

# Hebrews 12:1-3 – Middle-strength

## Introduction

We've Just passed 21<sup>st</sup> June: mid-winter – it's cold, dark and wet.

"I'm done with winter. I want to fast-forward to spring!"

"I'm not adding this year to my age; I didn't use it"

"I didn't know life could be so hard; how will I get through it?"

After the euphoria of starting with Christ, we need something more than the adrenalin of starting something wonderful and new. We need strength for the middle of the race, when we're in the slog of life.

> We need a strength greater than we have. Hence the "By Faith" series.

**The audience of the preacher of the book of Hebrews** faced a tough life:

"33 Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. 34 You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property" (10:33, 34). Those were tough days, indeed. Paul writes:

*"Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all"* (2 Corinthians 4:17).

> So, *"You need to persevere"* – Where do we get the strength to do that? Heb. 11 characters show how; **Abel's** strength came from his heart for God. **Enoch** grew strong keeping in step with God; **Noah** endured by holding no compromise; **Abraham and Sarah** grew in faith as God became more and more real to them; **Isaac and Jacob** were inspired by what they saw coming; **Moses** held strong when he saw how poor the world was in comparison with the glory of God;

Now in Hebrews 12 the Preacher changes from **"them"** talk to **"you"** talk:

**Scripture reading:** "1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and **let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.** 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. **3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart"** (Hebrews 12:1-3).

## 1. Accept the race as finish-able

“Let us run [with perseverance] the race marked out for us” (12:1)

It is finish-able. How do we know? So many before us have done it!

“Since we are surrounded by such a great, cloud of witnesses...” (12:1);

Look at the bulging, overcrowding mass of witnesses that we were learning about in the previous chapter – **They were not in the grandstand watching us; We were in the stands watching them.**

They were testimonies to the faith that gets us through the middle of the run. They did it. So can you. It’s a race “marked out for you.”

Now that we have seen their race, in Hebrews 11, we’re in our own

race in Hebrews 12. We now look back to the commendations they

received for finishing by faith. They are an encouragement to us, now.



# Comrades Marathon – after 35Kms, it’s all about pain management

– At Drummond is massive encouragement: The Wall of Honour: It’s bricks hold the names of people who have finished the race.

When you run by them, you see blank bricks that are waiting for more finishers. You can imagine one of those bricks with your name on it.

And when you finish the race you can go online and book it. It’s a

fantastic encourager that the race marked out for you is finish-able!

On what basis? On the basis of Jesus Christ. Jesus makes it finish-able.

> If it’s a race marked out for you, it’s do-able.

## 2. Assure yourself about Jesus – Faith is in HIM

“Looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (12:2)

- a. Jesus: Author of our faith – the Cross & resurrection – trailblazer!
- b. Finisher – ascended and sat down at the RH of the throne of God.

> Jesus has made this race a sure thing. It puts a song in your heart.

*“Blessed assurance; Jesus is mine; Oh what a foretaste of glory divine;  
Heir of salvation; Purchase of God; Born of His Spirit; Lost in His love”*

Your assurance of Jesus keeps your joy alive; Faith is in HIM!

David writes in the Psalms: **“Every day I will praise you** and extol your name for ever and ever” (Psalm 145:2).

**Because faith is in Christ, His joy is also ours.**

## 3. Attack the causes of exhaustion: Eliminate distractions & competition

“Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles” (12:1b).

a. **Trim to the Lord’s race gear.** A marathon is not run with clutter (unless for charity); A runner gets the light running club colours.

It’s often been explained that the athletes running in the Greek sports stadium stripped down to the minimum for their races, so that they were not encumbered by flowing robes and paraphernalia. This is true.

And the lesson is also quick to learn: We so often add into our lives all sorts of things that stress us out and weigh us down. What we need to remember, also, is that the laying aside of everything that hinders

includes the attitudes that weigh our hearts down: unresolved anger, feelings of never being good enough, pride about our achievements, and how good we are. All these should be placed where they belong, at the Cross, so that they may be given their proper weight and perspective.

But this passage also points to something that I feel burdened to deal with. It’s in the next clause, “Cast aside the sin that so easily entangles”.

b. **Eliminate the causes of exhaustion:**

**“Cast aside the sin that clings closely or so easily entangles”**

# In preparatory school, grades 1 to 3 we enjoyed egg and spoon races, three-legged races, hop-skip-and-jump, and all those fun things.

