

THE FINISH LINE

Hebrews 12:1-3

June 10, 2007 Sunday a.m.

INTRODUCTION

A. A few years ago, at the 2002 Winter Olympics, there were five finalists for the Men's 1000 Meter Speed Skating Race. During the final lap, the American and Chinese were out front with the Canadian and Korean skaters hot on their heels. Australia trailed behind obviously destined for last place. As they came around the last curve for the final straightaway stretch, everyone gathered around our television were on the edge of their seats cheering for America to pull out in front. The winner would receive the Olympic Gold medal.

Suddenly, the Chinese skater slightly bumped the American and sent both of them careening into the wall as they spun out of control. With no time or space to get out of their way, the tangled mess caused the Canadian and Korean skaters to also spin out of control and join them in a tangled heap of arms and legs. The Australian skater pushed by the heap and shouted to the top of his lungs as he crossed the finish line, "Gold! I won the Gold!"

B. The writer of Hebrew's describes the Christian life as a race-read text.

1. This is the scriptural theme for this year's VBS.
2. Although it's an exciting theme, far too many Christians today aren't even in the race.
3. They are Christians, but that's it. They aren't growing, serving, or sharing their faith.
4. They may have once been in the race. They may have even started strong, but now they have quit somewhere along the way.
5. How can we be sure that we don't quit too? How can we cross the finish line as our text encourages us to do?

I. FIRST, WE MUST REMEMBER OTHERS WHO HAVE CROSSED THE FINISH LINE—v.1a.

A. Who are these witnesses?

1. "Therefore" ties chapter 12 with chapter 11.
2. Chapter 11 is a list of some of the great hero's of our faith from the Old Testament. (i.e. Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samson, David, to mention just a few.)
3. We also have hero's of the faith today (i.e. godly parents and grandparents, teachers, pastor's friends, etc.).

B. There's an example of a modern day hero from 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 19,413th—dead last. Bob completed the New York marathon in 4 days, 2 hours, 47 minutes, and 17 seconds. It was unquestionably the slowest marathon in history—ever. So, what is it that made Bob Wieland's marathon so special? 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. That is real endurance in the face of adversity.

II. SECOND, WE MUST REALIZE IT'S A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT-v.1b.

A. Marathons are about perseverance and endurance. Bill Broadhurst is an example of perseverance and endurance... Bill Broadhurst was running in the Omaha, Nebraska, Pepsi 10k, a race of 6.2 miles. Broadhurst, who is a Christian, is slowed by a brain aneurism he suffered as a young man, leaving him partially paralyzed on the left side. He wanted to finish the 10k despite this obstacle. He was determined to run because Bill Rogers, his hero, was in the race that day.

Rogers is a great runner and ran the race in 29 minutes and 37 seconds. The other runners finished in 30 to 50 minutes. The joggers crossed the line in 60 or 70 minutes. It would take Bill Broadhurst much longer. As he ran, some kids didn't understand he was competing and said, "Hey mister, you missed a good race."

As he ran, his left side got so numb he wanted to quit. He wanted to drop out. After two hours, the cars were back in the streets, it was getting dark on Saturday afternoon, and

running through intersections became difficult. One policeman stopped cars to let him across; a nice lady handed him some water. At two hours and twenty minutes he said the pain was so bad and so throbbing, "I didn't want to make it; I didn't want to go on."

Then he saw the end. They had already taken the banner down. Broadhurst ran down the street on the sidewalk, saw the banner had gone, and his heart sank because everybody had left. He thought, What's the use? But he decided to finish. When he got to the end, out of the alleyway stepped Bill Rogers and a gang of people. They were waiting for him. Rogers opened his arms, welcomed Broadhurst across the finish line, and hugged him.

After Broadhurst willed his partially paralyzed body the last few steps to the end of the race, Rogers took the gold medal from around his own neck, and put it around the neck of the last runner to cross the line.

Rogers said, "Broadhurst, you're the winner; take the gold."

