

“Runner”

Some years ago our younger son Kraig and I went fishing together. He was single, out of college, and I thought it'd be a nice day of bonding between father and son. So we met at one of PA Fish Commission lakes, and rented a small boat with one of these electric trolling motors.

We made our way to a spot that looked good to us, turned off the motor, and dropped the anchor. We fished for a while; there wasn't much activity, so we decided to move. When Kraig went to pull up the anchor, he couldn't find the anchor rope. With a look of surprise painted on his face, he looked at me and said, “We lost the anchor!”

Now what? What are we going to say to people at the boat rental office? “We lost your anchor?” I tried to think of a story we could make up that would get us off the hook. But that's lying. So, I figured we'll just have to face the music and pay for a new anchor.

We tried to fish some more – but the boat kept drifting. Aggravated – we just packed it in and called it a day.

So, we headed back to shore. But when we revved up the electric motor, the boat hardly moved. “Darn it,” I thought. “The battery for the electric motor is going dead on us. Isn't that nice. They rent you a motor and you can't even use the motor! We'll just have to row back.”

So I picked up the oars and started to row. Man, it was tough! I rowed and rowed and we just crept along. I was sweating to beat the band. Kraig was in the front of the boat, sort of guiding me. “To the right,” he'd say. “I am, I am! Ok!” I'd shoot back. Then he took over for a while and rowed. Then I rowed again. We inched our way back to the dock. Our fuses were getting shorter and shorter. He'd tell me to go more to the left and I'd bark back at him that I was doing the best I could.

Well, by this time, a small crowd was gathering on the dock, watching us expert sailors do our thing. As we got closer, we could hear one of them yelling something. Finally, I could make out what they were saying. “Pick up the anchor!” That's all I needed to hear. The jerks didn't know we had lost the anchor! “Pick up the anchor,” someone yelled again. By this time I had had it! I turned around and screamed, “That's not the problem! What do ya think I am, an idiot!!”

As soon as I said that, I glanced up at Kraig, and he had this look on his face like he had just swallowed a canary. “Dad,” he said. “We're dragging the anchor”. He was right. We hadn't lost the anchor. The anchor rope was attached to the boat through a metal loop outside the boat, *beneath the water's edge*. We had the anchor all along. We just couldn't see it. And we managed to row to the boat dock dragging the anchor across the bottom of the lake.

I checked the boat back in at the little stand where the attendant was. My face was red. Kraig got out of the boat and walked as fast as he could past everyone to the safety of his car. The attendant was good enough to give us 2 free passes that we could use another day, since our day was wasted. Truthfully, I never did have the nerve to show my face there again and use the free pass.

Sequel to the story: When I retired, I bought a nice fishing boat. Kraig and I went fishing several times, and we actually survived the outing! I sold boat after having it a couple of years – so I do feel my life is a bit safer

I've gotten lot of laughs as I've shared this story with family and friends. And I always think of that fishing excursion when I read some words found in Hebrews, chapter 12. Hebrews 12, the first verse says, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us." Notice, "let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely" (or "so easily entangles"). *Don't try to row a boat when you're dragging the weight of the anchor on the bottom of the lake!*

Let's look at these words of Scripture more closely. In Hebrews 12, the writer is talking about living your life as a follower of Jesus. He compares it to running a foot race. "Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us..." (Hebrews 12:1b).

This section begins with the word "therefore". Whenever you see that word, you have to look at what came before that. In the previous chapter, Hebrews 11, it gives us the roll call of Old Testament heroes of the faith. The writer of Hebrews reminds us of the great faith of people like Abraham and Moses and Gideon and Samuel and David. And he says, Therefore....since we are surrounded with such a host of faithful people like that, let us put every effort we have into living for Christ. Let these great heroes of our faith inspire us to be the most determined followers of Jesus we can be!

Let's think more about this image of the Christian life as a race. *Since the Christian life is compared to a race, this tells us that being a Christian takes effort.* Think of a race like the Boston Marathon. How many people are participating in that race without exerting any effort on their part? Probably none! You don't run the race by standing still, or by sitting in a chair on the sideline, or by just thinking about the race. You have to *run*. And in most races, it takes preparation – running, getting in shape, etc.

There are some people who think being a Christian takes little or no effort. Just believe certain stuff. Just come to church when it's convenient. Just try to be a nice, decent person. I don't think so! Want to be a real follower of Jesus? It takes sweat and blood! Taking time to pray, and study the Scriptures. Making a determined effort to turn away from what is wrong and evil. Sometimes standing against the crowd or popular opinion. Striving to grow in our ability to care about people, to forgive people.

Living the Christian life takes a lot of hard work and dedication! Scott Hamilton, the Olympic figure skater, describes the time he won a Gold Medal: "It was a moment to be shared. Someone asked me why I was looking at the medal so intently. What I was doing was looking at 16 years of my life." 16 years of his life poured into that that goal of winning an Olympic Gold Medal.

You want to live the Christian life and run the race with Jesus? It's not for slouches and lazy

people. It will take all the effort you and I can muster!

It's also important to realize that *the Christian race is not a sprint. It's a marathon.* It's not a hundred meter dash; it's a cross country run!

At one point I played on a hockey team that only had games once a week. So in order to be prepared and not get out of breath, I had to do wind sprints. I'd go out at night (it was a small town), run as fast as I could for maybe 30 seconds, then walk a bit. Then run as fast as I could for another 30 seconds. I hated it. (I always hoped nobody would see the preacher in town dashing around the streets).

