

The Christian Race-Hebrews 12



RUN THE RACE TO WIN

Paul writes "Do you not know that those who run ([trecho](#)) in a race all run ([trecho](#)), but only one receives the prize ([brabeion](#))? **Run** ([trecho](#) - [present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) in such a way that you may win ([katalambano](#) - "kata" adds intensity = seize, grasp). 25 Everyone who competes ([agonizomai](#) ~ "agonizes") in the games exercises self-control ([egkrateuomai](#)) in all things (HOW MANY?). They then do it to receive a perishable ([phthartos](#)) wreath ([stephanos](#) ~ crown), but we an imperishable ([aphthartos](#)). 26 Therefore I run ([trecho](#)) in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27 but I discipline ([hupopiazō](#) - "beat black and blue" - present tense - continually) my body and make it my slave ([doulagoeo](#) - present tense - continually), so that, after I have preached ([kerusso](#)) to others, I myself will not be disqualified ([adokimos](#))." (1Cor 9:24-27+) Paul is not speaking of loss of salvation, but loss of rewards at the [Bema Seat of Christ](#).

The song [RUN LIKE HEAVEN](#) is from Psallos, a group that uses Scripture as the basis for their songs. Listen all the way through, as the closing words are very convicting..."**til you leave this earth.**" Those closing words should remind us of our last moments in this life and how we would wish to live them. It reminds me of the old Puritans who frequently preached on "the art of dying" or "dying well in the Lord."

Puritan **Richard Baxter** said that

"He that would die well must learn to live well; and he that would live well must oft think of dying well."

Paul faced with the prospects of bonds and afflictions declared

"But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish ([teleioo](#)) my course ([dromos](#) - RACE) and the ministry ([diakonia](#)) which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly ([diamarturomai](#)) of the gospel ([euangelion](#)) of the grace of God." (Acts 20:24+)

And in some of his last words we see Paul followed through on his conviction writing...

I have fought ([agonizomai](#) ~ "agonized" - perfect tense - past completed action, enduring impact!) the good fight ([agon](#) = "race" in Heb 12:1+), I have finished ([teleo](#) - perfect tense) the course ([dromos](#) - RACE), I have kept ([tereo](#) - perfect tense) the faith ([pistis](#)); (2 Timothy 4:7+)

Lord, by Your Spirit and Word, let each saint who reads these words imitate the passion of the great cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 11 and daily seek to die well, so that we finish the race well, all for Your glory and honor. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

A "BEMA SEAT MINDSET" MOTIVATES HORIZONTAL LIVING!

"O God, stamp eternity on my eyeballs."
— Jonathan Edwards



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, fixing our eyes on Jesus**, the Author and Perfector 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.

--Hebrews 12:1-2

THE CHRISTIAN RACE

Adoniram Judson is a man who ran the race well and finished well...

"A life once spent is irrevocable. It will remain to be contemplated through eternity... If it has been a useless life, it can never be improved. Such will stand forever and ever. The same may be said of each day. When it is once past, it is gone forever. All the marks which we put upon it, it will exhibit forever... Each day will not only be a witness of our conduct, but will affect our everlasting destiny (**Note:** Not in loss of salvation but of rewards - cp 1Co 3:11-15+, Jn 15:5+, 2Co 5:10+, cp 1Ti 4:7, 8+). No day will lose its share of influence in determining where shall be our seat in heaven. How shall we then wish to see each day marked with usefulness! It will then be too late to mend its appearance. It is too late to mend the days that are past. The future is in our power. **Let us, then, each morning, resolve to send the day into eternity in such a garb as we shall wish it to wear forever.** And at night let us reflect that one more day is irrevocably gone, indelibly marked." (See page 33-34 of [A memoir of the life and labors of the Rev. Adoniram Judson](#))

NOTE THAT SOME OF THE FOLLOWING MAY BE PARAPHRASED AND NOT EXACT QUOTES:

Jonathan Edwards - Resolved, never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life."

