



Run the Right Race

You're the Only One Who Can

by Jane Rubietta

A few Sundays ago, I went to church worried about someone's behavior. Did I say worried? No, try obsessed. Consumed. I wrung and whittled and rebutted and spent all sorts of codependent time focusing on this person's actions rather than on worship or the sermon.

Then song lyrics on the overhead screen displayed portions of Hebrews 12:1-2. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." And I realized, as the familiar verses sank into my soul in a new way, that I was trying to run someone else's race. I was judging this other person's race rather than the one specifically marked out for me. But for Christians, racing is not a spectator sport.

We embrace and admire running with perseverance—sort of the Forrest Gump School of Running ("Run, Forrest, run!"). Run and keep running, even if, as in Forrest's case, you don't know why you're running. We consider the great cloud of witnesses from Hebrews 11—Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Samson—and compare our running with their race, their steps, their journey. But how does one compare with the likes of these Hall of Faith people?

So then we aim a little lower. We look at the way Jim at church leads that committee, or coaches that team, or cares for his family, or earns more money, and think, "I should be like Jim." Or we watch Susie and admire her flair for administration, drama, or speaking, or how she runs her home along with all her other commitments. And we wonder, "Why am I not like Susie?" We envy others' running abilities and focus on their race while neglecting our own.

Or what about this: we get so caught up in how others run (or don't run) that we become the great critic, the armchair running back. "He doesn't hold his arms right. He should position his hands like wheels on a railroad track, rather than letting them flop around or cross over his rib cage." "Look at her stride. Tsk, tsk. She'll hurt her hamstrings or her something-or-other if she keeps running like that."

We get so busy critiquing others' running that we forget to run our own race. For instance, when I obsess about your anger reaction rather than look at my own response in that relationship, I fail to run my own race. What does it look like for me to be faithful in my relationship with God, and my relationship with you, though you may not be running very well right now because of your unresolved anger issues? Rather than worrying about why you don't just throw off the sin that's tripping you up and slowing your race, I need to see what sin in my own life hurls itself in front of me and trips me up or detours my course.

Besides, a real runner, though aware of the other runners' location, runs face forward, keeping the momentum and stride. Perhaps this is why horses wear blinders when they race. To fixate on other runners hinders our pace.

So what about *your* race? Where do you envy other runners? Where do you critique their form, their preparation, their finish line time, instead of checking your own race plan?

If we really want to run—and is there some doubt as to our calling to run?—then the only way to do it is to fix our eyes on Jesus' face. Let Him define your race and set your pace, and then you will not grow weary and lose heart. Because it's exhausting and self-defeating to run the wrong race at the wrong pace.

Besides, no one else can run like you. No one else can accomplish what you can accomplish in the race designed specifically for you. So get your bearings . . . fix your gaze . . . and run.