Some people who say they're Christians are like that. They're hot for a while. Gung ho. They come to church. Get involved in this or that. Enthusiastic about Jesus. But 4 months or 6 months down the road, where are they? They've cooled off. Maybe they get a spell where they're active again, but that only lasts a short time.

But the Christian life is a marathon, a long distance run. *Once you start running with Jesus, you run for the rest of your life!*

I used to be active playing sports. Baseball, softball, ice hockey. When there were no teams around, I took up golf, and tennis. But after some years that tailed off. As I grew older, I took up jogging. I hated it at first, but it grew on me. I used to feel really good about jogging maybe 20 minutes in the morning. But at one church there was a man who got into running – he *really* got into it. He'd get up all hours of the morning, and run for an hour or two. Whenever I'd talk to him at church, he always seemed to get onto the subject of his running. He'd tell me about race training for maybe a 15 mile run. Occasionally I'd see out running in his running gear – spandex pants, etc. When I started running, I used to wear regular shorts or slacks. One day our daughter was visiting, and looked out at me, and said, "Oh mom!" They convinced me to buy sportswear. So I did. But not spandex pants, like my friend.

The more he talked about *his* running, the less I felt like talking about my 15-20 minute jogs in the morning, often with the dog – interrupted by the dog's sniffing, and stops to take care of business! On the other hand, he was in it for serious *long distance* running!

The Christian life is more like my friend's running style, than my 15 minute jogs! You sign up with Jesus, you sign up for life! You don't quit running if you get too busy with material things or worldly concerns. You don't quit running when you become 65 or 80, and say, "I've paid my dues. Let someone else do the work of the Lord." You run with Jesus for life, and you give it all you've got!

And then, if you're going to run the race and be a follower of Jesus, you've got to overcome all sorts of obstacles. First of all, there are the obstacles life throws at us. People or things that might dissuade us or divert us from living as a Christian. A spouse or parent who isn't a believer and gives us no encouragement. Problems and difficulties that come our way, and can get us

down, and discourage us from continuing to trust God.

In the 1986 New York City Marathon, almost 20,000 runners entered the race. What is memorable is not who won, but who finished last. His name was Bob Wieland. He finished dead last - 19,412 people finished ahead of him. Bob completed the New York marathon in 4 days, 2 hours, 47 minutes, and 17 seconds. Why did it take him so long? Bob ran with his arms. 17 years earlier while in Vietnam, Bob's legs were blown off in battle. He sits on a 15 pound saddle and covers his fists with pads. He uses his arms to catapult himself forward one arm-length at a time. He can run a mile in an hour. Sometimes life itself hampers our running, but we run and keep on running!

But then there are the obstacles we create for ourselves that hinder our running the Christian race. Hebrews 12:1 says, "Let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely." These are the anchors we try to drag as we row towards shore!_What is the sin that clings so closely to you? That tends to entangle you? The sin that interferes with your living effectively as a Christian?_Maybe it's a bad temper...impatience...a sour, negative attitude...difficulty trusting God (unbelief)...maybe it's sexual impurity...or being caught up in buying and spending._Whatever it is – we are to "lay aside" this sin, this weight! *The Message* version of this verse has it: "Strip down, start running – and never quit. No extra spiritual fat. No parasitic sins" (Hebrews 12:1). Most normal people wouldn't think of running a race wearing a heavy topcoat, or carrying a backpack full of bricks or books!

Notice, Hebrews 12:1 says we are to run "with perseverance" the race set before us: things will get in the way, but keep at it, keep running, don't quit!

Then it goes on to say, as we run the race, *we are to get our eyes on Jesus.* Hebrews 12:2-3 says, "looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary in your souls or lose heart."

Jesus is the "pioneer" – He cleared the way. He ran the race before us. He showed us how to live life as God intended it to be lived. He faced many obstacles (such as the cross) in order to be faithful and do God's will. Jesus is also the "perfecter" of our faith. There's no way we can live the Christian life and stay in the race without His help. He is the one who helps us grow in our faith – as we keep in touch with Him

Keep your eyes on Jesus! A lot of people run the race of life and have goals in life that have little or nothing to do with Jesus. They live for themselves...or for money...or pleasure...or comforts. They're following the wrong leader.

In an NCAA cross-country championship held in Riverside, California, 123 of the 128 runners missed a turn. One competitor, Mike Delcavo, stayed on the 10,000 meter course and began waving for fellow runners to follow him. Delcavo was able to convince only four other runners to go with him. 123 runners lost out because they went by their own instincts, rather than

following one who had the right directions. Asked what his competitors thought of his mid-race decision not to follow the crowd, Delcavo responded, "They thought it was funny that I went the right way."

There are a lot of people giving us advice on how to live. The airwaves are filled with all kinds of so-called "experts" on life. But there's only One who completely knows how to get on and stay on the path that leads to Life – that's Jesus! We can't go wrong if we keep your eyes on Him!

Near the end of his life, the Apostle Paul could write this, "I have fought the good fight, *I have finished the race*, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:7-8). I want to be able to say that too!

There's a race to be run! All of the great heroes of the faith, the great cloud of witnesses, are cheering us on! Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, is running with us! So run, run, run! Don't quit. Don't give up! Stay in the race till you reach the finish line!

Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.
Community United Methodist Church
August 17, 2025

