

## “GETTING IN THE GAME.”

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

**February 12, 2017, 10:30AM**

**Text for the Sermon: Hebrews 12:1-4**

**Prayer:** Holy Father as we approach your Holy Word this morning we are aware we are standing on holy ground and we are not holy. Send your Holy Spirit upon us now, open our blind eyes and ears to receive your truth for your people and grant us the grace to walk in it, for your glory in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

### **Introduction.**

It seems especially appropriate to consider the theme the Cadets are focusing on this year, getting in the game, at the time America also celebrates the biggest game of the year, the Super Bowl.

The Cadet theme verse is a great verse with great challenges and implications for all of us. Or not. Is it for all of us?

What about those with walkers or wheel chairs? How is Jeannie Bakker supposed to get in the game and run the race at 101? Or Mary K.? Is this verse just for young Christians like the cadets? Just for those who are in shape?

The Bible uses athletic analogies that could sound like Christianity is a younger persons sport.

Tom Brady, the quarterback for the New England Patriots joined Peyton Manning as the oldest quarterback to win a super bowl at age of 39 (Brady is four months younger than Manning).

Tiger Woods is trying to make a comeback at 41 and it's not looking too good.

After shoveling this week, I'm not sure how fast I could run today. Is it possible for a person confined to bed to run the race set before us? Does this verse apply to all of us, no matter our age or our health?

The answer is yes, because this race doesn't require getting out of bed, it isn't run with our legs or bodies, but with our hearts by faith. The weak and the aged among us not only run this race, they can win this race, because it is won by keeping the faith.

**I Timothy 6:12** Fight the good fight of the *faith*.

**II Timothy 4:7** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the *faith*.

### **Don't grow weary.**

Notice what Hebrews says about the race. Don't grow weary or faint-hearted. Why does the author say that? Because the race we are called to run takes real endurance, not physical endurance but spiritual endurance, it takes keeping the faith.

This letter called Hebrews was written to Christians who used to be Jews, probably a house church in Rome. They have come under attack, suffering persecution, humiliation, reproach, had their property taken and been imprisoned. Can you understand why they might be thinking about getting out of the game, giving up the faith and going back to being Jews?

If it was easy or fun or comfortable, it wouldn't be weary. It is weary precisely because it is hard and sometimes it's exhausting, and painful. It takes great energy that can leave us tired, sore, sweaty, spent.

There are four things that make running the race of faith even harder, harder than necessary, harder than God intends for it to be.

Running alone.

Running without help.

Running without an aim.

Running with extra weights and obstacles.

Our text counters those things with four ways to make the race easier and the goal obtainable.

### **Look back at the witnesses.**

**Hebrews 12:1** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.

The common temptation in reading this text is to think of them as a great crowd of spectators up in the stands watching us and cheering us on, but that is not how we should take this. They are not spectators, they are fellow participants who have run before us, and who by their example are an inspiration and encouragement to us.

The "therefore" points back to chapter 11 where we are given a dozen testimonies of OT saints who ran the race with perseverance and endurance by faith. The stories of the saints who have gone before us are recorded in Scripture for our encouragement.

**Romans 15:4** For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Consider their race, the game they were in.

**Hebrews 11:35b-37** Some were tortured, ... 36 Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated.

We don't run alone, there are those who have gone before and there are those who run with us and those who will come after. Don't run alone. Look to those who have gone before, remember their faith and their faithfulness even in great trial.

If you feel you are alone in your situation, consider the saints, consider their lives and how they endured, how they didn't hope in this life but in the life to come. (Adult SS).

At every funeral of a great old saint I encourage those listening to consider the example of the one who is gone and follow them to heaven. And we have had a lot of great examples just in this

church. Just in the past year, Sid Oostema, Bill Scholten, Nella Boxum, Frank Vogel, Betty Medema.

We are on the best team, with the best running mates, in the most important race. And we are on the winning team.

Those who were rooting for New England came away from last week's game elated, thrilled having been for the winning team. Those of us rooting for Atlanta had a different experience.

The cadets are getting their derby cars ready for their derby car race. They all want to be the one with the winning car.

We want to run to win, and to do that we need help. Cadets is built on the idea of witnesses, mentors, helpers, guides. Cadet counselors, give these younger men a model, an example, someone to follow in the race.

One way we run alone is keeping our struggles to ourselves, that doesn't help or make us stronger somehow. A burden shared is a burden cut in half, a burden now carried by two.

The lives of other Christians past and present are a great source of help in our race, but there is an even better source of encouragement.

### **Look up to Jesus.**

**Hebrews 12:2** Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

Jesus is the champion, Jesus is the greatest competitor of all time, the supreme example. We have the best coach who brings the best out of us by putting Himself in us. Jesus is with us the entire race, not just to cheer us on and encourage us but to run with us and to supply everything we need while we run, we run in His energy and strength.

Jesus makes staying in the game and running the race and fighting the good fight possible. Jesus is our trainer, our strength and conditioning coach, and the one who shows us the course and guides us over it the whole way. He is the trail blazer who has gone before us and He is the one who comes back and goes with us.

We don't have a coach and trainer that has not run or doesn't know the pain or has never made it to the goal Himself. We don't have a coach who is washed up as a player and now just sits on the sidelines.

We have greater respect for those who have come through great trials or battles, who have persevered to the end and paid the price. Those who have walked their talk.

Consider what Christ has endured, the hostility, the injustice, the pain, the mocking, the ridicule, the undeserved hate. And Jesus submitted to all of this willingly. Jesus resisted temptation to the point of shedding blood, and He suffered for us to the point of death. Look to

Jesus when you think about giving up or throwing in the towel. The harder our race, the more we must look to Jesus.

