

RULES FOR RUNNING A REWARDING RACE

A New Year's Message
Philippians 3:12–14; Hebrews 12:1–2



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Are you the worrying type—fearful of the possibilities tomorrow may hold but also grieving mistakes of the past? As we stand at the beginning of a new year, we must admit that we can't predict the future and we can't change the past. Trying to do either is a waste of time and energy.

In this message, let's examine Philippians 3 and Hebrews 12 and learn how to keep our eyes focused on Jesus and run our race of faith *today*.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. The Setting of the Race (Hebrews 12:1–2)

We're all in a race called life. It began when we took our first breath, and it will end when we take our last. We each run our race one moment at a time, one day at a time.

In Hebrews 12:1–2, the writer imagined life as a vast arena with the saints who have gone before us filling the stands and cheering on all Christians in their races. The Greek word for *race* teaches us that the race each believer runs is a struggle that requires endurance. But if we learn the rules of the race outlined in Scripture, we will finish well.



Quotable

The obstacles won't seem as daunting, and temptations won't have the same appeal when you focus on Christ.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. The Rules of the Race (Philippians 3:12–14; Hebrews 12:1–2)

Now that we understand the setting of the race, let's examine seven rules for running a rewarding race.

1. *Remember that God has predetermined our race.* God orchestrates each person's race; therefore, no two races look the same. Comparison is foolish. Acceptance is crucial.
2. *Preparing for the race is our responsibility.* Hebrews 12:1 urges believers to get rid of excess weight—negative attitudes, laziness, worry, fear, and so on—that hinders our running, as well as the lack of trust in God that slows us down.
3. *Keep on running our race with endurance.* Each New Year, we start running with stamina but often give up by spring. God calls us to faithfully continue running no matter what.
4. *Stay focused on Jesus Christ throughout the race.* As disciplined runners, believers must constantly turn our focus away from distractions and toward Jesus (Hebrews 12:2).
5. *Refuse to concern oneself with the past.* The apostle Paul modeled the Christ-focused life by leaving behind both his greatest accomplishments and his vilest sins (Philippians 3:13).
6. *Lean hard into the future.* Just as Olympic runners strain every muscle striving toward the finish line, Christian runners must expend our energy leaning into the future God has ordained for us (3:14).
7. *Never forget that rewards await us.* When we have finished our individual races of faith, we will hear, "Well done, my good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21 NLT). The Bible also tells of other rewards that await us, not the least of which is eternal fellowship with our Savior.



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A CLOSER LOOK

What will eternity be like?

While the language of Revelation is often mysterious and far-removed from our experience, when placed in the context of all Scripture, the fog clears and certain elements appear more distinct. Through the light of Genesis 1–2, we can see Revelation 21–22 as a bookend to biblical revelation. The new heaven and new earth pictured in the Bible's last chapters correspond with the original creation described in the first two. Heaven is much more than just another place—it is a future paradise similar to the one portrayed in Genesis.

In Genesis, God dwelled with His people in some kind of visible form. God walked in Eden (Genesis 3:8). In Revelation, God will again dwell among His people. Jesus will rule from the throne in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:3). In both the past and future paradises, we find the Tree of Life (Genesis 2:9; Revelation 22:2) as well as life-giving water (Genesis 2:10; Revelation 22:1). Finally, Eden marks the first place of one human connecting with another, while the heavenly paradise of Revelation will be an extended community of all who have believed (Genesis 2:18, 22; Revelation 21:27).

Revelation also tells about the kind of life the new heaven and earth will usher in. Since Jesus will have defeated His enemies and will dwell bodily with His people, death, mourning, crying, and pain will pass away forever (Revelation 21:4). The negative effects of sin will have finally been eliminated, leaving the world as God intended it. Such an existence will allow God's people to be exactly who God made us to be.



LET'S LIVE IT

The Christian life is not a peaceful alliance or a passive coexistence with enemy forces. It is a quest against incredible odds to receive the promised victory. But the rewards that wait for believers who run with self-discipline, faithfulness, and endurance far outweigh any sacrifices we may have to make along the path. And after having received our rewards from the King, we will place them at His feet, for only He is worthy of honor and praise.

Are you actively running in the race that God has prepared for you? If not, what is hindering you?



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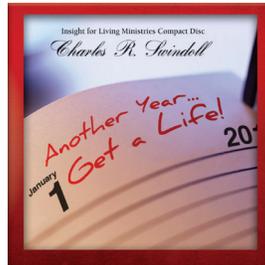
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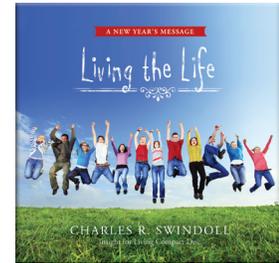
Tools for Digging Deeper



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