

WE'RE ALL IN THIS RACE TOGETHER

HEBREWS 12:1

Spectators

On a recent trip to Florida, I found myself at an elementary school track meet ...

As I sat watching the runners, I couldn't help but notice just how many different types of spectators there were in the stands. Some were cheering loudly, but only for the one person they had come to see. Others were cheering for the whole group of runners as they went by. Still others were jeering, even making fun of the athletes. While others, even though they were in the stands and at the track meet remained seemingly quite disconnected from the event altogether. It occurred to me that this is true in the Christian life as well. We are all in a race but sometimes our race takes on the role of cheering others on in their faith. I thought about the different people who were present at that track meet, and started to wonder...



What kind of "Spectator" am I?

Do I encourage those around me to live their faith in an "all out" kind of way? Am I "loud" in my support for others? Do I show favoritism, and only cheer for the people who are in my immediate circle- that is, for the people I like and know? Do I cheer or "pray" for my brothers and sisters in Christ who live in faraway countries? We're not just talking about words here, either. To "support" someone in their faith is to help them in whatever way they need. Whether it's financially, or prayerfully, through Bible study, or by sincere, God-led, life-giving words... Am I enthusiastically supporting the Body of Christ as God is truly leading me?

Cheering or Jeering?

Oh, yeah, and as much as it's reprehensible to jeer and make fun of some of our fellow runners, unfortunately, I think many of us could be guilty of this very thing. Whenever we complain against one of our brothers and sisters in Christ, that's the same as jeering, and God says we are bringing judgment upon ourselves. (James 4:11-12). Furthermore, God really HATES division: "There are six things which the LORD hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers." (Proverbs 6:16-19) If I am jeering (complaining), why am I doing that? Why would I want any of my fellow runners in Christ to fail? It's something to think about and *correct* if that's happening in our lives.

It's All About Me?

There are times when I'm so entrenched in my own little world it looks like I've forgotten that there are actually runners on the track. Selfishness compels me to have tunnel vision where it only concerns me. I may even be participating in ministry of some kind, but my focus is on the work I'm doing, not necessarily on the person it's for. This kind of behavior is unacceptable in the Christian life.

Certainly, none of us wants to admit to being a jeering/complaining or selfish/disinterested spiritual spectator, but if we're honest with ourselves and God, we know it can happen and probably has happened at some point in our lives.



The Hall of Faith

Hebrews, Chapter 11 is affectionately called, "The Hall of Faith" because it's packed full of examples of how a bunch of people lived and died in faith. Forget the "Hall of Fame." God is pleased with people who live by faith! ("Without faith it's impossible to please Him..." Hebrews 11:6) The interesting thing about this famous list of "witnesses" is that they all died in faith. Some however, who are mentioned at the end of Chapter 11, not only died *IN* faith, but died *FOR* their faith. The definition for the English word, spectator, can also include the word "witness," but the Greek word for "witness" is...are you ready? **MARTYR**. As Christians in America, we may have the luxury to be some kind of "no-risk witnesses," but back then, and also in other parts of the world even today, if you are going to be a "witness" for Jesus, you must also be willing to be a "martyr" for Him as well. After the writer of Hebrews recaps the noble lives of those who lived and died in faith in chapter 11, the writer starts Hebrews chapter 12 with this verse: "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us..."

Christian UP!

The rest of Hebrews, Chapter 12 charges us to press on and run as hard as we can for Christ. If I were to summarize chapter 12, I would have to say that God is telling us to "Christian Up," and stop being wimps. If we're going to follow Jesus, then we better be tough. You see, most of us are not and hopefully never will be, tortured and or killed for our faith. Especially in America (thank God for this Country), we have not come to the point where we are physically persecuted for our faith. Not to say it could never happen, but some of our brothers and sisters in Christ in this world have it a lot worse, that's for sure. Still, we all have trials that can seem to be almost too much to bear at times, yet God is telling us to endure and toughen up.

What kind of race is this anyway?

Some believers are running, some are limping along, and others are barely even moving. It's our job, as believers in Jesus Christ to cheer each other on in this race called life. It's the job of the strong to help the weak. Sometimes I'm strong and I should run to the aid of another who has fallen, and sometimes I'm weak and I'm the one in need of help. Unlike the track meet, Christians are not in competition with one another; rather we are in cooperation with one another to reach the same goal together. What if this is some kind of 3 legged race or billion legged race, and we are intricately connected to each other? What if the strong and the weak are all tied together and it will take all of us to make it across the finish line? What if we are the Body of Christ and your success is my success, and my failures are your failures? What if we're all in this together?!

Let's join with those witnesses (martyrs) from Hebrews 11, as we cheer each other on, shouting, "ENDURE! Keep going! You can make it because of Christ! Don't give up! The reward is greater than any suffering! Don't let sin or this world slow you down! Give God thanks in ALL things! You are not alone! Look to Jesus! Don't fear man! Keep the faith! Finish the course! It's just a little further! You're almost home!!"

In conclusion, if you see me running (or limping) by, please cheer me on, and I'll do the same for you, because for those of us who are Christians, our spiritual legs are inextricably tied together by the Holy Spirit, and ultimately, we're all in this race together!

Peace! Denise