Charles H. Spurgeon – Depend upon it, your dying hour will be the best you have ever known if your most living hour has been spent with Christ. — Sermon: [‘The Believer’s Death Day Better Than His Birthday’](#)

Charles H. Spurgeon – “To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing. It is the end of sin, the end of fear, the end of pain, the end of labor, the end of tears.” — Morning and Evening (Related Sermon - [Though He Were Dead](#))

John Wesley – “Our people die well.”

Robert Moffat - We have all eternity to celebrate our victories, but only one short hour before sunset in which to win them."

Jeremy Taylor – To live well is to die daily; to die well is to live eternally. — [Holy Dying](#) (1651) (210 pages)

Thomas Watson – We must begin to die before we die, that we may not die when we die. — [The Godly Man’s Picture](#) (235 pages)

John Owen – When a believer dies, he has done his work, finished his labor, and enters into rest. Death is but his entrance into rest and glory. — [The Glory of Christ](#) (70 pages)

Randy Alcorn – We are not simply dying; we are going home. — BORROW [Heaven](#) (552 pages)

J.I. Packer – Dying well is the last and perhaps the greatest lesson of the Christian life. — BORROW [Finishing Our Course with Joy](#) (116 pages)

[RECOMMENDATION FROM SAM STORMS](#) - "I wish I had thought more about growing older when I was younger. If I had, perhaps I wouldn't need wisdom from J. I. Packer. But I didn't, and therefore I do! And what wonderful wisdom it is, the sort that challenges us, redirects our energy, and equips us with Biblical truth to face our latter years. I'm at that stage in life where 'engaging' with my 'agin' has become increasingly more urgent. And I can't think of anyone who can provide more helpful and encouraging insight than J. I. Packer. DON'T WAIT UNTIL YOU'RE SIXTY OR SEVENTY TO READ THIS BOOK. START NOW AND FINISH WELL."

See excerpt [God's Path for Aging Believers](#)

John Piper – The way to die well is to live in such a way that Christ is more precious to you than anything you'll lose in death." — [Don't Waste Your Life](#)

D.L. Moody – Someday you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody of East Northfield is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! I shall be more alive than I am now.

Elisabeth Elliot – “When death has no sting, life has no fear.

Jim Elliot - "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

R.C. Sproul – For the believer, death does not have the last word. It is not the end of life but the door to eternal life. — BORROW [Surprised by Suffering](#)

***So teach us to number our days,
That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.
--Psalm 90:12 Moses***

Faith learns to die daily so that death itself is but the final act of trust.

Those who walk closely with Christ will not find it strange to walk with Him through the valley.

He who has learned to die to self will not fear dying to this world.

J I Packer - [GOD'S PATH FOR AGING BELIEVERS](#)

Several times in the New Testament we find the Christian life vividly pictured as running a race. "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus" (Heb. 12:1–2). Similarly, Paul reasons with the undisciplined Corinthians:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things.... So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (1 Cor. 9:24–27)

The apostle's image works by "as if" logic; it calls for running as if you were competing and so had to go as fast as you could in order to beat your rivals. Paul uses "run," with these overtones, again in Galatians 2:2 and Philippians 2:16 as an image of his life of serving God. Finally, as an old man (Philemon 9) facing martyrdom, he says: "The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight" (the image is probably from wrestling), "I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness" (counterpart of the victor's laurel wreath in Greek games) (2 Tim. 4:6–8).

Put positively, the apostle's race image clearly combines these four notions: first, clearheaded goal orientation (you run to win); second, purposeful planning (you think out how you should run the race, pacing yourself and preparing for the final burst); third, resolute concentration (you put everything second to training for and then running and hopefully winning the race); and fourth, supreme effort (you run flat out, putting everything you have got into what you are doing). Thus Paul conceives the faithful Christian life; the believer runs, as did he.

Granted, this is not Paul's only perspective on the Christian life. In terms of its theology and the revealed truth that shapes it, it is a life of gratitude for grace received, a matter of being moved and motivated by the overwhelming glory of God's redeeming love to a person as naturally unlovable and unacceptable as oneself. "I appeal to you ... by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1). And in terms of its temper and the need for steady persistence in it, the Christian life is for Paul a walk, a matter of keeping on keeping on along the set path and declining to be distracted from it. "As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving" (Col. 2:6–7).

