

## PRESSING ON IN FAITH

## STUDY TWO

## Looking Ahead, Let's Prepare for the Race

*Hebrews 12:1–3*

*We don't know what this year holds for us. Whatever it may be, we can be sure of this: He knows the way we take. He has planned for us what pleases Him, and we adapt to it, adjust to it, accept it, and conduct our lives confident that He will lead us and strengthen us through it.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EVERY four years, the world's best athletes gather to compete in the Olympic games. The competitors represent some of the most talented individuals in the world. But raw talent isn't enough to earn one of the few coveted spots on the athletic world stage.

ON YOUR MARK . . .

Yes, all Olympian runners—for example—have talent, but they match their talent with hard work. Their innate ability shone brightly the first time their feet touched the track. So for the following years, they dedicated themselves each day to an intense training regimen that amplified their abilities to prepare them for this singular moment on the starting line.

GET SET . . .

As they stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the fastest runners in the world, one question will race through their minds: *Am I ready?*



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## **Looking Ahead, Let's Prepare for the Race**

*Hebrews 12:1-3*

This same question ought to run through the minds of followers of Jesus as well. This *Searching the Scriptures* study will show how God has laid the specific course of a race only you can complete. Are you prepared to run it faithfully?

GO!



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

No one will achieve a vibrant Christian life through sheer grit, hard work, and determination. Instead, the path of the follower of Jesus beholds His grace at every turn, where He reveals His greatness through your weakness. Offer this prayer to God as you prepare to study His Word.

*Father, I confess that the only thing I have earned in my life is eternal condemnation. Yet I praise You for Your grace. Thank You for offering me the eternal prizes of the forgiveness of sins and new life. Help me as I seek to run a race that is honoring to You. In Jesus' name, amen.*



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

The earliest Christians were Jews who found hope in Jesus as the One who fulfilled all the Old Testament's messianic promises. They left behind their old path characterized by law and works and chose to run a new race—one marked by grace and forgiveness and faith in Christ.

Yet this new race of faith proved to be more challenging than the other one. Obstacles like internal pride and external persecution caused many to want to abandon the way of Jesus for the old mode of living.

The author of Hebrews wrote a letter to his own people to urge them to continue to pursue Jesus faithfully, despite all the difficulties, in order to obtain the eternal reward found only in Him.



## Looking Ahead, Let's Prepare for the Race

*Hebrews 12:1–3*



### Observation: The Race

Read *Hebrews 12:1–3* a few times, and use a different Bible translation each time. As you read, keep track of your observations below. Focus simply on what the text says.<sup>1</sup>

According to *12:1*, who has set out the race of the Christian life?

According to *12:1–2*, how are followers of Jesus Christ commanded to run this race? What kinds of obstacles tend to slow them down and trip them up?



## Looking Ahead, Let's Prepare for the Race

*Hebrews 12:1–3*

According to *Hebrews 12:2–3*, where can believers find encouragement when they want to give up because of the race's difficulty?

*How good it is when we can simply say, "Lord, this is obviously Your will for me. I wouldn't have chosen it, but I accept it. And I ask for strength to run this race."*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



### Interpretation: The Course

The race imagery causes many to misunderstand how God envisions life for His people. Many hear the word *race* and think only of a competition. Either you win the race, or you lose it.

Yet anyone who puts his or her faith in Jesus Christ receives the prizes of forgiveness of sin and eternal life. Therefore, the author of *Hebrews* was more interested in staying on the course and less concerned about who gets first, second, or third place. How does this interpretation help you understand the importance of the Christian community as you run the race of faith?

The Greek word translated “race” in *Hebrews 12:1* is *agon*, which refers broadly to a kind of struggle, but more specifically it refers to a competition or—in this instance—a race. The English word *agon* is derived from this context.



## Looking Ahead, Let's Prepare for the Race

*Hebrews 12:1–3*

This is not to say that Christians will experience or should strive for a life of pure agony. In fact, God loves to lavish His children with blessings! It does, however, mean that life will often be characterized by struggle. How does *Hebrews 12:1–3* demonstrate how a follower of Jesus Christ should respond when he or she encounters obstacles in life?

*I want you to finish well. Don't just run until it gets tough. It'll get really tough, and you'll want to quit. You'll want to go back to a habit that can ruin your life. Or you'll want to return to a lifestyle that you'll be ashamed of. Don't quit, don't stop. Stay in the race regardless. That's what the Lord wants for every one of us. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Correlation: The Apostle Paul's Race

The New Testament contains a story of one believer's hard-fought race. The apostle Paul had ample opportunity to give up, but he didn't because he was well-prepared and because he kept his eyes on Jesus.

According to *2 Corinthians 11:24–27*, what kinds of struggles did Paul face on his race? List three or four trials that stand out to you. If you had faced these same circumstances, at what point would you have most wanted to give up?



## **Looking Ahead, Let's Prepare for the Race**

*Hebrews 12:1–3*

Yet Paul had one more trial to endure—his own execution. As he approached the finish line, he penned a heartfelt letter to Timothy. Read *2 Timothy 4:5*. What advice did Paul want his protégé to keep in mind as he faced obstacles in his own race?

According to *4:7–8*, why was Paul able to stay focused on the prize of Jesus throughout his race? What hope did he have in Jesus?

What a powerful example of a well-run race! Followers of Jesus can look to Paul's example as they run their own races today.



## **Looking Ahead, Let's Prepare for the Race**

*Hebrews 12:1–3*



### **Application: Running Your Own Race**

Based on his study of *Hebrews 12:1–3*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll developed five application points regarding the Christian race:

1. *God has predetermined each person's race.*
2. *Preparing for your race is your responsibility.*
3. *Stay focused on Jesus throughout the race.*
4. *When discouraged, think of all He endured.*
5. *No matter how difficult life may become, never quit running the race.*

Even the team that loses the first few games of the season can turn things around and go on to win the championship. You may find yourself at a point where it feels like finishing your race well is impossible, but it's never too late to start pursuing God.

What practical steps can you take today to prepare to run the remainder of your race well?

The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. Over the course of the long race, you may occasionally trip and fall off the path because you lose sight of the heavenly finish line. What kinds of entangling sins tend to draw your eyes away from Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for you?



## **Looking Ahead, Let's Prepare for the Race**

*Hebrews 12:1-3*

An obstacle like a broken relationship, a painful loss, or a financial crisis can cause anyone to question why God prepared the race the way He did. Have you ever stumbled so painfully that you considered stepping off the course of your Christian race? What ultimately caused you to stay on the path?

Perhaps you've spent the past season of your Christian life running *from* Jesus rather than running *to* Him. You may wonder if you're too far gone. But Jesus Himself said, "And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day" (*John 6:39*).

Jesus won't give up on you, so why should you give up on Him? Start by jogging. Keep your eyes on Him. Soon enough you will be running a race marked by Christlikeness.

*ON YOUR MARK. GET SET. GO!*



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

Offer your own prayer to God as you conclude your study. Ask Him to give you the strength to finish the race He's prepared for you.

*Father,*

#### ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*."

