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Hebrews 12:1-3 (NIV) *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses (Examples of the people of faith in Hebrews 11),*

(Preparation) *let us THROW OFF everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. (A competitor who is hindering and confusing a runner)*

Illustration – In 1967, Kathrine Switzer became the first woman to officially run the Boston Marathon despite being attacked by the race director who tried to physically pull her out of the race because she was a woman. She changed history by not playing it safe!

(Activation) *And let us RUN WITH PERSEVERANCE the race marked out for us,*

(Motivation) *FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Hebrews 11 gives examples of people who believed God in challenging situations and overcame! They made God's purposes their main goal in life. They were not distracted by their surroundings and aggressively cast all "weights" aside.

Safe or sacrificial Christianity?

Over the last 2-3 years Christianity seems to have been redefined, the intensity of many has faded into a more comfortable commitment. As well, people have become unsure of the future and what God holds in store for them.

Two Biblical characters exemplify this **dichotomy** of Christian lifestyles. *Dichotomy is a separation into two divisions that differ widely from or contradict each other.*

1. **Zechariah** (Safe) -- When the Angel appeared to Zechariah, a priest in Israel, about the miraculous birth of his son, John (the Baptist), he needed assurance that God would do what He said.
 - Luke 1:18-20 *How will (can) I be certain of this?*
 - He was cautious and needed proof. (As “proof” the angel blinded him until John was born)
2. **Mary** (Sacrificial) -- However, when the same Angel appeared to Mary, she responded in a very different way!
 - Luke 1:38 *Let it be done to me according to Your Word.* (Unconditional!)
 - She was dedicated and God focused. She wholeheartedly gave herself to God and to His purposes, even if that meant sacrifice for her!

Bible people who left the confines of comfort and did not “play it safe!”

1. Abraham took his family and left everything, his security and society, to follow the Voice of God. (Genesis 12:1-5)
2. David abandoned “common sense,” and RAN into the battle to face the giant, Goliath. (1 Samuel 17:48)
3. Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel to turn Israel back to God. (1 Kings 18:30-40)
4. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to compromise and faced the fiery furnace. (Daniel 3:16-30)
5. Elisha rested in the Word of God, even when their village was surrounded with fierce warriors to take his life. He trusted God’s “unseen” fiery, angelic warriors. (2 Kings 6:14-17)
6. Four men ripped up a roof to bring their friend to Jesus. (Mark 2:3-5)
7. The woman with an issue of blood pushed her way through the crowd to touch Jesus. (Mark 5:25-34)

8. Jesus shouted into the cave to bring resurrection life to Lazarus. (John 11:38-44)
He also cleansed the Temple in Jerusalem TWICE! (John 2:13-17 and Matthew 21:12-13)

Set your course in 2023

Safe Christianity (no risk) produces very little of any consequences (except keep us safe). If you desire to see miracles, deliverances, changes, etc. in your life and in the lives of those whom God has put in your life then it's time to step out of the comfort zone.

Can you identify ONE thing that, if you had victory over that, would greatly enhance your quality of life?

1. *Preparation* | Take inventory of worldly time wasters and “cast” them away (with “both hands”).
 - Use the Romans 12 principle: Overcome evil with good. What type of activities can replace them that are in line with your life purpose?
2. *Activation* | Little by little develop ONE NEW HABIT that will lead you into greater victory and fruitfulness.
 - Conquer distractions and discouragement. If you fail, begin again. Keep at it!
3. *Motivation* | Develop a deeper relationship with Jesus each day by spending *quality time* with Him in prayer (talking with Him) and the Word (listening to His Voice).

More Next Week...