

SERIES: **BETTER**

Meet me in: **Hebrews 12:1-3** (((READ TEXT then PRAY)))

HOOK- Harlan David Sanders grew up a poor farm town boy.

He spent the first half of his life working odd jobs (selling insurances, selling tires, working a steamboat, etc)

He couldn't hold down a job for long, often getting let go.

He opened a service station (gas station) and started to serve his chicken there....the main road was rerouted and he was forced to close down. He was 60 years old.

He filed for social security and with his first check traveled the country trying to get someone to invest in his chicken recipe. Over 1,000 rejections later he finally hit it big.

At an age when most people retire, Colonel Sanders was making his millions.

This morning I want to encourage you from the scripture with a simple yet profound message:

Title & Main Point: Don't quit before you finish

The whole purpose of this sermon-letter was to let the early Christian readers (and by extension us) know this:

I know it's tough and you are tired but hold on to Jesus because He is worth it!

¹Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us,

✕ *Therefore*- This verse is an extension of what came before in the previous chapter.

What came before? -a list of individuals who had resilient faith (Abraham, Noah, Moses, etc.)

It's not a cloud of *spectators*, but **witnesses**-

they are not there to simply watch you live your life, and cheer you on when life gets hard;

They are there as witnesses, testifying of their own lives and struggles,

to encourage your race with their own;

in essence saying *"You can run, and to the finish line, because we have also"*

Surrounding- in every direction...everywhere you look in the bible you'll find examples of ordinary people who felt like quitting... but didn't

Allow the faith of others to fuel your faith

A In every situation there is someone to look at for encouragement

Struggling with Finances? Look to Paul "I have been hungry...I learned the secret of contentment"

Lost a loved one? Look to Job

Experiencing failure? Look to Peter

Experiencing doubt? Look to Sarah who God said would become pregnant 90 years old

Rejected by your family? Look to Joseph, his brothers sold him

I'll venture to say that the great cloud of witnesses, by extension, is also those Christians throughout history and in your life who didn't give up, despite having a difficult race before them.

🏠 Anne Askew- *"I did not come here to deny my Lord and Master"*

I did not run this far to quit now

Some quit before they finish because they grew discouraged. The faith of others is a witness that fuels our faith. By implication, our faith can fortify the faith of others who look to us...or our lack of faith can weaken the weak.

let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us.

Ditch the excess drag (barnacles at bottoms of boats must be broken off)

✘ Meant to provoke imagery of the Greco-Roman games- runners would run nude stripping off all weight

Hindrance- any weight, any bulk, anything that slows down your progress

Something doesn't have to be bad to be a burden, wicked to be weighing you down, sinful to slow you

🏠 Linnea Mills story- wore the wrong type of suit and they could not ditch the weights- meant to help her ended up drowning her

1 Corinthians 6:12 "Everything is permissible for me," but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me," but I will not be mastered by anything.

1 Corinthians 10:23 "Everything is permissible," but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible," but not everything builds up.

John Piper says, "Don't just ask, 'is it a sin?' That's about the lowest question you can ask in life. Instead ask, 'Does it help me run? Does it get in my way?'"

✘ **Sin**- you don't have to work hard or even try to be trapped by sin, tangled in it. It comes naturally, it's EASY.

If you are not actively casting it off, it will inevitably build up

If you hold on to sin thinking you control it, one day you will find that it has a hold on you

Sin Clings – weeds (cleavers, stickers, grip-grass, sticky-willy, sticky-weed)

🏠 Sin is like a woman who found a black kitten in the snow, took it home and cared for it, She continued to feed it and it continued to grow, until 1 day it fed on her, because it was a panther

⚠ Maybe you are growing but not at the level you know you could be; maybe your marriage, your family is doing good, but it could be doing great-

Why don't some marriages make it? Why do some church goers fall away?

Some quit before they finish because they had too much drag.

If you wanna go the distance, you gotta ditch the baggage

Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us,

✘ **Endurance**- Lit. *remaining under*

Race- (*agōna*) (the root of the English word 'agony' / 'agonize') Lit. *contest with a struggle*

- It was the word they used for penthalon (5- event race ending with wrestling match)

⚠ Run the race with endurance= keep showing up even if it's hard

Endurance is built, it's grown....by staying, remaining

Pastor Mike Ray- "Marriages are built by people who STAYED, ministries are built by people who STAYED, degrees are received by people who STAYED"

Run relentlessly

Life isn't a sprint, it's a marathon- the days are long even if the years are short

Philippians 3:12-14 Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, ¹⁴ I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus.

