3 Keys To Winning Life's Race
Hebrews 12:1,2 NKJV

Please turn with me to Hebrews chapter twelve. And let’s read verses 1, 2, and 3.

Hebrews 12:1-3 (NKJV)

1. Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2. looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

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INTRODUCTION

In the New Testament we find a number of metaphors and figures of speech used to describe the Christian life.

For example......

- The Christian life is compared to WARFARE. In Ephesians 6:11 the apostle Paul talks about “putting on the full armor of God that you may stand against the wiles of the devil.”

- Also in that same passage, Ephesians 6:12 Paul compares the Christian life to A WRESTLING MATCH. Paul writes...... “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this age, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

- In I Corinthians 9:26b, 27 (NIV) Paul compares the Christian life to A BOXING MATCH. Paul writes, I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

The Christian life is like warfare......its like a wrestling match......its like a boxing match. And here in Hebrews 12 we see the Christian life compared to A RACE.

In fact this metaphor for the Christian life is used several times in the New Testament.

I Corinthians 9:24,25 (NKJV)

24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.
25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.
And of course we remember those familiar last words of the apostle Paul in **II Timothy 4:7 (NKJV)**  

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

The Christian life is a **RACE**........not a 100 yard dash.....not a quick sprint........it is a grueling, lifelong marathon race.

As Christians, everyone of us is a participant in this race. I'm a runner......you're a runner....we all are runners.

In an athletic race one runs with his feet; **In the Christian race one runs with his heart.**  
In an athletic race only one is crowned the winner; **In the Christian race all who run with faithful endurance are crowned winners.**  
In an athletic race the reward is temporal; **In the Christian race the reward is eternal.**  
In an athletic race the goal is to beat all the other runners; **In the Christian race the goal is to help and encourage all the other runners.**

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In our scripture text, the Hebrew writer provides us with **“3 Keys To Winning Life's Race.”**
KEY #1:  We Must **LAY ASIDE** Anything That **WEIGHS** Us Down  (v. 1a)

1a Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us........

1. The Hebrew writer begins by giving you and me some encouragement about this race we are running. He reminds us that “we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.”

Illustration: When the ancient Greek Olympics were contested in Athens, it was not unusual for the coliseum or stadium to be filled with 75,000 to 100,000 spectators who came to witness the games.

2. Who is this “great cloud of witnesses that surround us? It is all those **great heroes of the faith** that are mentioned in Hebrews 11. Remember these are the faithful men and women who have already completed the race that you and I are now running. By their example you and I can draw strength.....and courage.....and inspiration to run our race with the same kind of faithfulness.

3. Having said that, the Hebrew writer now gives us the first key to winning the race, and that is **WE MUST LAY ASIDE ANYTHING THAT HINDERS US.**

Illustration: When runners trained for the ancient Greek games they would fasten weights on their bodies to help build strength and stamina. But then when the day of the race came they would “cast off” all those weights that might slow them down. In fact, they went so far as to strip off all their clothing and they would compete naked.
Even in the modern Olympics, you see short and long distance runners wearing the skimpiest of clothing. They aren't doing this to be lewd, they do it because they don't want anything to impede them in their race.

**Illustration:** Imagine you're watching the Olympic marathon on TV for just a moment. One by one all these lean, muscular runners wearing the lightest of clothing go across your screen. About ten minutes behind all the runners is this flabby guy wearing a heavy winter coat.......all-weather pants.....and hiking boots. And he's got a big back-pack slung over his shoulders. This guy is moving along at a “snail's pace.”

A TV reporter starts walking beside him and asks him, “What's in your back pack?” The guy says, “I've got all sodas and twinkies I will need to finish the race.” Well not only does that guy stand NO CHANCE at all of winning the race, it is very doubtful he will even complete the race.

4. Its the same way in **running our race of faith.** When the Hebrew writer tells us to “lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us” he is admonishing us to get rid of anything that burdens us down......anything that hinders our forward spiritual progress......anything that causes us to trip or stumble.

5. Everyone of us has “a sin that easily ensnares us.” We all have a sinful weakness that has tripped us up time and time again throughout the race. It may be **PRIDE**.....it may be **LUST**. ......it may be **AGOSSIPING TONGUE** or **ALYING TONGUE**.....it may be **AN UNCONTROLLED TEMPER**.... it may be **A LOVE OF MONEY AND MATERIAL THINGS**.....it may be **A CRITICAL, JUDGMENTAL SPIRIT**......or **A LOUSY ATTITUDE.**
6. What is “the sin that so easily entangles you?” What is that one thing that has been a frequent source of failure and misery and disappointment in your life? What is that one thing that has impeded your spiritual progress and held you back spiritually? What is that one thing that has weighed you down with a sense of guilt, and failure, and discouragement over and over again?

7. Think of how much lighter your burden would be if you laid aside that burden by repenting of your sin and forsaking it once and for all by surrendering that area of sinful weakness to the control of the Holy Spirit. Think of the sense of JOY and PEACE and FREEDOM and CONFIDENCE that could be yours if you could run your race without that extra weight.

Seventeenth Century Puritan preacher and writer Richard Baxter once wrote......

