”* Start pulling items out of the backpack one by one. As you do, say: *“A lot of people want to follow Jesus, but they’re trying to do it while still carrying things that slow them down.”* You can name examples as you remove each item: *“Sin that we keep going back to.” “Distractions that take all our attention.” “Habits we don’t want to let go of.” “Comfort that keeps us from growing.”* Then set the backpack down completely and say: *“The writer of Hebrews says to throw off everything that hinders. Not manage it. Not carry it lightly. Let it go.”*]

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, 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, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. (Hebrews 12:1-2, NIV)

And that brings us to this idea: following Jesus isn’t just a casual walk through life. It’s a race. And if we’re going to run it well, we’ve got to understand what it takes to finish.

Point #1: The Christian life is a race.

Have you ever thought about the Christian life as a race? Is it possible that following Jesus is the greatest adventure you’ll ever experience? I think it is. Too often Christianity gets portrayed as a bunch of rules, a weekly church service, or simply trying to be a good person. But the Bible gives us a completely different picture.

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us... (Hebrews 12:1, NIV)

Did you catch that? God doesn't compare the Christian life to sitting in the stands watching everyone else. He compares it to running a race. And it's not just any race, but one that He Himself has already laid out for us. He knows the course. He knows the obstacles. He knows exactly where He's leading us.

When you think about it, the Christian life is a lot like an amazing race. Every day God gives us clues through His Word and through prayer that help us know where to go next. Along the way, there are challenges, unexpected detours, and roadblocks that try to slow us down or pull us off course.

The important thing to understand is that those obstacles don't come from God. And we're not competing against other believers either. God isn't comparing your race to another Christian's. The real battle is often inside of us. Often, we're our own worst enemies when it comes to following Jesus. We let fear convince us God can't use us. We let discouragement make us want to quit. We let distractions pull our attention away from what matters most. And we let sin wrap itself around our lives until we stop moving forward altogether.

Paul warned about this very thing when he wrote:

⁷ You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? ⁸ That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. (Galatians, 5:7-8, NIV)

The believers in Galatia had started well, but somewhere along the way they got distracted. People convinced them that following Jesus was about rules and legalism instead of grace and freedom. They forgot that the Christian life isn't about earning God's love. It's about living in the freedom He's already given us through Christ.

Have you ever stopped to enjoy the race God has called you to run? Following Jesus isn't meant to be a burden. It's waking up every day with purpose. It's fixing your eyes on Jesus, the One who ran the perfect race before us and now leads the way. It's trusting Him through the twists and

turns of life, knowing that one day we'll cross the finish line and finally be home with Him.

Point #2: We run for an eternal reward.

So, how is your race going? Maybe you're running hard after Jesus right now. Maybe you're growing, learning, and taking your faith seriously. Or maybe you've hit a rough patch. Maybe you've wandered off course, gotten distracted, or stumbled into some sin that keeps tripping you up. The good news is this: as long as you are still living and breathing, it's not too late to get back in the race.

One of the greatest things about following Jesus is that failure doesn't have to be final. The enemy loves to convince us that one mistake means we're done. He whispers things like, *"You'll never change,"* or *"God can't use someone like you anymore."* But that's not the message of the gospel. Jesus specializes in picking people up, dusting them off, and putting them back on the course. Every race has a finish line. Nobody trains, sacrifices, and pushes through the hard parts without thinking about what waits at the end. Athletes endure because they know a reward is coming. The Christian life works the same way.

Followers of Jesus don't just run to participate. We run to finish well. Every day is another opportunity to become a little more like Jesus. Every temptation we resist, every act of obedience, every time we choose faith over fear or forgiveness over bitterness, we're taking another step toward the finish line God has marked out for us.

Paul understood this better than almost anyone. By the time he wrote 2 Timothy, he had been beaten, imprisoned, rejected, and persecuted because of his faith. But this is what Paul wrote to Timothy:

⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7-8, NIV)

Paul had every reason to quit, but he didn't. Instead, he looked back over his life and said that he had fought the good fight, finished the race, and

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