☒ I HATE running. I hate that *Run* thymes with *Fun*. -Mud Run ///“just keep going, just don't stop”///
I knew if you stop, you cramp, if you cramp, you're done.

You don't quit when you are tired, you quit when you are finished.

You don't quit when the marriage gets hard; you don't drop out when the test gets too difficult;
you don't quit when you had a relapse; you don't quit when you slipped up and backslid;
you don't quit when you had a bad day; YOU QUIT WHEN GOD CALLS YOU HOME INTO HIS REST!
This world needs Christians with *staying power*. Running with endurance power!

Some quit before they finish because they simply stopped.

²keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

☒ It is Jesus who paved the way for our salvation and it is Jesus who will keep us
Philippians 1:6 I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

⚠ We take a glance at the cloud of witnesses.... But we set our gaze on Jesus

Stay in your lane and make Jesus your gain

When you get to the finish line, it will not just be the hall of famers of the faith waiting to greet you,
not just your loved ones who went ahead,
it will be the one who paved the path Himself at the finish line waiting to embrace you

If you keep your eyes on others, you'll run into them- comparison is the great distracter

If you have your gaze on others, you will either grow *pitiful* because you don't run like them,
or *prideful* because you don't fall like them

☒ *Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace.*

Don't run off course- **Some quit before they finish because they got distracted.**

For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.³ For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you won't grow weary and give up.

☒ Run with *endurance* (v1) because He *endured* the cross (v2) and *endured* hostility (v3)
Be motivated & strengthened by Jesus' example
However much you may have to endure, He endured even more as He bore our sin & shame

Isaiah 40:29-31 He gives strength to the faint and strengthens the powerless.

³⁰Youths may become faint and weary, and young men stumble and fall,

³¹but those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not become weary, they will walk and not faint.

For the joy- You can have a hard race and also have joy- they are not exclusive- Joy isn't dependent on an easier race, but on a better perspective

What was His joy.. why endure? A relationship with you....let that be your joy also

Make Jesus your gain

A This life is draining, the devil is discouraging, but find encouragement in Jesus
When you feel like giving up, throwing in the towel- remember that Jesus didn't give up

B We all mess up- don't quit before you finish;
as a pastor, I've said the wrong things at the wrong time many times- I won't quit until I finish
as a husband I've completely blown it repeatedly- I won't quit until I finish
as a dad I've made mistakes- I won't quit until I finish
Sign above my window I put up after my valley of depression- (picture)

Allow the faith of others to *fuel* your faith;
Ditch the drag;
Run relentlessly;
Stay in your lane and make Jesus your gain

It matters how you finish- the original readers had started well, but were growing weary, some were thinking of calling it quits- the encouragement is simple...**don't because He didn't**

Main Point- Don't quit before you finish

Call to action: Run your race

Maybe you haven't even started your race... never gave your life to Christ and feel you're too messy.
Afraid you won't make it?

William Cowper story

*There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains*

Invitation: Surrender your life to Him

1 time time in the Bible God is pictured running- towards the lost son coming home

BULPEN-

The whole purpose of this letter-sermon is to let the early Christian readers (and by extension us) know this:

Keep holding on to Jesus, don't let go!

Ch.2 Pay attention so that you won't drift away

Ch.3 Watch out that your heart doesn't turn away

Ch.4 Beware that you don't fall short

Ch.5-6 Grow up, mature, don't fall away

Ch.7-9 Draw near to God because of Jesus, don't fall back to the O.C.

Ch.10 Hold on to the confession; don't throw away your confidence

Ch.11 Have faith

The Christian life as a race:

Acts 20:24

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Galatians 2:2

Galatians 5:7

Philippians 2:16

Philippians 3:13-14

2 Timothy 4:7

Illustration- Shark Tale- seahorse race- it trips...underwater

Philippians 3:7-11 But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰ My goal is to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, ¹¹ assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead.

