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***Let's Run the Race!***  
***Hebrews 11:13-16, 12:1-3***

<sup>1</sup>Today's verses come after what many refer to as the **Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11**—the list of our Biblical ancestors, and their great faith in God. And even though they were imperfect, even though they didn't always see the end result of their efforts, they had faith, and we can look to them as examples.

Listen now to the word of the Lord to you:

*All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, <sup>14</sup>for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup>If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup>But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.*

*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,<sup>[a]</sup> and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of<sup>[b]</sup> 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.*

*<sup>3</sup>Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners,<sup>[c]</sup> so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.*

Who do you cheer for? We all have favorite teams, right?

What about **people** that you cheer for?

I am always inspired by **special Olympians**, people who have major **disabilities**—

maybe artificial legs after a terror attack, and they manage to run a marathon!

I cheer for people who are **overcoming obstacles**, like addiction, who are relying upon their faith for every single step ahead.

I cheer for my **family**, and for all of **you**.  
 Who do you cheer for?  
 And **who is cheering for you?**

Do you realize that there is this great cloud of witnesses?  
 All the **saints who have gone** before us—cheering us on?  
 Who are some of those people specifically from your life,  
 and what does it mean to you?

Think about watching the Olympics...  
 All those athletes are competing on a world stage.  
 And millions of people are **cheering** them on.

Well, what if our faith is the same way?  
 What if our faith is never a noun.  
**But a verb.**  
 A thing that we do....like running a race, or setting out on a journey,  
 or taking a different path.

Faith is **active**. It's a **way of life**.  
 The writer of Hebrews says that our way of life  
**is like running a race** of faith,  
 and being **cheered** on by all the saints who have gone before us,  
 and are now watching from **heaven!**

Our ancestors in faith like Abraham and Gideon, Samson, David, Samuel,  
 Rahab...all those named in the **Hall of Faith** of Hebrews chapter 11,  
 they were followed by the **disciples** of Jesus,  
 and they have essentially passed the baton of faith to us,  
 in this relay called **Christian life**.  
 Now it's **our turn**.

So what does it mean **to run this race** of faith?  
 What does it mean to be people of faith?

Well, I don't think it means we have all the **answers**,  
 or that we can do it **perfectly**.

When you read the stories of Gideon or Samson,  
David or Samuel or Rahab,  
and you'll find **people who** doubted their call,  
who committed adultery, or murder,  
who disobeyed God in a multitude of ways.

All of our ancestors in faith were **imperfect**.  
They could have been considered **failures**,  
but God considered them **just right for lives of faith**.

God is known for taking people like **Moses**,  
a man who killed out of anger, who ran away,  
and who at first refused his call to speak to Pharaoh.  
God is used to taking people who the world might consider **ordinary**,  
and using them to **do extraordinary** things in faith.

But we don't have to compare ourselves to any of Biblical ancestors.  
**God wants to use US—just the way we are.**  
**Right where we are, today.**

**But there is a certain way to run this race....**

It's like Peter when Jesus asked him to walk out on the water,  
And he only started to sink when he looked at the wind and the waves....  
But while looking ahead to Jesus, he was just fine

We too need to know **where to look**, as we lead lives of faith.  
We need the **leader**---who is Jesus, the one who has run ahead of us.  
We need a **finish line**—which is our eternal life with God.  
We need a **cheering section**—which are the saints in heaven.

Faith today is not that different than faith in Jesus' day--  
In Jesus' day, a Rabbi like Jesus, his job was to **teach**,  
and a disciple's job was to **learn**.  
The word for disciple in Greek means **student**.

But disciples were **more than students** the way we think of them today.  
To be a disciple meant that you followed what was **taught**,  
and you sought to **become just like** your teacher.

In other words, the disciples when they agreed to follow Jesus, were agreeing to ***become like Him!***  
They were leaving their jobs and families, to ***live like Him.***

The disciples were expected to ***know everything*** about their teacher, inside and out.  
everything was part of becoming a disciple!