Stay close to Jesus. In His Word, in prayer, in worship, in seeking Him and to be like Him.

The Cadet theme song is a great one to remember:

Living for Jesus a life that is true,  
Striving to please Him in all that I do.

Living for Jesus wherever I am,  
Doing each duty in His holy name;  
Willing to suffer affliction and loss,  
Deeming each trial a part of my cross.

It is very easy when we are in the midst of a very great trial or difficulty, when the going is very hard, to look to ourselves and what we are feeling, to feel sad or sorry for ourselves. It is the work of the devil to get us to turn our eyes off of Jesus and onto ourselves.

Satan says, "Your sins are too great. Your faith is too weak. You're a failure, you aren't trying hard enough, you are not acceptable to God."

It's the work of the Holy Spirit to get us to turn our eyes off ourselves and onto Jesus. He is the source, the author and finisher of our faith. It is He who begins the good work in us and He who brings it to completion. Everything begins and ends with Him.

When you are running the race, look to Him. When you are getting in the game, keep your eye on Him. When you are feeling weak, look to Him. When you feel like giving up, look to Him. When you are afraid, look to Him. When you are tempted, look to Him.

As good as our Cadet counselors are, they always point us to Jesus, and showing us how they look to Jesus for their own race.

### **Look forward to the joy.**

We don't just run aimlessly, but with a goal in front of us.

**Hebrews 12:2** looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who *for the joy that was set before him* endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus ran the same race we are running, the race of faith and obedience. He never lost sight of the goal. And where is He now, seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

And what reward is held out for us? The very same thing.

**Ephesians 2:4-6** But God, being rich in mercy, ... made us alive together with Christ ... 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

What is the prize that is set before us? Heaven and all its glory and all its joys.

Jesus endured the very worse because He could see ahead to the very best. We are running for the best reward. He shows us the goal, what to aim at, and He is the goal, the joy set before us.

Jesus is the rewarder of our faith. Having run with us the whole way, He stands at the end and gives us the prize. He speaks the “well done, thou good and faithful servant.” But it’s His faithfulness in us that has done it.

If you start thinking the fight of faith isn’t worth it, or you can’t go on, look up to your reward.

While in the game, don’t just look at the present. The game is hard, the race is long, the fight is to the finish. Don’t look for some present reward, look to your future reward and blessings. In fact don’t be satisfied with any worldly reward, it is fleeting.

What are Tom Brady’s five Super Bowl rings in the scope of eternity? If that’s his only reward, then he has nothing. “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, but lose his soul?”

There is a prize, a reward at the end of whatever we endure in this life. Even if we suffer the worst affliction and endure the greatest pain, there is before us the wreath of victory, salvation and glory, to all who persevere and endure and keep the faith. We will reign with Him in His joy.

### **Put off every weight, every obstacle.**

**Hebrews 12:1** ... let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Every race, every game has obstacles. It is like we are in an obstacle course. I picture the race of faith to be more like a steeplechase with the high barriers and water hazards, or a cross country course or a long winding marathon over hills and rough ground.

But remember this race is not a physical one, it’s a spiritual one. So the impediments aren’t age or health or handicap, the impediments are spiritual. What in our life is slowing down our progress in the gospel? What is slowing down our imitation of Christ? What is slowing down our increasing in faith, hope and trust?

Our attachments to this world and all our physical and worldly cares and concerns weigh us down and slow us down considerably. These weights are many and they are serious.

**I John 2:15-16** Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

Everything in this life isn't bad, it is only if it hinders our love for Jesus and our faith in Him.

Some things that aren't sin are still obstacles and weights. Is there something in your life that hinders your faith, dampens your love, reduces your ability to resist temptation, that impedes your spiritual progress? Some time waster, some activity, some friendship, some place? If it hinders your relationship with Christ, you should let it go.

What is it for you? Obsession with sports, video games, social media, workaholic, shopping?

It may be something perfectly innocent or fine for others, but you know it is a stumbling block and a burden or obstacle to your living your faith well. The race is hard enough without adding cumbersome weights.

Nothing impedes our faith like sin. We are all running with a handicap because of our fall into sin. It's like we are in the game playing injured. I played football in High School, and I played my entire senior year with a rib injury that impeded my playing well.

No one can run the race of faith entangled in sin that clings so closely to us. The KJV calls this besetting sin or sin that so easily besets us. These are the deeply ingrained sins, the habitual sins we struggle to overcome and never seem to make progress.

We have those sins that quite frankly we want to do more than we want to obey Christ and kill them. Our resolve and our desires ebb and flow, increase and decrease. We are in a real conflict of interest between what we want to do and what God wants us to do. Unless we lay them aside we will not get to the finish line.

To run the gospel race with grace and victory we want to cast off every weight, burden, obstacle.

We are going to spend the next couple of months doing this very thing, putting off weights, shedding a few pounds, to help us run the race better, faster, farther, with greater hope for greater joy. We are going to look at seven serious weights or obstacles, seven serious sins.

Are we serious about getting in the game and staying in the game? Are we stripped for action, are we fighting the good fight of faith, are we waging war with our sin?

Consider what future is ours at the finish line. Let's train, practice, exercise, work, strive and encourage each other to keep the faith by keeping looking to Jesus.

Don't run alone, look to the faithful all around you.

Don't run without help, look to Jesus every day.

Don't run without an aim, but fixed on the joy set before us in heaven.

Don't run with extra weights and obstacles and sin, get rid of whatever entangles.

**II Timothy 4:7** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the *faith*.