He did what we must, and now intercedes for us

Don't give up, don't let up

Don't quit before you finish

Just keep running- why?? Because He did

Jesus marched towards the cross with His eyes beyond

NIV-let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles

No one else can race in your place, but everyone can watch you run . Run *your* race

'Pioneer'- Hebrews 2:10

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

Thomas Manton- “First we practice sin, then defend it, then boast of it”

This isn't a group run...if you're waiting for your spouse, your friend to start running well, God won't ask you to give an account for their race, but for yours. Run your race

We can look to those who've finished well and be encouraged that the same power that was at work in them is at work in us

The idea is of a Roman amphitheater, in which crowds sit all around.

This crowd, in context, is all those mentioned in chapter 11, individuals who have finished their race. And the reason they are in the stands is not to see you, but so that you see them.

When you get weary and tired and distracted, you look and remember the race that Noah ran, that Abraham ran, that Rahab and those unnamed who endured so much, yet they finished well.

Here's the thing, as you look to those examples of the faith, others look to you in the same way...for better or worse

1 Corinthians 10:11 These things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come.

The examples of individuals in the Bible are there to motivate us when we are weary

To the original readers it would spark imagery of the games the Romans would put on. Runners would run naked, not only to take off any robes that might trip them up, but, according to one historian, to strip off any pride that might weigh them down

There was a man named William Cowper.

His mother died when he was six and his father sent him to boarding school, where he was sexually abused by an older boy. At 21 he had his 1st major mental breakdown, but not his last. He fell in love and got engaged, but right before the wedding, the bride's father prohibited the marriage. He was devastated.

Struggle with despair came to be the theme of his life.

He went down to the lake to drown himself but the water was too low.

He tried to take poison, but his fingers cramped, preventing him from opening the bottle.

He took a pen knife and attempted to thrust it into his chest – but the blade broke.

He then tried to hang himself from his bed frame – but the bed frame broke.

Finally, he was able to successfully hang himself from his door frame, but after he lost consciousness, the rope broke. Someone found him still alive. He was taken into an asylum.

His doctor was a Christian who like him loved poetry, and he eventually gave his life to God there.

When he got out, he met a man named John Newton, who became not only his pastor, but his closest friend.

John Newton was described as a cheerfully and happy man, the total opposite of William Cowper.

Throughout his life John Newton encouraged William Cowper not to give up before he finished.

They both loved writing poetry. John Newton was the ex-slave ship captain who wrote Amazing Grace.

William Cowper, although he struggled with crippling mental health his whole life, would go on to write hymns such as, 'God moves in mysterious ways', 'For a Closer Walk with God', and 'There is a Fountain Filled With Blood'.

Step 1 Studying the Text:

- **What does it say?**

The text encourages believers to run with endurance, casting off whatever hinders them so that they may run long and well, and to keep their eyes on Jesus as both an encouraging example of one who ran ahead and as the prize itself to be obtained.

- **What does it mean?**

The persecuted early believers ought to live resilient and consecrated lives, gleaning their encouragement and example from Jesus who himself endured suffering in this life as he marched towards the cross

- **How is the Gospel related to this text?**

Jesus lived a life well and to the end, despite the suffering He endured, in order to obtain salvation for us all through his resilient obedience and sacrifice; as we journey in this world, towards the hope of our salvation, we too must be resilient and endure

- **How does it apply to life today?**

Disciples of Jesus will face troubles and temptations in this life, but they must endure by setting their hope on Jesus and following his example

Step 2 Unify the Redemptive Theme:

- **Main Point of the Text:**

Since Jesus Himself endured through a life of trouble and temptations, His followers can also endure to the end as they journey in His footsteps

- **Main Point of the Sermon:**

Don't quit before you finish

- **Title that reflects the MPS:**

Don't quit before you finish

Step 3 & 4 Outline the text & Develop Functional Elements:

- **Point 1- More than one are watching how you run (v.1a)**

- Explanation:
- Application:
- Illustration:

- **Point 2- If you wanna go the distance, you gotta ditch the baggage (v.1b)**

- Explanation:
- Application:
- Illustration:

- **Point 3- Beware of running off course (v.2a)**

- Explanation:
- Application:
- Illustration:

- **Point 3- Be motivated & strengthened by Jesus' example (v.2b-3)**

- Explanation:
- Application:
- Illustration:

Step 5 Intro & Outro:

- Intro:
- Outro: