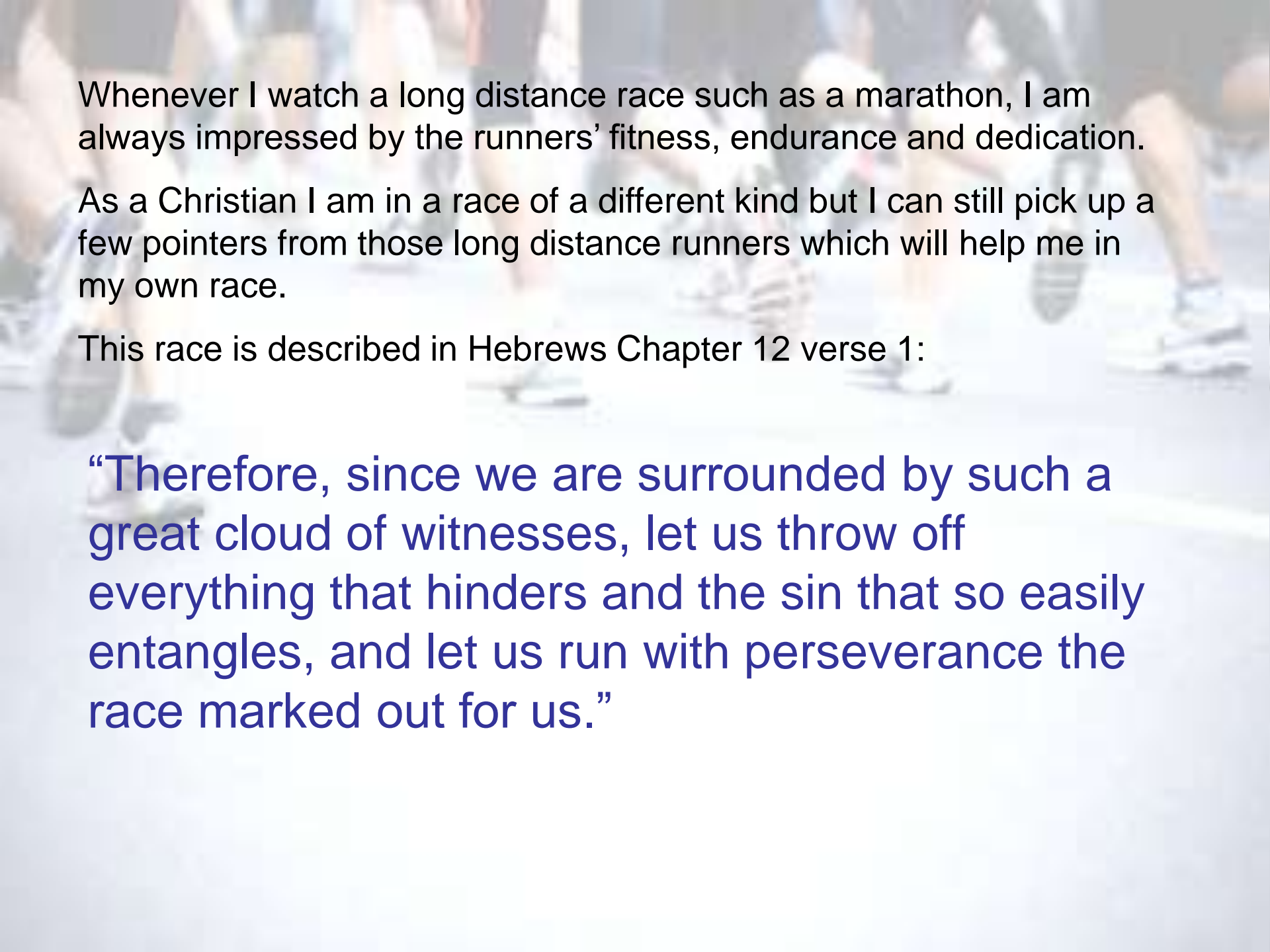




Running the Race

A study of Hebrews 12 verse 1

A blurred background image showing the lower legs and feet of several runners in motion on a paved surface, likely a marathon or long-distance race. The runners are wearing various athletic shoes and shorts, and their movement is captured with a slight blur to convey speed.

Whenever I watch a long distance race such as a marathon, I am always impressed by the runners' fitness, endurance and dedication.

As a Christian I am in a race of a different kind but I can still pick up a few pointers from those long distance runners which will help me in my own race.

This race is described in Hebrews Chapter 12 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.”

