

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, March 14, 2012 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

## DANGEROUS FOLLOWSHIP “Faith Following – Arena Life-Style” *Luke 9:23, Hebrews 11:6, Hebrews 12:1-3*

“Flash in the pan” is a popular way of describing someone who starts off on the path of “following” with a lot of noise and flurry but soon fades and passes from the scene. Such people are a dime a dozen. They are quick to begin with great enthusiasm, lots of big ideas, loud talk, heated emotion and a lot of dynamic commitment that is going to shake the world and storm the gates of hell; but when the going get rough and the path of following gets long... and it will, they drop through the cracks. They have no staying power. They lack endurance: the ability to tough it out over the long-haul. Followship... genuine faith followship requires much more. The verse we are about to consider addresses the need for faithful endurance in our “followship” even when there isn’t applause, tangible trophies, or relief from pressure... endurance in following Christ even when there is hardship and hostility and the ever-present temptation to grow weary and quit. This describes the “arena life-style” of faith following, an unpopular and painful reality that the child of God must face head on if he or she is to be a genuine faith-follower, denying self and taking up his (or her) cross daily.

### I. WHAT IT TAKES TO PLEASE GOD?

Hebrews 11:6 says, “*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.*” Some say that pleasing God requires doing the sensational or looking for the mystical and unexplainable. But faith was never designed to be like that. Faith fits into the fabric of life just as clothes fit on our backs and shoes fit on our feet. The faith-life or “faith following” as we are called to by Jesus, so wonderful and necessary for a believer, is characterized by three indispensable ingredients.

#### 3 Indispensable Ingredients of Faith-Following:

1. **Faith requires that we come to God** – This means that you and I must possess an attitude of total dependence on, and available to, God. As Jesus said in **Luke 9:23**, we must “*deny ourselves*” and by implication of such, become totally dependent on God.
2. **Faith requires that we believe God is there** – This means that you and I must have unswerving confidence in His presence, which we cannot see, and in His concern, which we may not always feel. How else can we possibly “*take up our cross daily*”?

3. **Faith requires that we trust Him, earnestly seek Him in fellowship** – Again Jesus said in Luke 9:23, *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”* In other words... trust Him with our heart and follow him whole heartedly with our life.

## II. BRIEF BUT NECESSARY CLARIFICATIONS

Hebrews 12:1-3 pictures a stadium scene... an arena, if you will, with grand stands filled, with participants in view, with an event taking place before the crowded stands and apparent challenges and obstacles to the event. That is a picture of the “dangerous fellowship” we have been discussing in this study... one that involves 1) self-denial, 2) cross-bearing, and 3) faith-following or running by faith the race marked out for us as believers. The reality is that this thing called life is “tough” and following Jesus is often (most of the time) “tougher.” Not because following Jesus doesn’t carry with it huge blessings, a deep seeded joy, a peace that passes understanding, great abundant life and victory, but because really living for Him and being sold out to him in genuine fellowship can be so hard given our own sinful nature and this old world we live in.

### Characteristic of the Arena of Life: (in which we follow Jesus)

1. **Difficulties of common life** - When we become Christians, we enter the arena – in which there is the reality of pain, heartache, sickness, sorrow, pressure, hardship, and even death according to Jesus own call to dangerous “fellowship” in Luke 9:23, *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”*
2. **Difficulties of our own making** - To these things we can add our own humanity, wrong habits patterns, personal weaknesses, and conflicts with others.
3. **Difficulties of the enemy** - Also in that arena is a world that’s bent against God, and a host of satanic forces that are committed to our failure and defeat.

**NOTE:** *Since we have entered the arena of life, we have need for endurance and encouragement. This is why name after name of endurers are listed in Hebrews 11. We stand reminded that we can endure because they endured by faith before us.*

## III. AUDIENCE SURROUNDING THE ARENA (Hebrews 12:1a)

The writer of Hebrews speaks here of *“so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us.”* Who are these witnesses, and what is the scene? The picture is of the writer walking down the track in the stadium of life. There he envisions the contest, the race, or as it is called in the Greek, the “agona” (from which we get our English word “agony”). As he walks, he begins to hear the sounds of great men and women, courageous martyrs, shouting words of hope, endurance, and encouragement to people in battle. Those who form this great cloud of witnesses are the people of chapter 11 and a whole host of others you and I could list. **NOTE:** The writer does not seem to be saying that these people actually watch us from heaven, but that their lives stand as models demonstrating that we can make it through the race – that we can persevere and, in fact, must do so.

**What do you think that the following might be saying to us in the faith-following race we are involved in?**

1. Abel – “Offer God your best by faith” (Heb. 11:4)
2. Enoch – “Walk with God” (Heb. 11:5)
3. Noah – “Believe and follow even when you don’t understand and it doesn’t make sense” (Heb. 11:7)
4. Abraham – “Follow God by faith even when you don’t know where He is leading you or how he is going to work everything out.” (Heb. 11:8-19)
5. Isaac – “Following God will bless your family... those coming behind you.” (Heb. 11:20)
6. Jacob – “Following God will bring you to see past all the hurts, disappointment and heartache of the journey” (Heb. 11:21)
7. Joseph – “Following God will give you a perspective and vision beyond what this world understands.” (Heb. 11:22)
8. Moses – “God has a trustworthy place and plan that He is leading you and He will go before you and accomplish what He says.” (Heb. 11:23-29)
9. Rahab – “Trust where God is leading you.” (Heb. 11:31)
10. Host of Hebrews 11:32ff – “God can do and accomplish amazing things if you will follow Him by faith.”

