

Running the Race To Finish

Michael Woody | Hebrews 12:12–17

This is a call to become strong in our walk with the Lord; how is it we renew our spiritual walk to finish the race?

WHY THIS TEXT?

1. This passage is a call to become strong in our walk with the Lord
2. It answers the question on how is it we renew our spiritual walk to finish the race?
How is it we renew our spiritual life that we might finish the race before us?
3. These Hebrew believers were being tempted to forsake their inheritance in Christ by desecrating themselves in forsaking Christ.
4. Reverting to his athletic figure of speech, our author bids his readers brace their flagging limbs and press on to the goal.
5. Some of their number were feeling especially discouraged and disinclined to make the necessary effort; the others should do everything possible to help them.
 - a. Each person has a responsibility towards one another in the perseverance of the body.
 - b. When you do not seek peace with one another we erode at this purpose of the body
 - c. We must encourage each to live in the glory of the Gospel.
6. This is a call to stop thinking about your kingdom, your desires and your agenda: if you are Christ's then you must die to these things!

HOW DO WE FINISH THE RACE?

QUALITIES OF THOSE WHO FINISH WELL:

BE HEROIC (v. 12)

1. To be heroic we need to believe that what we are doing is the most important thing.
2. Isaiah 35 is the key text.
 - a. This chapter is a prediction of the glory and flourishing estate of the Gospel church, and of the blessings received by it from Christ.
 - i. Its flourishing state is expressed by the fruitfulness of the desert, being made like to Lebanon, Carmel, and Sharon; and by the inhabitants of it seeing the glory and excellency of Christ
 - ii. Believers are directed and exhorted to strengthen the weak, and comfort the feeble minded, by assuring them of the coming of Christ to save them.
 - b. The exhortation from Isaiah 35 was written to encourage Jews in exile who felt promised deliverance and restoration would never come.
 - i. The encouragement is for those who are weak and spiritually lame, who might be prevented from continuing the race if they were tripped up and permanently disabled.
 - ii. Each person has a responsibility towards one another in the perseverance of the body.
3. Key word in this verse is strengthen:
4. What does this look like?
 - a. When people hear your words do they testify of the difficulty of life or of the grace of God in life?
 - b. Does your life testify that our God shall supply all of your need according to His riches in glory?
 - c. Does your life testify that God's grace is sufficient according to His riches in glory?

- d. We all experience times as the weaker brother who needs to be encouraged, but this should not characterize our lives.

BE HARMONIOUS (v. 13)

1. Toughing it out individually is needed but it is only part of the picture here.
2. Important words:
 - a. Make Straight: We are to be making straight (present, active, imperative; to behave in a correct manner).
 - b. The reference to lameness is that a person used to have a different walk but, by behavior, they have dislocated this in their life (see below).
 - c. Dislocated — to direct one's interest, attention, or trust away from something (to something else). We might use the word distracted.
3. What does this look like in the church?
 - a. Tell the doubting that God is faithful.
 - b. Tell those that feel the burden of sin that it was for sinners Christ died.
 - c. Tell the backsliders that God never does cast away His people.
 - d. Tell the desponding that the Lord delights in mercy.
 - e. Tell the distracted that the Lord does devise means to bring back His banished.
 - f. Be an encourager - be someone who looks for that silver lining not because this world is without tribulation but because you know a Sovereign God is in control.
 - g. Learn the art of speaking a word in season.
 - h. Become Spirit filled and controlled buy your response to trouble so that you can be used by God in comforting the sad.
 - i. Let your own troubles and trials qualify you to sympathize and relieve. You will be of great value in the Church of God if you acquire the art of compassion, and are able to help those that are bowed down.

BE HOLY (v. 14)

1. We are called to be characterized by three adjectives:
 - a. Be characterized by peacefulness (Matt. 5:9; Romans 12:18; 14:19).
 - b. Be characterized by holiness (Heb. 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15-16; Romans 12:1-2; Col. 3:2; Matthew 5:8; Heb. 9:28)
 - c. Be characterized by forgiveness (Acts 8:23; Eph 4:31-32).
2. What are the commands in this verse?
 - a. Pursue peace (v. 14)
 - b. Holiness: (v. 14): refers to moral purity, it has the idea of growing in our dedication to God; it deals with our pursuit in life.
3. Sanctification is not optional (apart from it no one will see the Lord), sanctification is the essence of the Christian life.

BE HELPFUL (v. 15A)

1. Important words in this verse
 - a. Looking carefully (v. 15a)
 - b. Anyone falls short: present, active, participle.
 - c. Grace: the outworking of God's goodwill toward us in Christ. It is a reference to kindness.
2. You are commanded by God to be helpful - you are commanded by God to live for His Kingdom. Your family is not your most important priority in life - it is parallel to your priority towards Christ's church.

Believers, this is far greater a race than the Olympics, this is a race of faith. Will you continue to the end? What about the person sitting 2 pews ahead of you or behind you - how are you helping them?

QUALITIES OF THOSE WHO FAIL TO FINISH:

GUARD AGAINST FLESHLY ATTITUDES (v. 15B)

1. Within the text it speaks of several fleshly attitudes
 - a. The root of bitterness, the root of bitterness is apostasy - see Deut 29:18 for the full context.
 - b. It refers to this root of bitterness springing up: present, active, participle.
 - c. Causing trouble: present, active subjunctive. To annoy continually or chronically. This is a chronic, repeating injury.
 - d. It defiles many: aorist, passive, subjunctive. To become defiled, to mark or discolor something. To contaminate something causing it to become unclean.
2. What fleshly attitudes are you tolerating in your life?
 - a. Don't look around - look in the mirror because even if you ignore them others see them.
 - b. Not only can your fleshly attitudes cause you to fail to finish the race, but it can affect another.

GUARD AGAINST FLESHLY APPETITES (v. 16-17)

1. Esau is given as an example
 - a. We often miss the importance of the birthright. The firstborn generally received the double-inheritance, over others.
 - b. To desecrate means to make an object or place unclean by the impure action. It would cause the object or place to be unholy, impure, or unclean.
2. There is only one action for fleshly appetites - repentance.
 - a. Repentance means to turn the other direction.
 - b. Repentance is a change of mind but it leads to a change of life.
 - c. Repentance is a gift of God's grace.

- d. Are you characterized by repentance? If not, you are probably characterized by fleshly appetites.

HOW SHOULD THIS CHANGE MY LIFE?

1. Be heroic, harmonious, holy and helpful.
 - a. The context of this larger passage is affliction that must be endured with perseverance.
 - b. Are you running the race to finish?
 - c. Are you running the race in a way that hinders others?
2. Realize that affliction will result in a greater degree of holiness.
3. Do not separate peacefulness and holiness
 - a. No matter your state you are to seek peace with all men.
 - b. Peace and holiness are connected together: if you are not a peaceful person you are not a holy person.
 - c. Failing to do this can demonstrate an apostate heart that is characterized by you failing the grace of God but it also can impact others.
 - d. Lack of peacefulness shows a corrupt heart that has a bitter root producing bitter fruits. As a result, churches suffer in both purity and peace.
4. The grace that enables us to turn away from sin and to live in a holy manner is in your grasp. Just as Esau saw little value in his birthright and sold it, so those in the church, who see little value in holiness and holy fruits show they do not value the outcome of saving grace and they perish in their sin though they sat among the true church of God.