(1) Encouragement

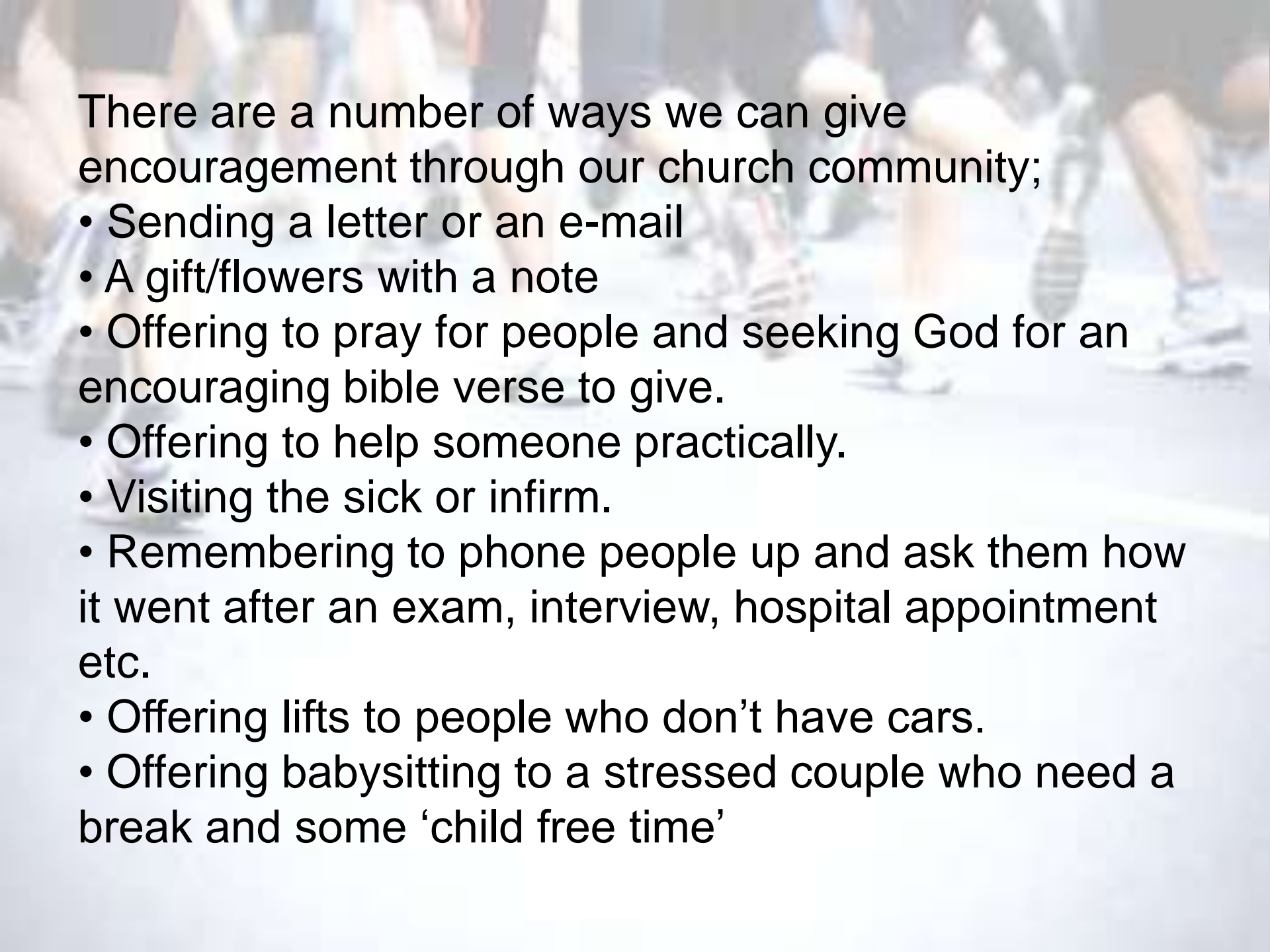
Let's look at the first part of the verse; "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses" so what does that mean?

When we see the word 'Therefore' it means that a lot has been said before. We are in the middle of a point the writer is making. In Hebrews 11 the writer has been talking about faith. He goes through a list of the great men and women of faith who have gone before. These people have run their races and have proved that God is faithful and reliable. They are encouraging us through their example and perseverance.



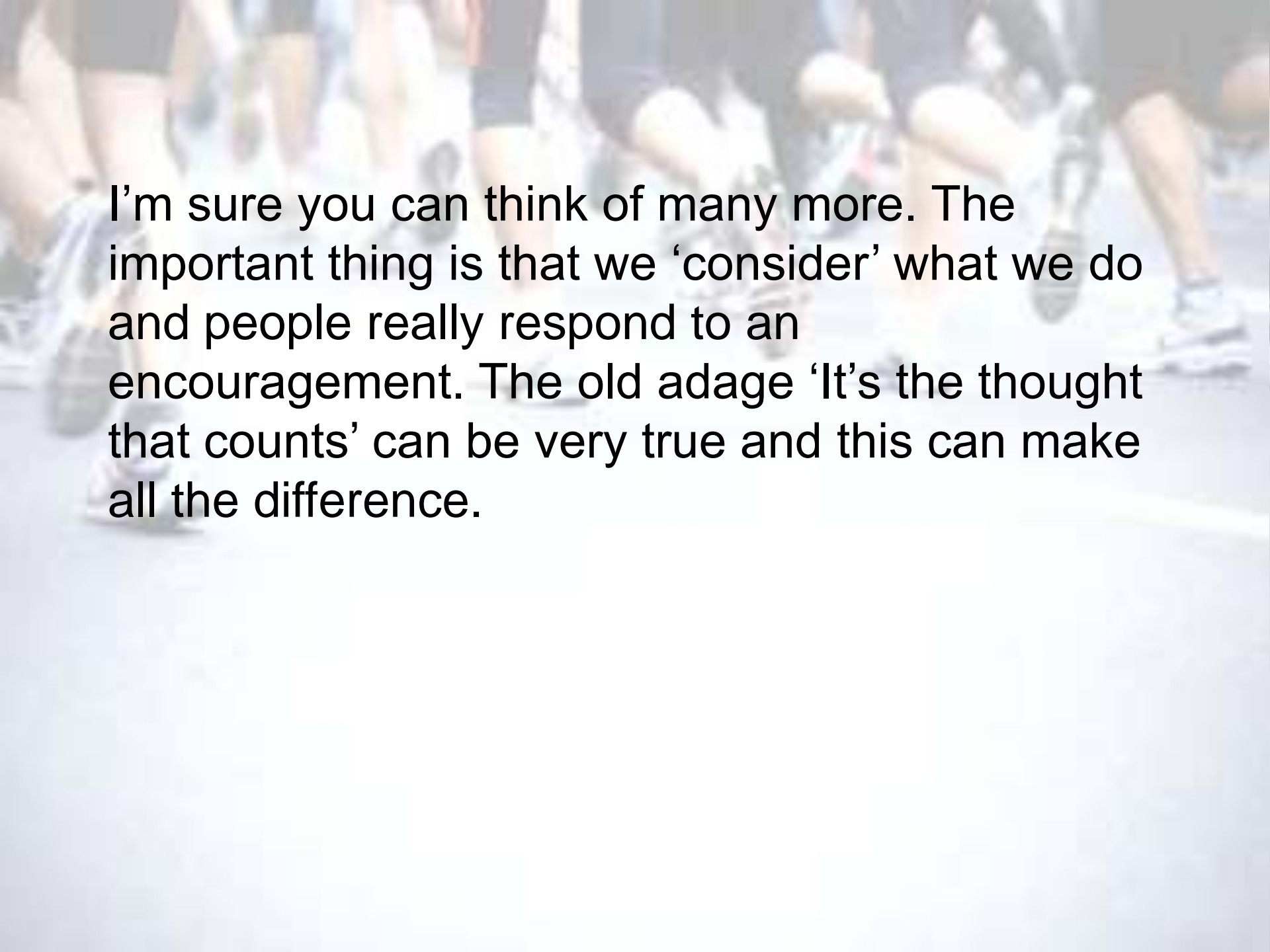
It's great to receive encouragement and you can see in a race how the runners are encouraged by a lot of people cheering for them.