It is a most lamentable thing to see how most people spend their time and their energy for trifles, while God is cast aside. He who is all seems to them as nothing, and that which is nothing seems to them as good as all. It is lamentable indeed, knowing that God has set mankind in such a race where heaven or hell is their certain end, that they should sit down and loiter, or run after the childish toys of the world, forgetting the prize they should run for. Were it but possible for one of us to see this race (edited) as the all-seeing God does, and see what most men and women in the world are interested in and what they are doing every day, it would be the saddest sight imaginable.

8. So our first key to winning life's race is WE MUST LAY ASIDE ANYTHING THAT WEIGHS US DOWN

Now here is .........
KEY #2: We Must RUN With Faithful ENDURANCE (v.1)

1. Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

1. I have never run in a marathon or even a half marathon. Our son and daughter-in-law have. And they have told us how grueling it is to complete a 26 mile run. It takes all the strength and perseverance one can muster. It requires you to push on when you're muscles feel like they are on fire and when you're body is racked with so much pain you don't think you can take another step.

This is why a marathon race is sometimes called “an endurance race.” It takes everything you've got to stay in the race to the very end when everything inside you is screaming to “give up” and “drop out of the race.”

2. The Christian race is like that. It is a race of endurance. Notice the Hebrew writer says, “and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

Pay particular attention to those last seven words, “the race that is set before us.” GOD sets our course in life. No two courses are exactly alike. The course GOD has set for me will not be the same course He has set for each of you. But one thing we can be sure of is that the course God sets for each of us will include a lot of twists and turns, and valleys and mountains. There will be times when our course will be easy and times it will be very difficult. The course God sets for you and me will be filled with lots of trials and hardships and sorrows, intermingled with “seasons of refreshment.”
3. Does this mean a lot of the things you and I have had to go through in life were all part of God's plan? That's exactly what it means. Behind every trial, every sorrow, every loss, every hardship we have been through, GOD HAD A PURPOSE!

   Our race is a race of faith! And were it not for all of the trials and troubles GOD placed along our course our faith would never grow strong enough to endure life's race to the very end.

4. You see the trials and troubles you went through ten...fifteen.....or twenty years ago made you strong enough to endure the trials you are currently going through.

   And the trials you are going through now are helping to make you strong enough to deal with the trials that you may encounter a year.....two years......or five years from now.

5. This is why it is so critical to have the right mindset about our race. We must have the mindset that “I'm in this race to the very end and giving up or quitting or dropping out of the race is NOT AN OPTION! By God's grace and His strength I will faithfully endure the race until the very end!

   KEY #1: We Must LAY ASIDE Anything That WEIGHS Us Down
   KEY #2: We Must RUN With Faithful ENDURANCE

Now here's..........
KEY #3: We Must **FIX Our EYES Upon JESUS** (vs. 2)

2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

1. One of the things I have read about marathon runners is how essential it is to stay “focused” in the race, especially the last 5-10 miles.

   It is very easy for the runner to get distracted by how tired he is or how much he is hurting or how weak his legs are getting. And if the runner allows himself to focus on those things long enough he or she can easily drop out of the race.

   The runner has to discipline himself to stay focused on the finished line. To do this he may think of the prize money or the trophy he will receive, or he will think about being greeted by his family and friends. And a lot of times it is that focus that helps him stay in the race to the very end.

2. Likewise, focus is critically important in the Christian race, and the Hebrew writer tells us where our focus should be....... we should “fix our eyes on Jesus.”

   Now its important that he calls Him **JESUS** and not **LORD** or **SAVIOR**. There is a reason for that! Jesus was His earthly name. Jesus was the name He was given while here in the flesh.
3. As a human being, JESUS ran the same race we are running. He endured trials, and troubles, and hardships, and sorrow, and loneliness, and rejection, and persecution. He was tempted in every way we are tempted.

4. And remember in verse 1 we learned that GOD is the one who “sets the course” for our race. Notice in verse 2 “the course” God set for His Son.

   “Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of GOD.”

5. I love that title the Hebrew writer gives Jesus, “He is the author and finisher of our faith.” That means Jesus is the perfect model of faith. He trusted in His heavenly Father for everything! He was obedient to His heavenly Father in everything, even obediently going to the cross. He is the perfect example of how to endure every trial and keep running the race! And now He has victoriously completed His race!

6. When you're going through a difficult time and you feel discouraged, keep your eyes fixed on JESUS and KEEP RUNNING!

   When you are carrying a heavy burden and don't know how you can go on another day, keep your eyes fixed on JESUS, and KEEP RUNNING!

   When you stumble and fall and fail the Lord miserably and want to give up and drop out of the race, keep your eyes fixed on JESUS and KEEP RUNNING!
C O N C L U S I O N

One of the surprise hit movies of 1981 was the classic “Chariots of Fire.” The movie was based on the true life story of Eric Liddell, the Scotish Presbyterian missionary who ran for GREAT BRITAIN in the 1924 Olympic games in Paris, France.

Eric Liddell found out that his race was scheduled for Sunday. Out of his deep Christian convictions that Sunday was the Lord’s Day, a “day of rest,” Liddel refused to run the race. He was willing to throw away four years of training to remain faithful to his Christian convictions.

After a meeting of the race officials, the race was moved from Sunday to Monday, and Eric Liddell won the gold medal in his event.

But the part of the story we don’t remember occurred before the Olympics. One day while Eric was training, he and his sister stood on top of a mountain.

His sister asked him, “Eric, why do you run? You are a missionary, why do you run?”

Eric responded, “Ah sister, God made me fast! I run for God!”