

Message #1075  
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"HOW TO SUSTAIN SPIRITUAL MOMENTUM"  
{Your Spiritual Journey--II}  
{Hebrews 12: 1-2}  
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#### INTRODUCTION

If you could have been around for any single event in the life of Jesus, what would you choose?

...in Bethlehem the day He was born?

...in Bethany the day He raised Lazarus from the dead?

...in Jerusalem on the day He emerged from the tomb?

And knowing some of you as I well as I do I'm sure some would have liked to have been at Cana when he turned the water into wine!

I think it would have been great to accompany Jesus to the Mount of Transfiguration {Matthew 17}.

...Jesus was transformed

...he face shone like the sun

...his clothes were as white as the light

...for one brief moment His disciples experienced the incredible glory of God

...and Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Jesus

If that isn't enough, the Bible says, "A bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!'" {17:5}

Peter was so overwhelmed {as he was so frequently} that he just wanted to stay there. "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If You wish, I will put up three shelters-- one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah!" {17:4}

That's the natural response we have when we've had a mountain top spiritual experience.

...when we've been in God's presence

...experienced His glory

...when we've been away from the stress and pressures of life momentarily

...like Peter we say, "Let' stay here!"

{I remember attending a contemplative retreat some years ago at San Francisco Theological Seminary for a week...a time of silence. I nearly went crazy the first 24 hours, but by the end of the week I was really in touch with God...with my inner self...and I appreciated the silence.

I said within myself, "I want to stay here!" The noise on the freeway 'down the mountain' was maddening!}

And then we read in the story, "And they came down from the mountain..." {17:9}

I spoke last week about the dangers descending a mountain. Why?

...many times experiences on the summit are emotional highs based on feelings

...be prepared: feelings fade

Experiences based solely upon feelings and emotion will not only fade, but they may well be placed on the shelf once one returns to ground zero!

The Christian life is not a 100 meter dash...it's a long journey!

...it's more like a marathon

...a test of endurance

I've seen far too many begin the race well but when the pressure came...when

endurance was needed...they fell by the wayside. That's precisely what the writer of Hebrews was saying...

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy He knew would be His afterward. Now He is seated in the place of highest honor beside God's throne in heaven." {Hebrews 12: 1-2--NLT}

#### SO--HOW DO WE SUSTAIN SPIRITUAL MOMENTUM?

Let's look at what we can learn...

First, if we're going to run a good race and finish well...

1. We will find strength from those who have gone before!

Know that...

...the Bible is far more than a history book

...more than a book on moral teachings

...no...the Bible is for us--for you and for me.

...look at Romans 15:4...

"Even if it was written in Scripture long ago, you can be sure it's written for us!"

{Romans 15:4}

Therefore, these words from our Hebrews text are applicable to each one of us this morning. They are our guide on...

...how to persevere

...how to keep going in the race.

"Therefore we are surrounded by this huge crowd of witnesses in the life of faith."

In order to understand what the writer is saying, we must look back into the previous chapter--Hebrews 11--the Christian Hall of Fame!

...contains a long list of those who have one thing in common--an unswerving faith in God!

...some were ridiculed

...others were mistreated

...God called some to leave families and leave for a far off land

...some paid with their lives

...they ALL ran with endurance the race set before them.

...and they never quit!

...sometimes it meant sacrifice and hardship

...the Hebrews writer wrote: "The world was not worthy of them...!"

And now in chapter 12 he calls them "witnesses" that the life of faith is worth living!

...he now pleads with contemporary believers--"Don't turn back!"

...look at that Hall of Fame and hang tough!

When you feel like you're drifting...when you're tempted to throw in the towel...

...read about the passion of David because David could testify it's worth it.

...read about Abraham and Isaac--they're witnesses of faith and perseverance!

And, let me add--if you want to take this a step further--hang out with those who have a great passion for God!

...whom do you know whose faith soars?

...who strengthens your faith when you walk with them?

...who builds you up and lifts you up?

Take your outline and fill in this question...what person of faith and godliness can strengthen my walk?

Secondly, if we are to run a good race and finish well...

2. We will need to put off that which trips us up

"Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress."

Last year there was a man in London who participated in the London marathon.

...history records it as the slowest ever

...Lloyd Scott finished in 5 days, 8 hours, 29 minutes

...instead of running shoes, nylon shorts, and a tank top he was wearing a diver's suit with a full metal helmet!

...he did this as a fundraiser.