In Hebrews 10:24-25 it says; “And let us consider how we may **spur one another on** toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but **let us encourage one another**—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”



There are a number of ways we can give encouragement through our church community;

- Sending a letter or an e-mail
- A gift/flowers with a note
- Offering to pray for people and seeking God for an encouraging bible verse to give.
- Offering to help someone practically.
- Visiting the sick or infirm.
- Remembering to phone people up and ask them how it went after an exam, interview, hospital appointment etc.
- Offering lifts to people who don't have cars.
- Offering babysitting to a stressed couple who need a break and some 'child free time'

A blurred background image showing the lower legs and feet of a group of runners in motion on a track. The runners are wearing various athletic shoes and shorts, and the image is out of focus to emphasize the text in the foreground.

I'm sure you can think of many more. The important thing is that we 'consider' what we do and people really respond to an encouragement. The old adage 'It's the thought that counts' can be very true and this can make all the difference.

(2) Getting rid of hindrances

Even though it may be cold or pouring with rain, you will not see any runners with overcoats. They don't want anything holding them back.

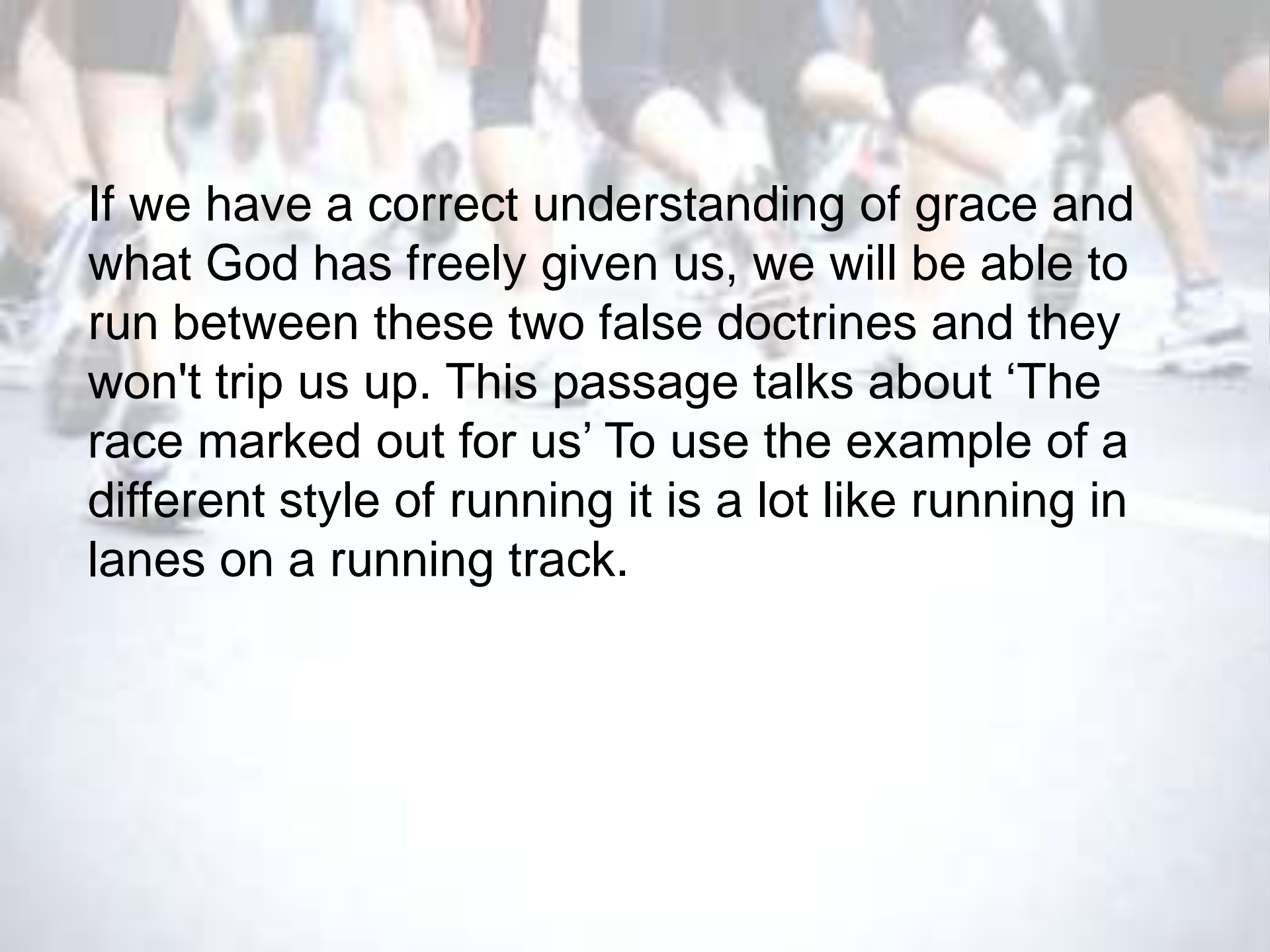
The verse mentions '**everything that hinders**' and the '**Sin that easily entangles**'.