But in Junior School, we got serious with sprints and hurdles and long jump and all those things that make an 8 year old quite excited.

While this was all going on, a teacher called me from the grandstand, and

said, "You're in the grade 4 relay race for your team. Our no. 3 is sick."

"What's a relay race?"

"Look, just stand here. You're number 3. Billy's number 2. He's going to run to you with a baton. Take it from him and pass it on to Steven when you get to him? OK?"

"Ok," I said. **I was so excited. "Yay! Yay! I'm in a race. I'm in a race!"**

The whistle went off (because in those days you didn't frighten kids with starting guns). No. 1's were off. They passed the baton to their No. 2s.

Billy ran in and gave his baton to me. I ran and gave my baton to Steve.

Something sparked in my brain that the race was still on. I mistakenly flashed passed Steve in the process because he was slow on the uptake,

and I was speeding to the finish line. **I didn't know that when you passed the baton you had to stop running!** Two things happened:

(1) Steve eventually got going and was trying to overtake me; and

(2) in the end the whole team was disqualified because of what I'd done.

You kind of live with those moments for the rest of your life, don't you?

**This passage speaks about the sin that so easily gets in your way.** When

you're in a race and the person in front is in your way and hinders you from passing – something changes in you, doesn't it? What happens?

The person hindering you changes the race into a competition between the two of you, rather than each running out their own race plan.

The sin of this verse is this: Whatever competes for our attention and takes our focus off Jesus Christ, and His goal for us – that's the sin.

The sin is a divided heart; a distracted life. We need to reduce everything

back to perspective: Whatever is in the Lord's hands, is fine for the race;

whatever competes with Christ steals our joy, saps our strength, and takes our focus off Him.

**We need to ask ourselves also** if we are hindering others in their race of life. Are we competing with anyone, making it hard for them to run freely

with a Christ-focus, by the way we relate to them. The tussle develops between us, rather than the focus being where it should be? It should

never be that we be a cause of another's stumbling. Rather, the Preacher

to the Hebrews takes these last chapters to talk about how we are to be an encouragement to others, rather than a hindrance to them – that they

may be helped and healed. **Let us always be alert and thoughtful about**

**these things.**

#### 4. Draw strength from fellowship with Christ

“Consider Him who endured... so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (12:3).

**“Consider him who endured so much.”** When we think of the sufferings of Christ, we realize that in some small way we share in His sufferings when we suffer in His Name for His cause. He gives us an identification with Him, wherever we have to endure, for His sake.

**a. The fellowship of His sufferings** – for doing the right thing;

I know that most of us do not suffer like those who are persecuted. Some of you are paying a price for making a stand for Jesus. But where we endure for doing the right, good and loving thing for Jesus' sake, there is a fellowship, in some small way, of His sufferings. Paul writes, *“I want to know Christ, and the fellowship (Gk. koinonia) of His sufferings”* (Philippians 3:10). The word fellowship is also used in 1:5 where he thanks God for their fellowship, a fellowship which God gives, in the Gospel. It is also used in 2:1 where it refers to the loving fellowship the Holy Spirit gives to the family of Jesus Christ.

**The point is this: Where you have to endure, there God meets you in fellowship.**

# The peloton is an illustration of such a fellowship concept. The front cyclist does all the hard work. We've already talked about Jesus going ahead of us, making the way for us to follow.



The peloton is a powerful feature of the race, because it brings everyone into one mind for the long, hard stretches of the race. **The wind and sounds of the peloton drives everyone along.**

> When it says of Jesus, that He is the Author and the Perfecter of our faith, it's a device that means that **He is also everything in-between.**

He is your helper in the middle of the long, hard, struggle.

Jesus is your peloton! I urge you to get back into Him – your help!

*“Fear not, for I am with you [that’s the Emmanuel concept -*

*“koinonia”]. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).*

**b. How can I make Jesus my strength each day?**

1. Own Christ as the Author and Perfecter of your faith;
2. Keep all your stressors and attitudes as that which Jesus owns;
3. Meet Him daily – first thing in the morning; last thing at night;
4. Make it a habit to ask Him for help; and to rest in His care.