What a great picture of many of us in the race of the Christian life.

...we're in the race

...but we're weighted down.

In this verse he tells us of two things we need to let go of that trips us up or slows us down.

**\*LET GO OF THE UNGODLY.**

Let go of those things in your life that you KNOW are wrong!

...let go of those things that hinder your relationship with God

...turn 'em loose!

Next..

**\*LET GO OF THE UNNECESSARY**

This is more subtle...

...for some, your plate is too full!

...we have families who don't attend worship because their kids are involved in six-eight extra-curricular activities that carry over into Sunday

...think of the hours we waste in watching ridiculous TV

Dear ones--we are not on our own agendas any longer--we belong to God!

We need to rid ourselves of those things that distract us...the unnecessary!

Read with me the passage from II Timothy-- "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs--he wants to please His commander officer."

So--fill in the statement--"In order to finish well, I need to let go of....."

Third, if we are to run a good race and finish well...

3. We will have to choose to persevere until we cross the finish line!

"Let us run with endurance this race that God has set before us!"

Throughout generations, greatness has often been defined by the ability to persevere and overcome obstacles.

Did you know there was a memo that came from MGM shortly after Fred Astaire took his first screen test: "Can't act, slightly bald, can dance a little!"

Someone said about Vince Lombardi: "He possesses minimal football knowledge!"

The parents of Enrico Caruso believed his teacher who said: "He has no voice at all. He just cannot sing!"

Walt Disney was once fired by a newspaper for lack of ideas.

Thomas Edison's teachers gave up on him wrote this evaluation: "He is too stupid to accomplish anything!"

Henry Ford before he succeeded failed and went broke 5 times.

Beethoven handled the violin awkwardly and his teacher called him hopeless as a composer.

Albert Einstein performed so badly in high school courses, except in math that his teachers encouraged his parents to pull him out of school.

Dorothy Scott Pate, director of John Adams High School Glee Club said when Jack Longley quit as accompanist to find employment to earn money for college: "He will never amount to anything because he can't stick to it!"

In the race of life, God is far more interested in HOW WE FINISH than how we begin!  
The first sermon I ever preached was given at Bethel College nearly fifty years ago  
on the I Corinthians 15:58 passage in your handout...

"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

...hang in there no matter how dark it gets  
...be steadfast...unmoveable...hanging in there!  
...decide now--no turning back...!

Now, fill in the statement "I know that God wants me to keep on....."

List the area where you need to keep pressing on in your life.

Fourth, if we are to run a good race and finish well...

4. I'm going to keep a single-minded focus!

...keep your eyes on the goal  
...keep looking at Jesus  
...don't let anything distract you!  
...take time to be alone with Him.  
...listen to what He says to you...

Paul wrote: "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ!" {Philippians 3:8}

...nothing is more important

Write it down: "In order to stay single-minded through the upcoming Christmas season, I will..."

Fifth, if we are to run a good race and finish well...

5. We will endure the suffering to see the smile!

I have a poster on the closet door in my study of the "Laughing Jesus!"

...it inspires me  
...it reminds me of a God who is cheering me on  
...when life gets tough...he encouragingly smiles at me as if to say: "You can do it, Jack!"

Keep going...keep our eyes on Him. Paul wrote in Philippians 3--"I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven."

Now, fill in that next statement: "I am able to endure the present because I know someday...."

## CONCLUSION

I want to close by reminding you of one of the most familiar stories in the New Testament--found in all four gospels--the account of Jesus feeding the multitudes--  
...5,000 men plus women and children

...from 5 loaves and 2 small fish donated by a small boy

Jesus blessed it...and all were fed! A miracle

The following day the crowds tracked Jesus down again and they said: "Do another miracle for us!"

He replied: "The only reason you're seeking Me is because yesterday I fed you...!"

...He explains that life is more than food and physical provisions

...He then teaches them about life

Many gathered there said: "This is a hard teaching!"

We then read: "From this time, many of His disciples turned back and no longer

followed Him!"

Jesus then turned to His disciples and asked: "Are you guys going to leave Me, too?"

I love Peter's reply: "Where else would we go? You alone have the words to eternal life. We believe and know you are the Holy One of God!"

...and what do you say?

I hope you've decided to follow Jesus no matter what comes...even when you come down from spiritual highs.

Our final verse says: "Keep your mind on Jesus, who put up with many insults from sinners. Then you won't get discouraged and give up