

# Hebrews

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Hebrews 12:1-2 – Removing Encumbrances - Part 1

November 22, 2009

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- I. The Necessity of Discipline for Living A Life of Faith
  - A. From the examples of faith in **Hebrews 11**, we are now moving into the last two chapters of Hebrews – chapters 12-13. God’s focus in these last two chapters is on what we need to do to live a life of faith. This focus on “our part” is not new to the book of Hebrews, but in these two chapters, God puts a concentrated emphasis on the “how to” concerning our part of living by faith.
    1. To help us make the most of these two chapter, I want to point out here at the beginning a theme that runs through each of the “how to’s” – and that theme is discipline. To help us remember this theme, I’ve given these two chapters a title – with two sub-titles.
    2. The title is “The Necessity of **Discipline** for Living a Life of Faith.” The two sub-titles are: (1) **Self-Discipline** in Living by Faith. (2) **God’s Discipline** for Living by Faith.
  - B. Definitions – from a Christian perspective:
    1. **Discipline:** Training to obey God’s rules and to act in accordance with His will. The training part is made up of teaching, exercises (*testing, trials, etc.*), and a regulated and repeated set of activities (*regimen*) which develops and improves our submissiveness and faithfulness at obeying God’s rules and living according to His will.
    2. **Self-discipline:**
      - a. First, it is training yourself through learning, exercises, and a personal regimen – with the goal of overcoming your weaknesses in order to advance in maturity and faithfulness in obeying the word of God and submitting to the will of God.
      - b. Second, it is using your strengths and will-power to guard and control your thoughts, feelings, choices, and behavior in the daily affairs of life so that you live according to the will and word of God.
    3. **God’s Discipline:** God’s direct and specific activity in teaching, training, and correcting for the purpose of improving our maturity, strength, and consistency in obeying His word and submitting to His will so that we are better equipped to live by faith.
  - C. Prayer

II. **Hebrews 12:1-2** . . . Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

A. **Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us . . .**

1. The idea conveyed in the word “cloud” is simply “a crowd so large it surrounds us.”
2. And here is the point of this phrase: Since so many have lived a life of faith before us, and since we have the privilege – by means of historical accounts – to examine their lives and learn from the way they obeyed God’s word and submitted to God’s will . . . let us live a life of faith as they lived by faith; let us submit to God’s will and obey God’s word as they submitted and obeyed.
3. As I have already said, **Hebrews 12-13** are God’s “how to’s” for living by faith. And to help us see the practical application in His “how to’s, He sets them against the backdrop of a marathon race. And so, I am encouraging you to keep this picture of a marathon race in mind as we work through this portion of scripture. Now, with this marathon picture in mind, let me ask a question.
  - a. Of all the personal qualities necessary for running any marathon, what do you suppose is the most important? The answer to this question becomes obvious as we read **Hebrews 12-13** – and the answer is **self-discipline**.
  - b. Without question, from our first intentions of running any marathon – to our last breath in crossing the finish line, we need a healthy dose of self-discipline.
  - c. The same is true for every Christian. If we are to live by faith like those in **Hebrews 11**, we need a healthy dose of self-discipline from our entrance into the Christian life to our last breath on this earth.

B. **Therefore, since we have so great a crowd of witnesses surrounding us let us also lay aside every encumbrance . . .**

1. This exhortation about “laying aside every encumbrance and the sin that so easily entangles us” comes first because it is the preparation part of the race.

- a. No athlete – and an athlete is someone who competes with the intent and hope of winning – no athlete runs the marathon of a lifetime without adequate preparation.
  - b. In that same way, everyone who lives by faith – and living by faith means living a life of submission to the will of God and obedience to the word of God – everyone who lives by faith runs this race to win.
  - c. Now it doesn't take great wisdom to know that crossing the finish line a winner requires far more than just going out and running on race day.
    - (1) Winning requires preparation and the kind of conditioning that enables us to run the race to win.
    - (2) For us Christians, this means we must continue to do those things that keep us in shape so we can go out each day and run whatever distance and over whatever terrain is set before us.
  - d. Here again we want to stay with our marathon backdrop. Serious preparation requires a daily **regimen**. Every athlete who competes to win knows this – and so should every Christian.
  - e. The point here is this – everyone who lives by faith – the kind of faith lived by those in **Hebrews 11** – highly values preparation and continued conditioning because they know that inadequate preparation, or the failure to maintain the necessary level of conditioning, will produce inadequate, or even disastrous results.
2. Returning to our scripture text, we see that one vital part of preparation is getting rid of **every** thing that unnecessarily weighs us down.
- a. Let me stop here and make a point about two words found in this statement: **let us also lay aside every encumbrance**. The two words are **also** and **every**.
  - b. By definition, the word “**every**” means “all,” without exception.
    - (1) Now it may be that God has exaggerated a bit in His use of the word “every” – and if He has, then we are free to factor down the word “every” to something less than all – which means we have room for exceptions.
    - (2) However, I choose to believe that God carefully chose this word “every,” and that He wants us to take it for what it

means. And I invite you to do the same – because it is wiser to err on the side of taking God at His word than on the side of factoring down what He said to the point of feeling secure in living up to less than what He said.