The obvious sins are easy to identify, but what about the things that hinder. They may not even be particular sins but they can be things that can perhaps waste our time and stop us running effectively. There are many things that can throw us off course but a few that came to mind are listed next;

• **Habits** – Not necessarily wrong in themselves but can take up all our time. Things such as computer games, too much TV, a hobby that takes all your time. A verse in the bible to consider is 1 Corinthians 10 v 23 where it says; “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive.” We are free to do these things but we need to use wisdom

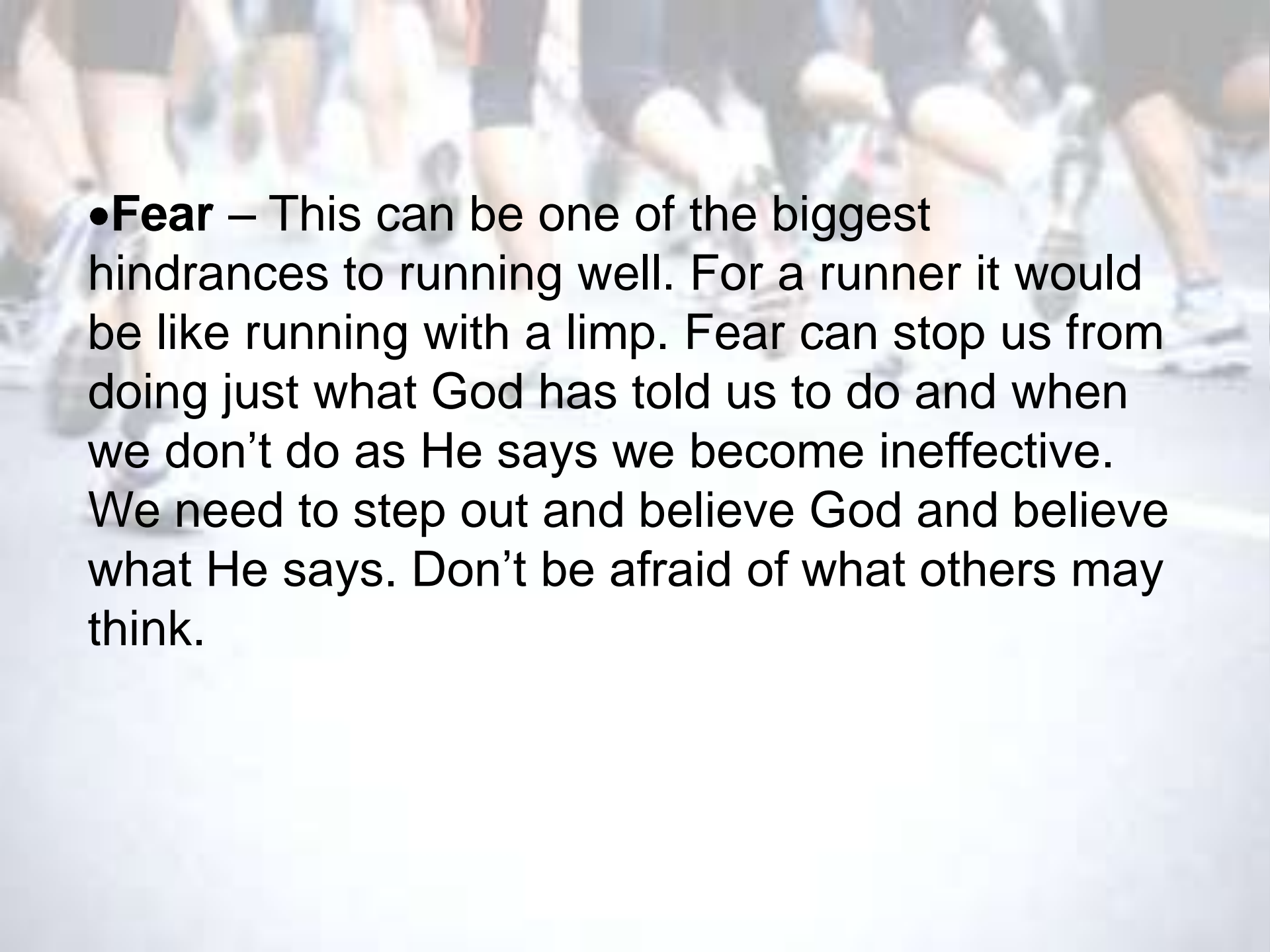
• **Legalism** – It's actually harder work trying to follow rules and regulations. We sometimes default to trying to earn our salvation through good works but this never works. The bible says in Galatians 5 v 1 "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." Don't strive by trying to earn your approval it's already been won by Jesus, you could never do it yourself anyway! To use the running analogy it's like running in circles.

• **Antinomianism** – (Big word alert!!) This is the opposite to legalism, sometimes called licence. This is the belief, wrongly taken, from the bible that because we are no longer ‘under’ the law or subject to it, then we can sin or do whatever we like. But the apostle Paul addresses this very clearly in his gospel to the Romans (chapter 6 v 1-2) “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” If legalism is running in circles then this is like running in the wrong direction!

A blurred background image showing the lower legs and feet of several runners on a track, suggesting a race in progress. The runners are wearing athletic gear like shorts and sneakers. The image is out of focus, emphasizing the text in the foreground.

If we have a correct understanding of grace and what God has freely given us, we will be able to run between these two false doctrines and they won't trip us up. This passage talks about 'The race marked out for us' To use the example of a different style of running it is a lot like running in lanes on a running track.

