

There is a marvelous song written by Thomas Arne and set to music by Isaac Watts. It teaches us to endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

1. Am I a soldier of the cross,
A follow'r of the Lamb?
And shall I fear to own His cause,
Or blush to speak His name?
2. Must I be carried to the skies
On flow'ry beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?
3. Are there no foes for me to face?
Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to grace,
To help me on to God?
4. Sure I must fight if I would reign;
Increase my courage, Lord;
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy Word.
5. Thy saints in all this glorious war
Shall conquer, though they die;
They see the triumph from afar,
By faith's discerning eye.
6. When that illustrious day shall rise,
And all Thy armies shine
In robes of vict'ry through the skies,
The glory shall be Thine.

We are soldiers of a king. We are followers of a Savior. Ours is a race to be run.

St. Paul wrote in I. Corinthians 9:24-27, **“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So, run that you may obtain it. ²⁵ Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”**

The imagery presented by Paul on this subject is easily imagined. In our mind's eye we can see a great arena. It is filled with a massive and boisterous crowd. Out on the track are those who are participating in the games. They will take their mark. They will run the race with every ounce of energy and skill at their disposal. Their ultimate, all-consuming desire is to win the prize. But Paul not only emphasizes the role of the athlete, he also emphasizes the role of the spectator.

This is Hebrews 12:1, **“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”**

It is in this context that Paul challenges the members of the church at Corinth to give it their best. They are to train and get into top shape. The right spiritual food and exercise will enable them to maintain the tone and tenor of their spiritual muscles. They are to hold nothing back. They are to run the race of life for the glory of God.

The goal is to reach the finish line. To win a crown of life. The goal for all of us to run the race of faith so that we may hear the words of Jesus, **“Well, done thou good and faithful servant.”**

Our view of life as a race should encompass the idea of how important the finish can be. It has been demonstrated again and again that those who falter or fail at the finish line can lose everything. A runner glances over his shoulder to determine the closeness of those on his heels. As a result, he loses that half step that means the difference between winning and losing the race.

Such examples in the Christian life are everywhere. The well-known spiritual leader falling prey to sexual temptation or being seduced by fame, fortune, or power. Many times, a momentary indiscretion can wipe out a lifetime of living for the Lord.

The ordinary Christian falling by the wayside. Losing their testimony and effectiveness for the Lord Jesus Christ among their family and friends. We must “Finish faithful.” It is not enough to fight a good fight and run a good race. In the battle and game of life, we must keep the faith as well.

When things go wrong as they sometimes will;
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill;
When the funds are low, and the debts are high;
And you want to smile, but have to sigh;

When care is pressing you down a bit
Rest if you must, but don't you quit.
Success is failure turned inside out;
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt;

And you can never tell how close you are;
It may be near when it seems afar.
So, stick to the fight when you're hardest hit-
It's when things go wrong that you mustn't quit.

We must always remember that we are building and battling for eternity. In the New Testament, the first insight into this truth is given by our Savior Himself. He speaks of the absolute necessity of building our lives upon the right foundation.

Jesus taught in Matthew 7:24-27, **“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”**

Jesus is focusing upon the Christian life in this analogy. He has spoken of the good fruit borne by those who live their life based upon His truth and teachings.

He has given a dire warning to those who are basing their lives on error and false doctrine. Reinforcing this idea Paul later speaks of the house of God as being the pillar and ground of the truth.

The foundation of the Christian life is strong and secure for those who have been saved by His grace. They have their feet planted upon the Solid Rock which is Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians 10:4 reads, **“and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”**

Paul makes it clear that this foundation is the necessary foundation for those who would build a valuable and durable Christian life. He wrote in I Cor. 3:11, **“For no other foundation can a man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”**

The materials and workmanship used to construct the building of the Christian life are also all important. Shoddy materials and sorry workmanship always lead to a poorly constructed and relatively worthless structure. As our Savior indicates, in the architectural world the real test comes in the storms and stresses of life. Wind and rain can bring the dream house of a careless builder crashing down to the ground.

There is obviously a right and wrong way to build the Christian life. There are sound materials and sorry materials readily available for construction. There are sound skills and sloppy short cuts that can be used in the spiritual building process. There are right or wrong motives that may be involved in any spiritual building program.

.All this is clearly illustrated by Paul when he said, **“For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest. For the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”**

We are each building a life for the Lord. What are your building materials? How strong is your foundation? Upon what are you building your life?

Our Savior said, **“And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?”**

In preparing His disciples for His crucifixion, Jesus had this momentous observation to make, **“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”**

Later Paul, who was well qualified and experienced in the matter, had this to say, **Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”**

Anyone who has been fighting the fight, running the race or building a life for very long clearly understands the implication of these images.

The Christian life is a battle to be fought. The militant nature of the Christian life is beyond dispute. It is clear to the real Christian soldier that they are daily engaged in a spiritual warfare of the highest order. We have a powerful adversary. Satan. He is a dangerous and deadly enemy.

Chuck Swindoll wrote, **“There is no truce in the invisible war. Demonic activity is both real and relentless. There is no R and R from Satan’s army. These soldiers work around the clock, 7 days a week, fifty-two weeks a year, year after year.”**

That the Christian life is an exhausting yet exhilarating race to be run is clear to the experienced Christian. They know that if they are to have any chance to run and win the race for the glory of His Lord they must train. They must temper and tone their spiritual body into top spiritual fitness.

They are to run the race of life for the glory of God. They lay aside the sin that so easily besets them. They patiently run the race as they look to the author and finisher of their faith. They are always considering how important the finish is. If they falter or fail at the finish line, they can lose it all.

Someone may well say, **“But I have been a Christian for a good while, yet I have never really gotten fully into the battle. Or really settled down to seriously run the race. Or build an effective and beautiful Christian life that would glorify God and be a testimony to the world around me.”**

It’s never too late to start to get serious about the matter of the Christian life. All these analogies are designed to challenge God’s people to fight the good fight. To run the race and build the beautiful building of the Christian life.

We are on a battlefield away from our true home. We are strangers here. Strangers in a strange land. Pilgrims on our way to the Kingdom of God.

As Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:12, "**Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.**"

For all the saints, who from their labors rest,
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong—

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—