

**"Running the Race"**

**Part 2**

**Hebrews 12:1-4**

**Introduction:** The last time we were in our study of the book of Hebrews we stepped into Hebrews 12 and in verse 1 we looked at the exhortation given by the writer concerning "running the race" of the Christian life. Tonight we are going to move on to the next verse but before we do there is yet one more point which we need to consider in verse 1.

In verse 1 the Holy Spirit focuses upon the negative before presenting the positive of verse 2 and this is so very important to see. What we find here can be seen throughout the Scriptures. You see in verse 1 the writer tells his readers there must be "a laying aside" before there can be a "running of the race". This order is a fundamental Truth taught throughout the Bible. To help us to see this I have borrowed thoughts from Pink on this text:

1. **There must be a turning from the world before there can be a True turning to the Lord.**

**Isaiah 55:7**

*<sup>7</sup> Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

2. **There must be a forsaking of self before we can follow Jesus Christ.**

**Matthew 16:24**

*<sup>24</sup> Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

3. **We must "put off" of the old man before we can "put on" the new man.**

**Ephesians 4:22-24**

*<sup>22</sup> That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;*

*<sup>23</sup> And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;*

<sup>24</sup> *And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*

4. **There must be a “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts” before we can “live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world”.**

#### **Titus 2:11-12**

<sup>11</sup> *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,*

<sup>12</sup> *Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;*

5. **We must “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit” before we can experience “perfecting holiness in the fear of God”.**

#### **2 Corinthians 7:1**

*Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

6. **We must “be not conformed to this world” before we can be “transformed by the renewing of our mind” so that we can then “prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”.**

#### **Romans 12:1-2**

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

<sup>2</sup> *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

This is a principle which can be seen even in life around us. You cannot grow a garden unless you root out the weeds. Jesus used this analogy to teach in the Parable of the Sower.

#### **Matthew 13:3, 7, 22**

<sup>3</sup> *And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;*

<sup>7</sup> *And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:*

Now in verse 22 our Lord will interpret verse 7.

<sup>22</sup> *He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.*

Let us now get back to the thought in Hebrews 12:1. We will never be the runners which God desires for us to be until there is a "laying aside" of ANYTHING that proves to be a distraction. Now as we move on the writer will give to us the key to running the race in a way that honors God.

## I. The Focus

### Notice Hebrews 12:2-3

The writer now points our attention and our focus upon our Lord and then he will give us some very valuable details about Him.

First of all we are exhorted to LOOK unto Jesus. The word "LOOK" here is very interesting. Let me show you the Greek word and its definition. (*Aphorao* from *apo* = away from something near, indicates separation + *horao* = look, see, behold) means to look away from all else and to look steadfastly, intently toward a distant object. The idea is to direct one's attention without distraction. The idea is putting some things away (behind) to go with a forward-gaze.

So the thought in this word is that we are to LOOK AWAY from that which can distract us here on earth and we are to SET OUR GAZE on Jesus Christ. This takes a great deal of self-discipline for we are surrounded by many distractions every single day. Not only does it take self-discipline but it also takes a denying of self on a daily base. Paul spoke of this when he wrote to the Corinthians and he told them, "*I die daily*".

I love the words of Job when he was speaking concern lust in chapter 31.

### Job 31:1a

*I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?*

If we are going to receive a crown for running the race we MUST be willing to look away from the distractions of this world and fix our eyes upon Jesus Christ. Let me show you what happens in life when our gaze comes off of our Lord.

### Matthew 14:22-30

<sup>22</sup> *And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.*

<sup>23</sup> *And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.*

<sup>24</sup> *But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.*

<sup>25</sup> *And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.*

<sup>26</sup> *And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.*

<sup>27</sup> *But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.*

<sup>28</sup> *And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.*

<sup>29</sup> *And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.*

<sup>30</sup> **But when he saw the wind** boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

When Peter took his eyes off of Jesus he began to sink and this is what happens to us in the Christian life. When we take our eyes off of Jesus Christ we get distracted and we then begin to sink into the world which hinders our ability to run the race.

There is even more here to consider.

*Kenneth Wuest writes that **aphorao** "The word "looking" is **aphorao** "to turn the eyes away from other things and fix them on something." **The word also means "to turn one's mind to a certain thing."** Both meanings are applicable here, the spiritual vision turned away from all else and together with the mind, concentrated on Jesus.*

So it is not just the eyes which must be disciplined but it is also the mind. The mind is often a battle field and it is so important that we keep our minds focused upon that which is eternal.

## **2 Corinthians 10:5**

<sup>5</sup> *Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every **thought** to the obedience of Christ;*

Now let me raise a question which comes into my mind when I step back and look at what the writer records in Hebrews 12:2, "What does it mean to set our gaze upon Jesus Christ?"

**Notice Hebrews 12:2 again.**

Jesus is the AUTHOR and the FINISHER of our faith. The word "AUTHOR" here is the word "ARCHEGOS" which means that Jesus led the way. He was the PIONEER who made a way for us to come safely into the presence of God. The word "FINISHER" here means "PERFECTER".

Notice the words of Thayer on the meaning of the word "FINISHER":

*"One who has in his own person raised faith to its perfection and so set before us the highest example of faith."*

Jesus lived His entire life by faith in the Father. Now let us notice something else which the writer records in verse 2.

*"...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

Many see this as Jesus looking beyond the cross and seeing the glorification of all believers who would enjoy eternal life with Him in eternity. But if we look at the meaning of one word here we see another possibility.

The word "For" is the word we need to define. Let me show you how Vines defines the word "FOR".

*"instead of, in place of (something)"*

Now let me show you how the verse reads when using this definition.

*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who **INSTEAD OF** the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

So what was the "joy that was set before our Lord" which He turned from to endure the cross? It was the comforts and the riches of heaven. Jesus chose to LOOK AWAY from heaven and focus upon the cross so that our sin debt could be paid. Jesus lived the meaning of the word "LOOKING" at the beginning of the verse. Jesus set His focus upon the cross and He lived by faith in the Father believing that in the end His sacrifice would bring honor and glory to the Father.

This is exactly what the writer of Hebrews is calling upon his readers to do. They were to look away from the temporary comforts which this world offered and focus upon Jesus

who set the example of how to run the race. Remember the offers of comfort that were presented to Him if He were to step away from the will of the Father?

**Matthew 4:3-10**

<sup>3</sup> *And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. (The temptation to live for the appetites of the flesh)*

<sup>4</sup> *But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

<sup>5</sup> *Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,*

<sup>6</sup> *And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. (The temptation to live for the praise of men [pride])*

<sup>7</sup> *Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*

<sup>8</sup> *Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;*

<sup>9</sup> *And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. (The temptation to take the path of least resistance)*

<sup>10</sup> *Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*

**Conclusion:** I will leave you with a story told by Tony Evans.

*Bible teacher Tony Evans tells of a farmer who was teaching his son to plow with a mule. "To make straight furrows, son, just pick out an object beyond the field and keep your eyes fixed on it." "The boy nodded his understanding, and the farmer left.*

*When he came back an hour later, the farmer was shocked to see a field of twisted furrows. ""What happened, son? I thought I told you to keep your eye on an object beyond the field.""*

*""I did, Dad,"" the boy replied, pointing to the ""standard"" he had chosen--a cow in the adjoining pasture!*