● **Passivity** – It takes effort to run a long race, do we look for the easy option? Pressing that snooze button in the morning when we could be spending time with our heavenly father, or missing out on the Sunday evening prayer meeting because we need to prepare for Monday morning. It's helpful to remember those pictures of us fighting in a war. The apostle Paul again had the right idea. Writing in 1 Corinthians 9 v 26-27 he said; “Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I **beat my body** and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” That doesn't sound very passive does it?



•**Fear** – This can be one of the biggest hindrances to running well. For a runner it would be like running with a limp. Fear can stop us from doing just what God has told us to do and when we don't do as He says we become ineffective. We need to step out and believe God and believe what He says. Don't be afraid of what others may think.

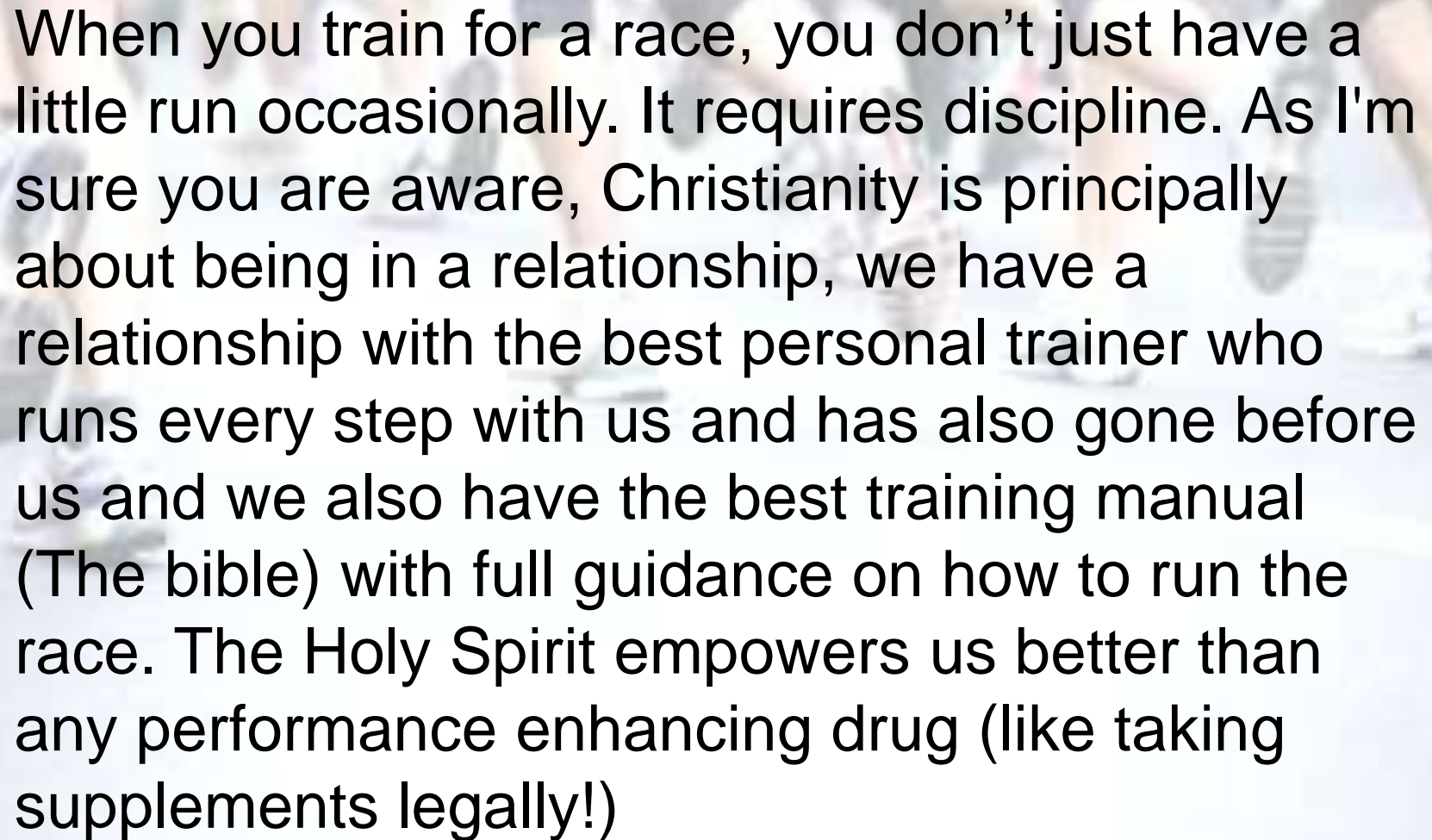
(3) Running with perseverance

If you're not tired and your muscles don't ache, you may not even be running the race at all.

Running the Christian race is not easy, it takes determination and perseverance to run the race right through to the very end.

Many of the runners you will see in a race look super fit, this is because they have trained. They have put in the hours and pounded the streets day after day. How are we to run with perseverance in the race that we run?

