



RISE UP & RUN STRONG

Sunday-morning light pours in through the stained glass windows at St. James Baptist Church, a small but close fellowship. The preacher is pacing about the pulpit, fueled in his message by frequent “amen’s” from the members. He shares, “Therefore, seeing we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race set before us.”

Tony is struggling to pay attention. Today, he’s more focused on the back door than the platform, because Johnnie has yet to show. Suddenly, he smiles, as she quietly slips in to sit with the Nathan’s. Tony’s mom nudges his dad, grins, and calls out, “Amen and amen!”

The pastor is just getting started as he declares, “Who’s got a race they need to run today? Who needs to rise up? We need those who will accomplish what God has laid before them. We need someone who can endure suffering because they are looking to Jesus—to the cross, to a new day, to a better day. So I say to you, ‘Rise up. Rise up!’ Somebody’s gotta rise up!”

Tony lets the challenge sink in. Johnnie’s eyes are fixed on him. Something special is happening here; they just can’t quite make out exactly what it is yet.

Let's take a deeper look at the passage from which the pastor quoted—Hebrews 12:1–3:

We are surrounded by a great cloud of people whose lives tell us what faith means. So let us run the race that is before us and never give up. We should remove from our lives anything that would get in the way and the sin that so easily holds us back. Let us look only to Jesus, the One who began our faith and who makes it perfect. He suffered death on the cross. But he accepted the shame as if it were nothing because of the joy that God put before him. And now he is sitting at the right side of God's throne. Think about Jesus' example. He held on while wicked people were doing evil things to him. So do not get tired and stop trying (NCV).

Paul's imagery is that of a sporting event where spectators are seated all around viewing the race; except this is not your normal crowd, for each one has also run their own race. So, because of this heavenly company cheering us on, let's look at four truths available to us.

1. Run your race. God has given you a specific lane to run in, at a specific time in history. Be faithful to run hard and fast right where He has placed you.

2. Never give up. Every runner or athlete knows that moment when you run out of strength, get injured, or feel like you will pass out if you don't stop. In those moments, you must look to and receive Christ's strength to keep going. After all, like Tony, our race is never just about us, but others who are counting on us to be faithful and finish.

3. Get rid of excess baggage. Sin can hinder and even end our race. Paul puts the responsibility of handing over our issues squarely on us. We can choose to rid ourselves of them, just as we chose to take them up. Christ offers forgiveness, grace, and deliverance for everything that slows us down.

4. Look only at Jesus. Runners who look to the side or even back to see where others are positioned often lose focus, then the race. While Jesus gives us strength to run, He is also the One standing at the finish line. Fixing our eyes on Him as the ultimate Goal keeps us running to win.

Jesus took on His assignment for God, stayed true to His mission, and only sought to please His Father. Tony was about to embark on his mission, carrying far more than a football to the goal line.

What about you? What race are you running? Is there anything hindering you? How can you focus more on Jesus to win?

Today, you can rise up and run your race!



In your journal, list the one thing ...

- that most causes you to want to give up.
- in your life you know you need to get rid of.
- you know you could do to inspire you to follow Jesus in a deeper way.