B. How can we persevere and endure in the Christian race?

1. First, by refusing to be distracted or discouraged-v.1b.

Wilma Rudolph was the 20th of 22 children. Born prematurely, doctors did not expect Wilma to survive. She did, but at the age of four, she contracted double pneumonia and scarlet fever, leaving her left leg paralyzed. She learned to walk with the aid of a metal brace.

When Wilma was nine-years-old, she removed the leg brace and began walking without it. By age 13, she developed a rhythmic walk. That same year, she decided to begin running. She entered her first race and came in last. For the next three years, Wilma came in dead last in every race she entered. But she kept on running, and one day she won. Eventually, the little girl who was not supposed to live, and then who was not supposed to be able to walk, would win three gold medals in Rome's 1960 Olympic games.

Wilma refused to be distracted or discouraged from her goal, so must we.

2. Second, by refusing to be controlled by sin-v.1c.

Vanderlei Lima went to Athens to do what no other Brazilian had ever done—medal in the Olympic marathon. This marathon was special. The runners would retrace the 2,500-year-old route of Phidipedes, the original marathoner.

As Lima neared the last leg of the race, he was in first place, and throngs of flag-waving spectators cheered him on. It was one of those moments where people of various backgrounds put their differences aside. The joyful celebration turned to bewilderment, however, when an eccentric spectator bolted from the crowd and tackled Lima. The assailant, wearing a red, white, and green kilt, did not injure Lima, but the delay dashed Lima's hopes for a gold medal. In the ensuing chaos, Lima lost 20 minutes and two other runners sped by him to win the gold and silver. Despite the unfortunate incident, Lima did not give up.

Following the race Lima expressed this reaction: "I'm not going to cry forever about the incident, although it broke my concentration, but I managed to finish, and the bronze medal in such a difficult marathon is also a great achievement."She was weighted down by a well meaning fan. Sind does the same for us.

3. By refusing to quit-v.1d.

Sally Robbins was a member of Australia's 2004 Olympic rowing team, competing in the women's eight final. With approximately 400 meters left in the race, the 23-year-old suddenly quit. Robbins slumped and let her oar dip into the water. Australia dropped from third to last place in the event.

"I just rowed my guts out in the first 1,500 and didn't have anything left, and that's all I could have done for today," Robbins explained.

Her teammates were not sympathetic, threatening to throw her into the water.

III. THIRD, WE MUST REMAIN FOCUSED ON THE FINISH LINE.

A. First, we must focus on the example of Jesus.

- B. Second, we must focus on our purpose in life.
- C. According to a Pew Research Center Poll about “Millennials” (ages 16- 25). Eighty-One Percent (81%) said...
 - 1. The most important goal for their generation is to get rich.
 - 2. The second most important is to be famous.
- D. Christians are to follow Jesus’ example and purpose in life-finish the Christian race.

CONCLUSION

- A. In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins writes:

The coaching staff of a high school cross-country running team got together for dinner after winning its second state championship in two years. The program had been transformed in the previous five years from good (top 20 in the state) to great (consistent contenders for the state championship on both the boys' and girls' teams).

"I don't get it," said one of the coaches. "Why are we so successful? We don't work any harder than other teams. And what we do is just so simple. Why does it work?"

He was referring to their simple strategy: We run best at the end. We run best at the end of workouts. We run best at the end of races. And we run best at the end of the season, when it counts the most. Everything is geared to this simple idea, and the coaching staff knows how to create this effect better than any other team in the state.

For example, they place a coach at the 2-mile mark (of a 3.1-mile race) to collect data as the runners go past. Then the coaches calculate not how fast the runners go, but how many competitors they pass at the end of the race, from mile two to the finish....

The kids learn how to pace themselves and race with confidence: "We run best at the end," they think at the end of a hard race. "So, if I'm hurting bad, then my competitors must hurt a whole lot worse!"

Jim Collins, Good To Great (Harper Business, 2001), p. 206

- B. Are you in the Christian race? Do you know Jesus as your Savior?
- C. If you do, are you still in the race? How can we stay to the finish?
 - 1. Remember others who have crossed the finish line.
 - 2. Realize it's a marathon, not a sprint.
 - 3. Remain focused on Jesus.