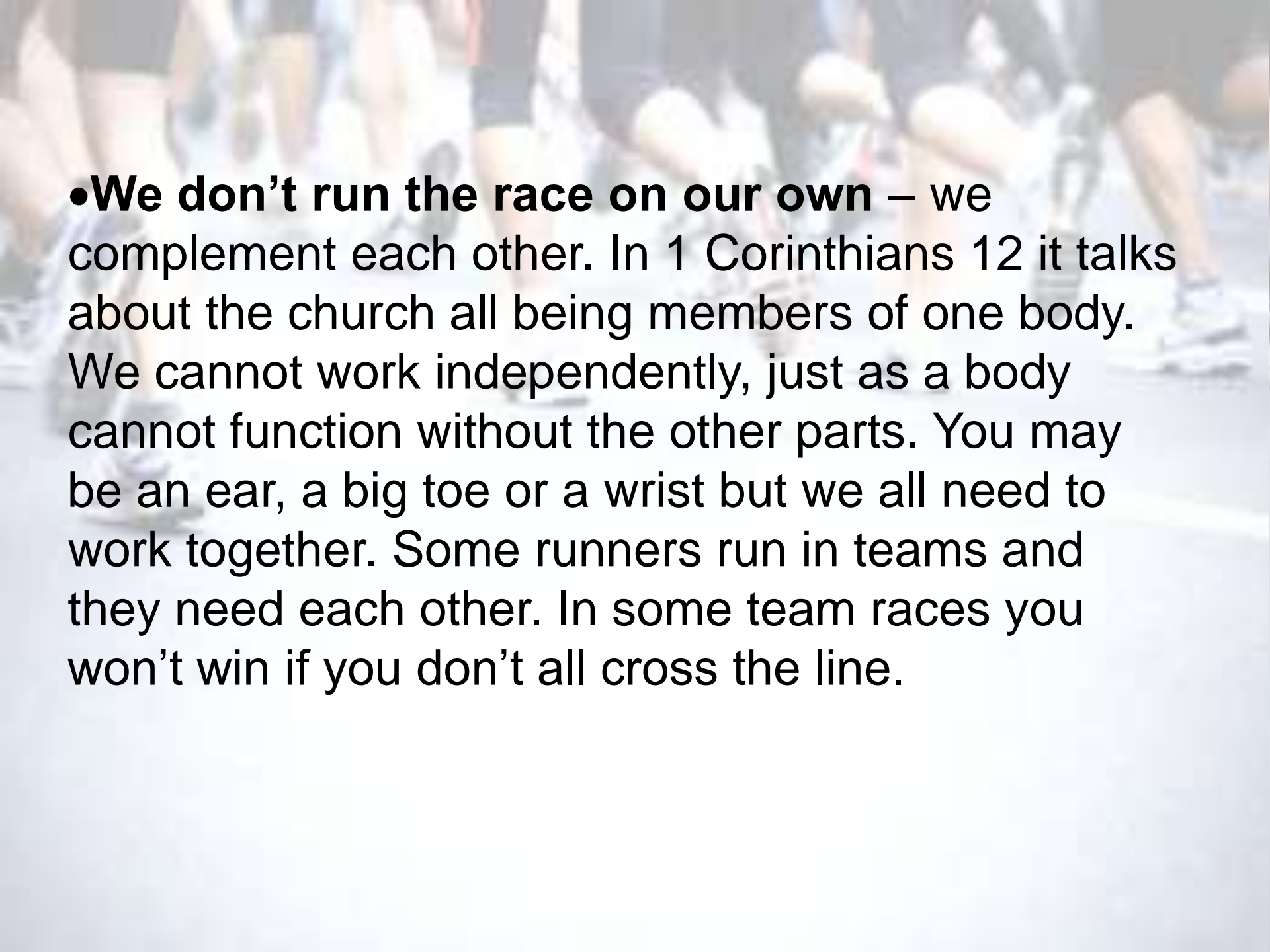
• **Dying to self daily** - Jesus said to His disciples: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9v23) That means we don't do things our own way but we are surrendered to God's will. This is a constant battle. Even Jesus struggled with this in the garden of Gethsemane when he asked if the cup could be taken from him, but he knew in the end it was not His will but the Father's that he wanted to do.



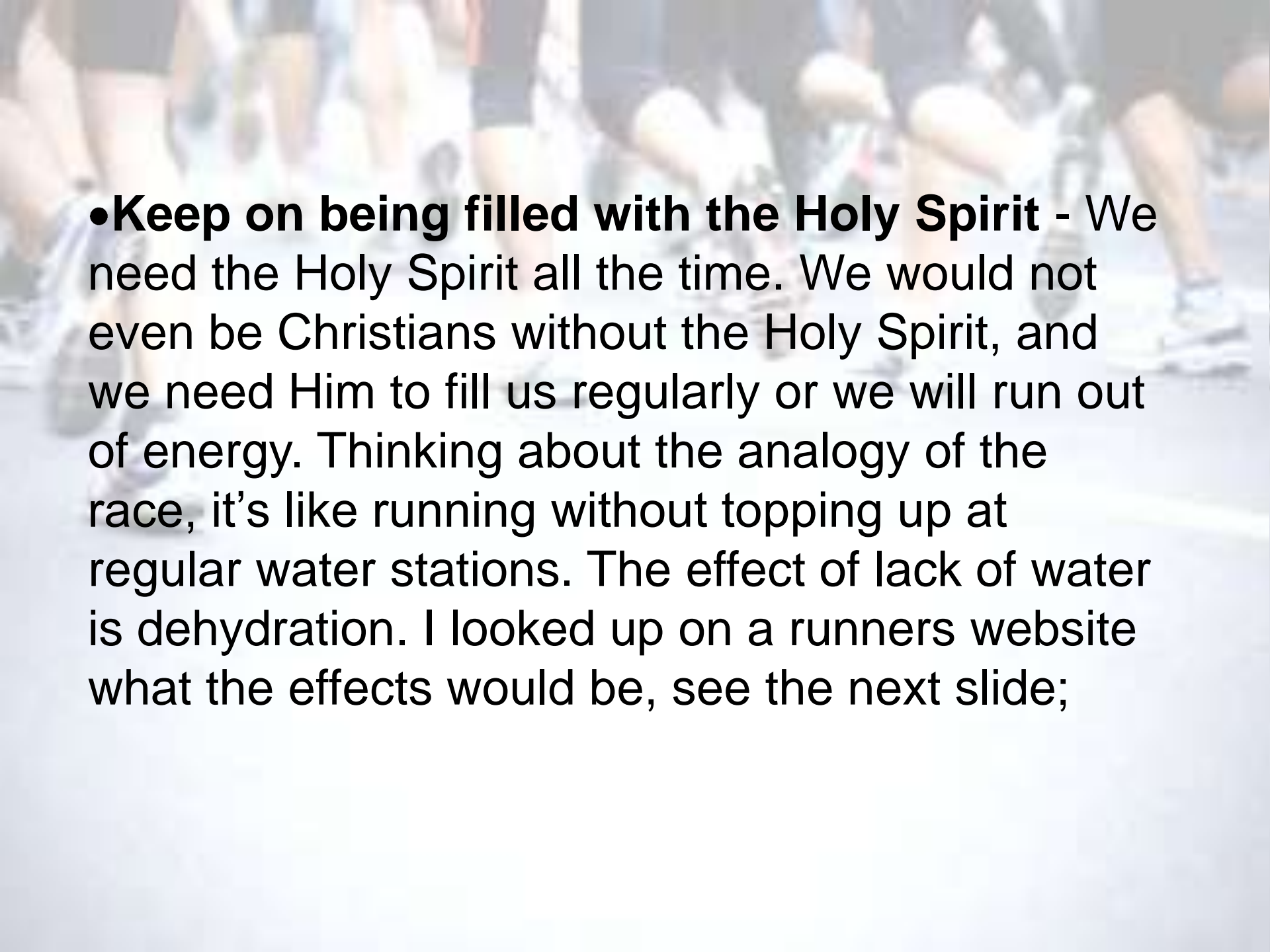
When you train for a race, you don't just have a little run occasionally. It requires discipline. As I'm sure you are aware, Christianity is principally about being in a relationship, we have a relationship with the best personal trainer who runs every step with us and has also gone before us and we also have the best training manual (The bible) with full guidance on how to run the race. The Holy Spirit empowers us better than any performance enhancing drug (like taking supplements legally!)