#### **IV. ANALYSIS OF THE AGONY (Hebrews 12:1b-3)**

All Christians are engaged in the race or “agona.” The conflict is occurring at this precise moment. How do we handle this race in order to please God? What help does the writer of Hebrews give us for this faith-following race?

##### **4 Helps for the “Faith-Follow” Race:**

1. **The Preparation for the race (v.1b)** – We cannot run the race well if we fail to take seriously the writer’s words at the end of **verse 1**, “... *let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles...*” The Greek word translated here as “hinder” (weight in NKJV & KJV, encumbrance NAS) means excess weight or needless baggage. The Greek term from which we get this word literally means “mass” or “bulk.” Since our race is in the spiritual realm, to run correctly and endure to the end we must set aside the things that weigh us down: and indifferent attitude, a lack of discipline in the areas of the mind, procrastination, impatience. There’s a remarkable thing about excess baggage: most people are unaware of the particular kinds they carry around with them. However, the Spirit of God knows and longs to teach us not only what they are, but how we can lay them aside. What about the entangling sin? The context of Hebrews 10, 11, and 12 suggest that this sin is the opposite of “faith”... “unbelief.” We experience it when we doubt God can do what He says He will do... when we doubt before we come to terms with the challenge. Unbelief wraps itself around us and sucks from us our vitality and enthusiasm for real Christian living... genuine followship. This sin impedes our following... running the race.
2. **A Command to runners (v. 1b)** – having set aside the hinderances, we’re told how to run in **verse 1**, “*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.*” The term “perseverance” (patience KJV, endurance NKJV endurance NASB) means “to abide under” or “to wait with patience.” Notice in the verse that we are not to stop running... stop following in order to “abide under” or “to wait with patience”, but rather we are to do this as we are following... as we are running. What does that mean? It is the reality that the race is going to get tough... it won’t be easy. There will be many challenges and trial in the following of Jesus, but we are to persevere, endure, keep going, keep following, push through, abide under the pain. Don’t quit! Don’t give up!

3. **The Technique of runners (v. 2)** – Notice the writers instruction in *verse 2, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross (there is that old cross-bearing again), scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* As runners... followers, our eyes must be trained on Him alone; we cannot yield to distraction. Why do so many people start the followship, begin the race, only to drop out or quit?

**Reason for failure:**

- 1) **Focused on the wrong things** – We get our eyes on people (i.e. Following a preacher, or a person that we really look up in the church, a leader, etc. either in a good way or a bad way), situations and circumstances (i.e. problems, hurt feelings, struggles, trials, misunderstanding, miscommunication, angry words, etc.).
- 2) **Faith in the wrong things** - We place our faith in religion, or rites and rituals, or tradition, or morality, people, etc. and when they fail us in some way in life they become empty expressions and void of help we bail out.

**How to put this technique in the faith-following race into practice?: (In other words, what to do and how to do it)**

- 1) **We must stare into His face in order to gain His perspective** –
- 2) **We must stare into His face in order to gain His hope** -
- 3) **Jesus Christ understands the race in its entirety** –
- 4) **As the author, He is the origin of this faith-life** – In other word, He know how it goes. He know the hurdles, the obstacles, the challenges that lay in wait; therefore, it is always better to follow Him.
- 5) **As the perfecter, he completed it successfully** - He know how to do it. He endured the cross, despised the shame, and triumphed in the end by sitting down *“sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

4. **An Attitude while running (v. 3)** – We are to enjoy two things:

**2 Things to Enjoy in the “Faith Following” Race:**

- 1) **A calm mind**
- 2) **And an encouraged heart**

**Question:** How do you do this know the race “agonia” is one of self-denial and holds a cross?

The writer expresses it this way in verse 3, “*Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*” “Consider” means “to reckon, compare, weigh, thing over.” The idea is that we are to meditate upon, and occupy our minds with, the Lord Jesus Christ. The result of our doing so is that our spirits and minds will be calmed. When God gives a command such as “consider Him,” He always has a purpose in mind. In this instance, the purpose is our encouragement. Let’s put it this way, “Meditating upon Christ and being preoccupied with Him will bring us bursts of encouragement at needed times.”

**Truth: Remember who we are following and stay fixed on Him**

## V. SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO KEEP FROM QUITTING

Faith following is not necessarily or always simply a mystical (spiritual, transcendent, supernatural, magical) experience, but it is the daily fiber that keeps us following Him... running our race in “dangerous fellowship” in an enduring fashion. Want to run the race and not quit... follow and follow well? Then implement these two suggestions?

### 2 Suggestion for “faith-following” that doesn’t quit:

1. **Claim the grace to persevere –**
2. **Remember you are never alone -**