When you think about it, the **same is true of us** today as Christians, isn't it?  
Our calling is to be ***disciples of Jesus.***

This means we ***hear*** his words and ***see*** his life, and seek to ***follow*** those teachings,  
But we also strive to ***be like Him.***  
We ask questions like ***WWJD?*** What would Jesus ***do?*** What would Jesus ***say?***  
And we ***seek to do that*** in our own lives.  
That's how we run this race of faith.

Listen again:  
*let us **run with perseverance** the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.*

Have you ever watched the Olympic gymnasts, and heard they were doing a move ***named for the gymnast who pioneered*** it?  
What if our Christian faith was that way?  
We are living a way of life ***pioneered by Jesus*** Christ.  
What if people looked at us, and said—***wow, that looks like Jesus!***

I've been talking about our ***faith as a race, because that's our verses.***  
But if it makes you feel ***tired*** when you think about it that way....  
What if we call it a ***journey?***  
A journey with lots of people who have made the ***path in the wilderness,***  
those ***tracks in the grass,***  
walking ahead of us?

What if we considered it a journey,  
 where we are *literally trying to place our feet into the footsteps* in the snow,  
 the footsteps of Jesus—  
 because he is the *ONLY one who knows the way* where we are all going!

Of course, on this journey there are *temptations*---  
 We can be tempted to *give up*—because it seems too hard.

Or we can *SAY we are on the path of faith*, write a few nice checks, do a few  
 hours of service, show up on some Sundays, and call it good.  
*But is that what the saints are up there cheering for?*  
 Is that *why Jesus led us on this path*---through death and resurrection?

We can run *half-heartedly*,  
 Trying to run literally in the *middle of the road* in following Jesus.  
 We try be good and do good,  
 But without *overextending* ourselves,  
 or *inconveniencing* ourselves,  
 or taking any *risks*...  
*But is that what the saints are cheering for?*  
*Is that what Jesus died for?*

Sure, it's *tempting to quit*.  
 Or to just go ahead *half-heartedly*.

But what if we just '*Go for it*',  
 What if we give this journey of faith all we've got,  
 And we live—to be *disciples* of Jesus Christ!

Funny thing is—the Book of Hebrews says us that is the *ONLY PATH*  
 to *a real, meaningful, joyful life!*

*Listen: we are looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our 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.*

*We may not be able to realize all our dreams* in our journey of faith,  
 Maybe our journey will be *shorter* than we thought...

Or **more difficult** than we expected.  
 But we sure can find **joy**.  
 Because that's the point.

And one day we too will enter that **better country**  
 That **heavenly city** that Hebrews talks about,  
 Where we join our ancestors in the Hall of Faith,  
 And **we become the cheering section** in heaven,  
 for the rest of the body of Christ!

Listen to the **vision of heaven** from Revelation 21:  
*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home<sup>[a]</sup> of God is among mortals. He will dwell<sup>[b]</sup> with them; they will be his peoples,<sup>[c]</sup> and God himself will be with them;<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>4</sup> he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."*

Friends, that is awesome news!  
 We don't know when we'll get there---but **we WILL get there**.  
 To our heavenly home—without pain, or suffering, death, or crying.  
 Can you imagine?

And we are beloved **children** of God,  
 We are **disciples of Jesus**---being encouraged all along the way!  
 That's the best reason to get up in the morning!  
 That is the best reason to keep on going in this life.  
 It is because of Jesus, that our lives have meaning!

And when we **keep going**,  
 when we **refuse to give up**,  
 when we **refuse to settle for a half-hearted run**,  
 or to take the road well-traveled,

That's when we find what Jesus found---the **JOY**.

In the Gospel of John Jesus tells his disciples  
that the whole world will **know them by their love**.  
And when he tells them to **abide in his love** he says in John 15:11:  
*I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you,  
and your joy may be complete.*

It's all for the **JOY**.  
That's why the saints in heaven are cheering—**they have THE JOY**,  
And they want us to have it too!

We are **surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses...**  
There are saints cheering you on—can't you **hear** them?  
Can't you just **see** them?

***What God did for them, God will do for us!***

Friends, hear the **Good News, about this journey of faith:**  
When we keep the **faith**,  
Keep **running** the race,  
Keep our **eyes** on Jesus...  
***We will hear.... the cheers from heaven....and find the Joy.***

And to that, all God's people said, Amen.