• **Following a perfect example** – Jesus is our example. We follow the one who ran the perfect race. He is our pace setter. In the very next verse in Hebrews it tells us to ‘consider him’. We will not lose our way if we follow him.

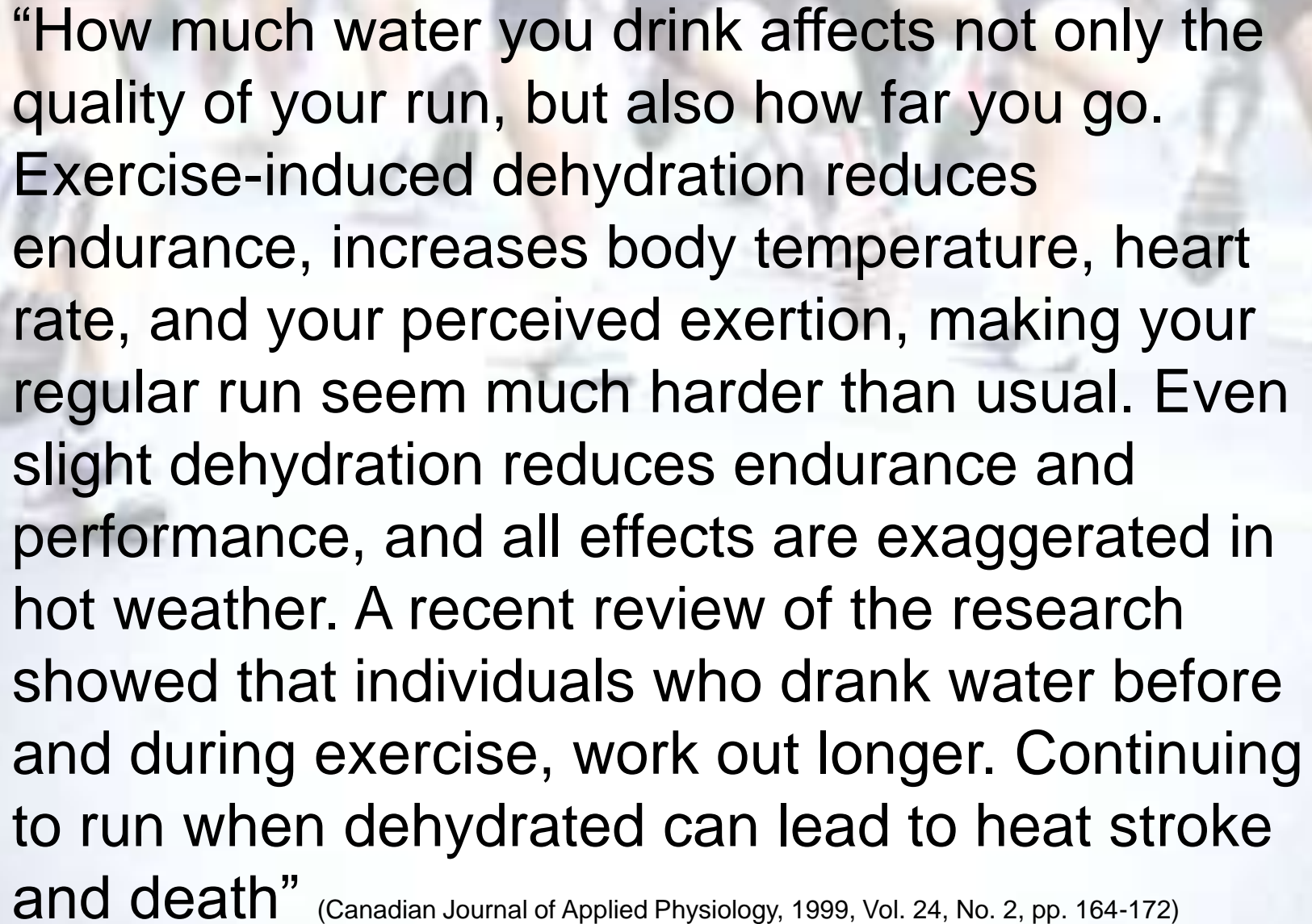
• **God has called us to a unique race-** God has made you for a purpose. You are unique. No-one on this earth is better qualified to do the job you have been given than you. We are not called to do other peoples jobs for them. Don't be jealous of what other people do (Don't try to run somebody else's race). Seek God for His will for your life and do it to the best of your ability



● **We don't run the race on our own** – we complement each other. In 1 Corinthians 12 it talks about the church all being members of one body. We cannot work independently, just as a body cannot function without the other parts. You may be an ear, a big toe or a wrist but we all need to work together. Some runners run in teams and they need each other. In some team races you won't win if you don't all cross the line.