- c. On to the word “**also**”. In relation to the examples of faith given in **Hebrews 11**, the word “also” means we are to do as they did. One of the reasons they were able to live by faith to the end of their lives was that they continued to stay in shape and continued removing excess weight – **wherever** and **whenever** they found it.

- 3. Back to where we were – as I was saying, one vital part of preparation to run this marathon – that is to live this life of faith – is getting rid of every thing that unnecessarily weighs us down – **wherever** and **whenever** we find it – be it a known evil or an approved good. Why? Because excess weight has an ever increasing negative impact on our ability to win the further we run.

- a. Those who run marathons know that minor amounts of excess weight are rarely felt immediately. But the further you run the more the weight becomes a burden and a hindrance to winning.
- b. Now I am confident this isn’t new news to any of you. You already know the connection between excess weight – even minor amounts – and winning or losing a marathon.
  - (1) Yet when it comes to running the race known as the Christian life, we don’t seem to be as wise as marathon runners in making this connection.
  - (2) And what is the result? Weighed-down runners! And sadly, weighed-down runners have become so numerous within Christian churches that they are now considered the norm. They’ve become the new standard of living by faith.
- c. How did this happen? How have weighed-down Christians become the new norm in the marathon of faith? I suppose there is more than one reason, yet as I look at it, the most obvious reason is – **they aren’t running to win**.
  - (1) Now I am convinced they want to be in the race. They want to finish the course. But they don’t have the will or the heart or the mindset or the zeal or the stamina or the self-discipline to run as one who wants to win.

- (2) In fact, many weighed-down Christians excuse themselves from running to win by claiming they've already done all that is necessary to win. They're been born again. And if you talk to them about running to win, it isn't long before they label you as spouting legalism, or talking as someone who is trying to earn his salvation, or – at the very least – as someone misguided about God's grace.
- 4. Now you may be thinking I am making too much out of this “running to win” idea – that I am laying a burden on you that God hasn't. And so to clear such thinking up, turn with me to **I Corinthians 9** and let's see what God says about “running to win.”
  - a. **I Corinthians 9:24-27** . . . Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? **Run in such a way that you may win.** [25] Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. [26] Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; [27] but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.
  - b. It seems obvious from this scripture that running to win is God's standard for living a life of faith, or as we call it, the Christian life. Have you made it your standard?
  - c. It also seems obvious from this scripture that everyone who wants to win exercises self-discipline. And the opposite is true. Anyone who fails or refuses to exercise self-discipline doesn't care about winning. In fact, without the exercise of self-discipline, you simply can't run to win.
- 5. Having addressed God's “run to win” expectation for Christians, I want to return to talking about being weighed-down. Weighed-down Christians ignore the fact that when we don't run to win, we won't see the need to throw off **every** encumbrance or put off **all** unnecessary weight. Why? Because the laxness of our pace and the weakness of our effort just doesn't demand it.
  - a. No one understands how powerfully something so minor as a heavier shirt or longer shorts impacts running until they've run to win.

- (1) And in that same way, you cannot understand how such seemingly minor things as what you read or watch on TV or talk about with your friends or think about or long for or do behind closed doors impacts your life of faith until you've made the effort to live like those in **Hebrews 11**.
  - (2) The casual Christian – if there is such a being – and if there is it should never be something we defend – the casual Christian knows nothing about laying aside **every** encumbrance. In fact, the casual Christian doesn't want to lay aside every encumbrance because some of them are still more important to him than winning the race.
- b. Now I realize that most Christians have removed many of the commonly known and more obvious encumbrances – or what we might call the grosser sins. And this is good, because this is as it ought to be. Yet for most of us, the challenge we face each day is not the challenge of putting off the grosser sins. Our challenge is **wanting to win** – wanting to win to the point that we eagerly and deliberately exercise the self-discipline necessary for laying aside **every** encumbrance – not just the grosser, more obvious ones.

### III. Conclusion

- A. I want to conclude this teaching today by emphasizing three truths about exercising the kind of self-discipline that enables us to win.
1. **First**, winners do not limit learning about extra weight to their experiences on race day.
    - a. They seek out winners from the past and learn from them so that they enter race day better prepared to win.
    - b. They use pre-race times to discover encumbrances they had not considered before and in so doing, lighten their load some more to increase their potential for winning.
    - c. And they seek out the advice of running coaches – experts in long-distance running as it were – to see if there are any changes they can make – even slight ones – that will help them run to win.
  2. **Second**, winners find a daily regimen that prepares and conditions them for winning.
  3. **Third**, winners at first lay aside encumbrances out of wisdom and self-discipline. In time, they discover intimacy with God and then, upon realizing how the least encumbrance disrupts that intimacy, they lay aside encumbrances out of love and self-discipline.

B. May we, as lovers of God and servants of Jesus Christ run to win.