But, as we have just seen, the image of running was central to Paul's understanding of his own life, and I urge now that it ought to be the central focus in the minds and hearts of all aging Christians, who know and feel that their bodies are slowing down. The challenge that faces us is not to let that fact slow us down spiritually, but to cultivate the maximum zeal for the closing phase of our earthly lives.

Why zeal? Because it is zeal that will keep us running. But what is zeal? Rarely do we hear the word or use it ourselves these days, so it is no wonder if we are less than clear as to its meaning. But Nehemiah 3–6 tells us how, against all odds, in fifty-two days Jerusalem's able-bodied inhabitants rebuilt all two miles of the ruined city wall, which is a classic display of zeal in action. And then early in John's Gospel we read of Jesus cleansing Jerusalem's commercialized temple with awe-inspiring ferocity, and we are told, "His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me'" (John 2:17, citing Ps. 69:9).

Zeal for his kingdom is a character quality of God himself, as he has revealed himself (Isa. 9:7). So zeal for God's cause, his kingdom, and his glory, all of which the temple symbolized, is one element of the image of God in his incarnate Son—the image in which, so we are told, Christians are to be renewed, and actually are being renewed, by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:20–24; Col. 3:10). Nowhere does Scripture suggest that this divine renewing process is programmed to go on hold as we age, however true it is that we can clog it up at any point by our own follies and wrong attitudes.

It follows, then, that as zeal for God and godliness and God's honor was integral to God's image in Christ, so it should be in us, and we should cultivate zeal, along with the rest of Christian virtues, up to the ending of our lives on earth—or at least, for as long as we can consciously focus and direct our thoughts. (As we all know, various kinds of heart failure and dementia, along with the palliative techniques of modern medicine, may involve for us extended spells of comatose or semi-comatose existence near the end of earthly life, but these are outside our present concern.)

So again we ask, what is zeal? Zeal means priority, passion, and effort in pursuing God's cause. In the second half of the nineteenth century J. C. Ryle, "the best man in the Church of England," according to the Baptist C. H. Spurgeon, produced the following classic statement on the subject:

Zeal in religion is a burning desire to please God, to do his will, and to advance his glory in the world in every possible way....

A zealous man in religion is pre-eminently a man of one thing. It is not enough to say that he is earnest, hearty, uncompromising, thorough-going, whole-hearted, fervent in spirit. He only sees one thing, he cares for one thing, he lives for one thing; and that one thing is to please God. Whether he lives, or whether he dies—whether he has health, or whether he has sickness—whether he is rich, or whether he is poor—whether he pleases man, or whether he gives offense—whether he is thought wise, or whether he is thought foolish—whether he gets blame, or whether he gets praise—whether he gets honour, or whether he gets shame—for all this the zealous man cares nothing at all. He burns for one thing; and that one thing is to please God, and advance God's glory. If he is consumed in the very burning, he cares not for it—he is content. He feels that, like a lamp, he is made to burn; and if consumed in burning, he has but done the work for which God appointed him. Such a one will always find a sphere for his zeal. If he cannot preach, work, and give money, he will cry, and sigh, and pray. If he cannot fight in the valley with Joshua, he will do the work of Moses, Aaron, and Hur, on the hill (Ex. 17:9–13).... This is what I mean when I speak of "zeal" in religion. ([Practical Religion \[Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 1959\], 130](#))

Maintaining zeal Godward as our bodies wear out is the special discipline to which we aging Christians are called. Realism requires us to remember that memory, particularly short-term memory, will weaken; logical tightness of speech will loosen; powers of concentration will diminish; physical exhaustion will overtake us sooner or later, and energy levels will keep going lower. Zeal, however, should be unflagging every day, all day, and all the way. But if this is to happen, zeal must be fed by hope. That is the final point that I have to make, and as was the case before, it too is a theme requiring a chapter to itself. (**BORROW** [Finishing our course with joy : guidance from God for engaging with our aging PAGE 68](#))