- **Keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit** - We need the Holy Spirit all the time. We would not even be Christians without the Holy Spirit, and we need Him to fill us regularly or we will run out of energy. Thinking about the analogy of the race, it's like running without topping up at regular water stations. The effect of lack of water is dehydration. I looked up on a runners website what the effects would be, see the next slide;

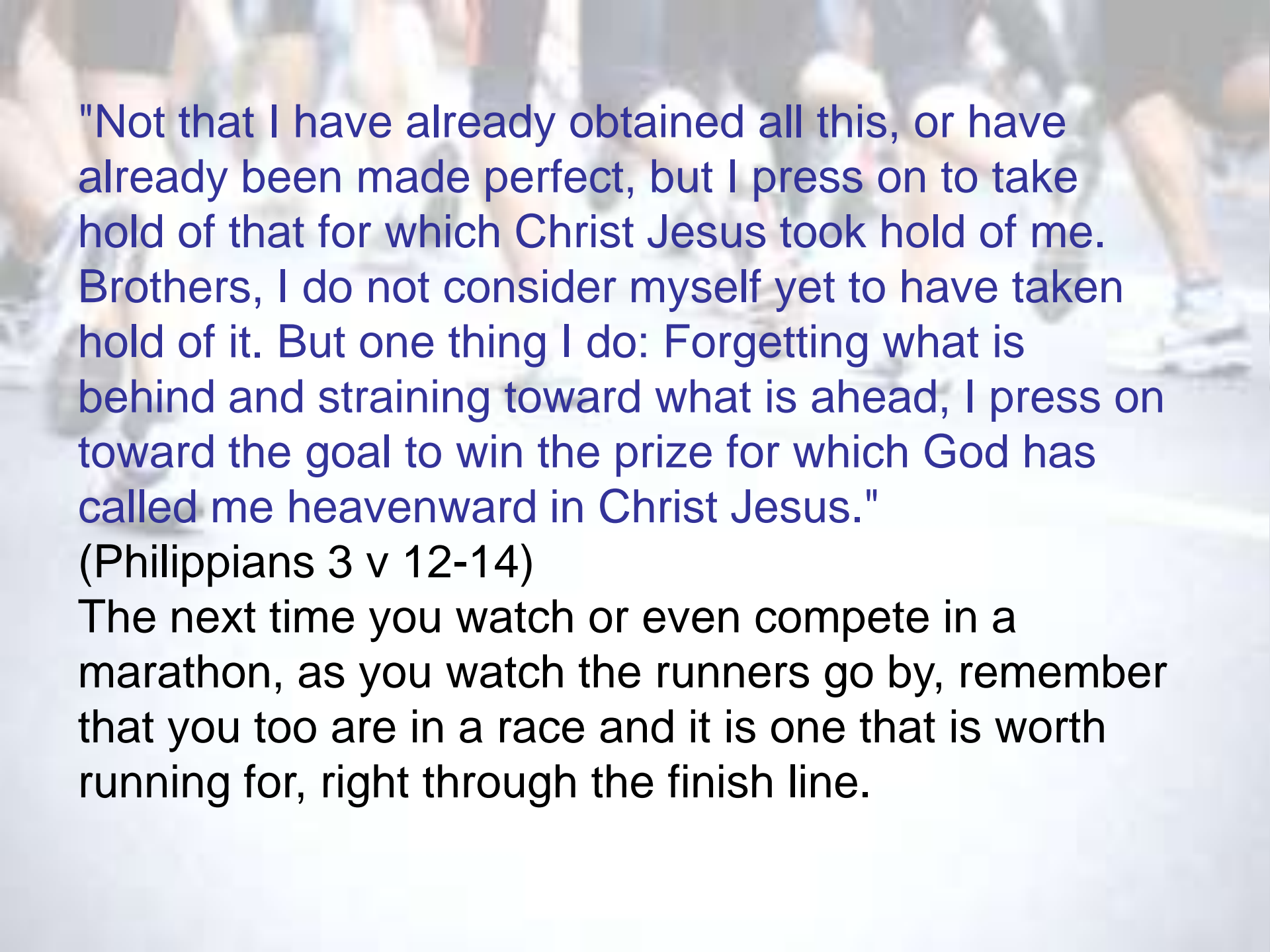


“How much water you drink affects not only the quality of your run, but also how far you go. Exercise-induced dehydration reduces endurance, increases body temperature, heart rate, and your perceived exertion, making your regular run seem much harder than usual. Even slight dehydration reduces endurance and performance, and all effects are exaggerated in hot weather. A recent review of the research showed that individuals who drank water before and during exercise, work out longer. Continuing to run when dehydrated can lead to heat stroke and death” (Canadian Journal of Applied Physiology, 1999, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 164-172)

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness. (2 peter 1 v 3)

Look to the prize – And what a prize. The bible records numerous blessings to look forward to. We get to spend eternity with our saviour with the absence of sadness and pain in front of a huge banquet. There are many verses that can give us motivation but I have picked out two;

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."
(2 Timothy 4 v 7-8)



"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

(Philippians 3 v 12-14)

The next time you watch or even compete in a marathon, as you watch the runners go by, remember that you too are in a race and it is one that is worth running for, right through the finish line.