

Don't Quit in the Middle Of the Marathon!

I've made the statement before that the Christian's race is a marathon, not a sprint. The Hebrew writer says as much in chapter 12, verse 1: "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with *endurance* the race that is set before us."

Now, it's relatively easy to run the race when the sun is shining, the breeze is gentle and cool, and everything is going our way, but how often does that happen? The devil knows that he can attempt to trip us up anywhere along the race course, so he sets various pitfalls in our path. We all stumble and sin from time to time (1 John 1:8-9 reminds us of this) but Christians *strive* to serve God. With the Lord's help we run the race to the best of our ability. The devil continues to set various traps to get us to stop in the middle of the marathon. It might be well for us to consider some of his snares (2 Cor. 2:11).

The devil will use a pet sin to entice us to quit the race. Each of us has sins which are especially attractive to us. That's why James 1:14 says, "Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed." The devil wants us to indulge in that pet sin until it becomes an entrenched habit. Eventually, that fault will become a weight no runner can carry. At first the runner may deceive himself into thinking he can handle that sin—give it up any time he wants—but soon the sin *has him*. Since the Christian's race is a marathon, all Satan needs to do is get us to repeat our pet sin over time. If true repentance never takes place, one day we will quit the race altogether.

We may stop running because of a conflict with a brother or sister in Christ. Christians should be an encouragement to one another. In fact, Heb. 10:24

says we are to motivate one another to love and good works. Sadly, sometimes saints develop interpersonal problems that threaten their spirituality. Maybe it's a dispute over some doctrinal point. Maybe it's more of a personality problem. Perhaps there's some kind of long-standing feud that has never been satisfactorily resolved. Unfortunately, one may become so discouraged in the midst of the conflict that he quits the Lord. I've seen it happen more than once. The brother or sister's faith is not strong enough to overcome the confrontation. We may do well to remember that, even though Paul and Barnabas "had no small dispute" (Acts 15:2), neither one quit the race.

We may stop in the middle of the marathon because of adversity or persecution. Of course, Christians should remember that serving Christ involves taking up our cross (Matt. 16:24). The Lord never promised us a painless, problem-free life. Far from it! "Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). Along the way people will poke fun at us for being Christians. We may have to wrestle with a serious disease. Money problems and job troubles may assail us. Some we love may reject us because of our faith. If we're not careful, we may be tempted to throw up our hands and stop running. Instead, let's dwell on Paul's words in Rom. 8:18: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Finally, some stop in the middle of the marathon because they simply grow tired. Gal. 6:9 admonishes us not to "grow weary while doing good," but sometimes that's difficult to remember. We need the help and encouragement of fellow saints. We need the strength of prayer and the foundation of solid preaching. We may need a helping hand to lift us from a ditch of despair. A marathon is a tough race, and sometimes the miles seem too long to finish.

If one stops in the middle of a marathon, it's hard to start running again. The devil wants us to quit before the race is completed. We dare not let him win.

--John N. Evans