

OFF THE TREADMILL

Better weather brings promises of spring and outdoor activities. One of the downsides of winter is the nemesis of the treadmill. There aren't enough days suitable for snowshoeing or cross-country skiing, etc. So a treadmill has to do. Come spring, you're thinking, that treadmill has to go.

The Christian life can be like a treadmill too. But why? If you've been following this column, the past several weeks we've worked through a series of Scriptures focusing on "intentional healthy Christian growth" by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Trusting and obeying God's truth, by His power.

1- GET OFF THE TREADMILL. Many Christians seem to approach life as a treadmill. 1 John 1:9 is a favorite verse: "*if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. But for many people, the Christian life has become a treadmill of "sin~confess~repeat..." Never overcoming sin, just repeating a process.

My old treadmill graphically displays going up and down hills as the platform raises and lowers. I watch clock, odometer and calorie counter. The screen shows me making progress, but I'm not actually going anywhere. I'm still in the basement on the treadmill. And I have to do it over and over. Day after day.

If you approach the Christian life that way, just assuming you're going to sin, but diligently confessing, are you really making any progress? In contrast, the Bible presents the Christian life as like a marathon. Not "sin~confess~repeat" but "sin~confess~repent." The difference is, you get somewhere.

2- GET IN THE MARATHON. A recent news report highlighted a 96-year old who ran 744 marathons. That's 26 miles each. Amazing? He had an 83-year old friend who ran 965 marathons. The Bible says if you are a Christian, believing and trusting in Jesus alone for salvation, you are already running the marathon of the Christian life. It's an apt metaphor, and much more encouraging than a treadmill.

Hebrews 12 says "*lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race set before us, looking to Jesus, the beginner and finisher of our faith.*" Then it says that God trains His children to run this race, through discipline. "*God disciplines His children whom He loves.*" Revelation 3:19 echoes, "*those whom I love, I reprove and discipline. So be zealous and repent.*" God trains us to get rid of sin in our lives so we can run the race of faith. Sin holds us back so we don't get anywhere, like the treadmill of "sin~confess~repeat." But the marathon of the Christian life is "sin~confess~repent." Getting rid of sin is "temptation~resist~grow stronger." So you can run longer.

Confession and repentance are two sides of the same coin of faith. Trust in the blood of Jesus to cleanse your sin. Confess, agreeing with God about sin in your life. Then repent, turn away from sin, by His power within - the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit. That's how you make progress in your Christian life. As 1 John 3:9 says, "*no one born of God makes a practice of sinning, because God's seed abides in him.*"

3- IT'S A PERSON, NOT A PROCESS. God's way is not a treadmill that gets you nowhere, it's a marathon that begins and ends with Jesus. He loves you and forgives your sins, and indwells you with His Holy Spirit. So you can say no to sin and yes to God's commandments - by His power within. The key to running your marathon is not the training or the process. It's the person - the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's all because of Him! As 1 John 4:4 says, we overcome sin because "*He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.*" Jesus overcame the world, the flesh, the devil, and sin. He lives within believers by the Holy Spirit. As Galatians 5:25 says, "*If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.*"

So get off the treadmill of sin. Run the marathon of faith. By the power of Jesus within, following Him to resist sin and grow stronger, more like Him. Confessing, repenting, training, running. That's His plan and purpose, as you trust and obey. Every day. Striving to reach His goal - all by His power within you.