

## Turning the Crap of Life, Into the Fruit of the Spirit

### Being An Action Figure, not just a talker

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#### Life Questions:

Do you know what the right thing to do about a particular situation? If so, what action have you taken? Do you go quickly to Facebook, Twitter, or the phone to express your opinion on something only to let that expression be to a couple of people? Why? Do you think that is enough to change things?

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You have decided that you need to lose weight. It's the beginning of the year. All the gyms have specials to get you in the doors. Family members and friends alike are all talking about losing weight. Every time you meet them for dinner, New Year's party, or read their messages you see how they are lamenting the need to lose weight, and that was last year!

You go to the meeting where everyone is talking about the problem employee. Everyone in the office is aware that Tommy isn't pulling his weight. Bosses, coworkers and staff all see that this guy is failing miserably. We all agree something has to be done. Right? Good, we are all in agreement.

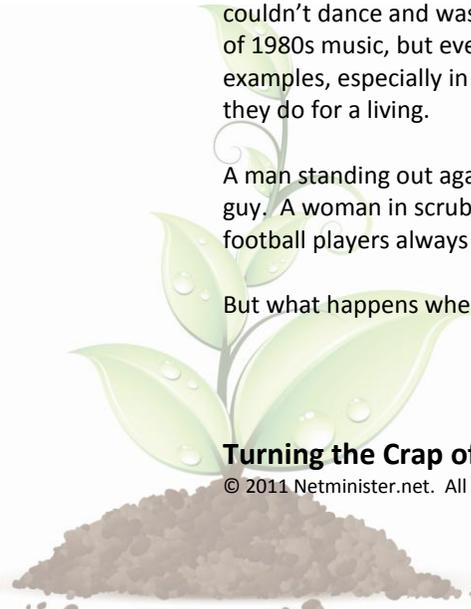
You may have noticed watching the National Championship and/or SuperBowl trophy presentation that no fan was presented the trophy. No one was pulled from the sideline for cheering, complaining about bad plays or showing up for every game. Instead, and this was true of both presentations, the people presented with the trophy were people who participated in the game(s). This has been true of every presentation that most of us have seen. The only way to receive the prize is to play the game.

Now most of us put on the uniform. We are good at that. We play the part of someone who looks the part. Presidential candidates are notorious for "looking the part." After all, you have a certain expectation of what certain people in life should look like. When they don't, you may tend to think less of them, right?

Take Rick Astley, a famous 1980s singer, who has a mellow voice. Just listening to him you would assume the fellow looked like Barry White. Smooth was the sound which was deep and different than anything else out at the time. Then you saw the guy, and he most certainly DIDN'T look the part. He was skinny, couldn't dance and was WHITE! He didn't look the part. Eventually, his career melts into the background of 1980s music, but everyone knows he didn't look like the voice he had. There are numerous other examples, especially in the music business. We have an expectation that someone should look like what they do for a living.

A man standing out against the curb wearing a yellow hat with a jackhammer is a city worker/construction guy. A woman in scrubs is a nurse or in the medical field. Doctors always wear white smocks. And football players always wear their uniforms, right?

But what happens when you look the part, but you aren't doing anything with it?



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Imagine going to a football game. Arriving at your seat you find a gentleman wearing a full home team uniform. Not just a jersey or painted face, this guy is wearing the pads, the helmet, everything he needs to take the field. What do you think?

He looks the part, he is in the right place at the right time, but why is he in the stands? Is he a really fanatic fan, or is he a player that lost his way to the field? Or do you think "great I have to sit beside this guy! Great seats!" Such is the case with a lot of us who go to church regularly. We wear the uniform, show up on the right day, fully geared with the tools we need for the game, but we are sitting in the stands, not taking the field.

**Heb 12:1-4**

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.  
NKJV

Paul is telling us that we have on the uniform of Christ. As Christians we are suppose to be Christ-like. With the uniform comes some responsibilities. In other words, there are a few things we should be doing in order to function as Christians. They are:

**1. Move**

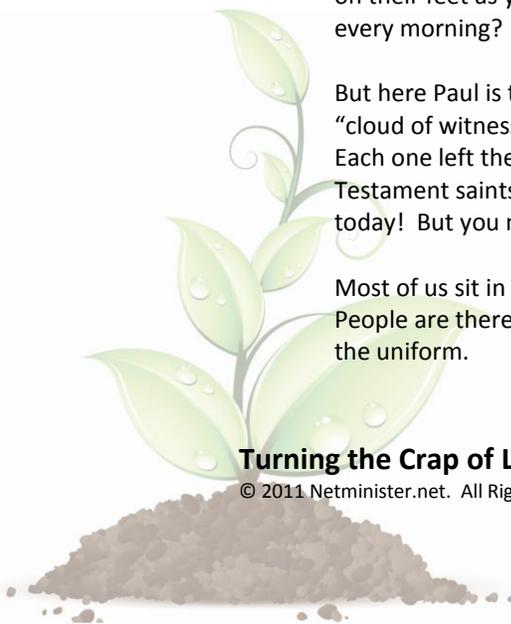
Paul is telling the listeners a story we would be familiar with today, but with different arenas. In Rome, there were the gladiator games. As the combatants would enter the arena they would go through a long tunnel. Within that tunnel was a listing of those gladiators who were there before. Each one would put his mark on the wall. Those entering would have been told about their past accomplishments. Each gladiator would know the names. He would know the stories of these guys' past victories. This ritual was meant as an encouragement to the one entering the ring. But even more, once he walked out of the tunnel, there was the crowd, screaming, chanting his name! Can you imagine, the stadium cheering for you?

Have you ever been to a college football game? Is it much different? You hear the band, and everyone gets on their feet as the team takes the field sometimes to deafening cheers. How excited would that make you. Imagine being one of those guys and having thousands of people on their feet as you step onto the field. What would work be like if you got that kind of welcome every morning? Do you think that would ever get old? I don't think so.

But here Paul is telling you guess what? You already have that kind of cheering section. That "cloud of witnesses", literally means the sky is filled with the people who have gone before you. Each one left their life for Christ. If you read the previous chapters, Paul points out all the Old Testament saints whose lives had influenced those that came after them up to and including today! But you must take the field.

Most of us sit in the stands! Hey, I like it too. It is comfortable. You don't have to run around. People are there to talk to who encourage you not to leave the stands, because they too wear the uniform.

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Paul says "run the race." That is an active term. We all know what run means; it means to start moving. The term in the original language was a term that meant to move with haste. Most people will tell you to sit and pray about it. Just sit here and pray. After the prayer is over, do you know where you are suppose to be? You are supposed to be on the field. GO!!!

We aren't called to be spectators. The people who Paul says are a cloud of witnesses have one thing in common; they are all DEAD! They have died. Their lives are over. But you and I are alive! We are alive with a purpose, which is to run the race of faith in Christ Jesus.

What does that mean?

That means to be more than a talker. We all know how to talk. Read one of these lessons and you know I know how to talk. Imagine me talking to you right now. If I can write this much, then how much more can I talk? Honestly, we have talking down pat. But what are we doing beyond identifying the problem. Are we gossiping about someone? What is the next step? Should we just keep talking about it? Does just making everyone know your opinion change anything? Even if they agree, they aren't doing anything about it either. But nowhere in the Bible are we commanded to be good talkers, but we are called to be action figures!

#### **James 1:22-25**

**22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word, this one will be blessed in what he does.**

NKJV

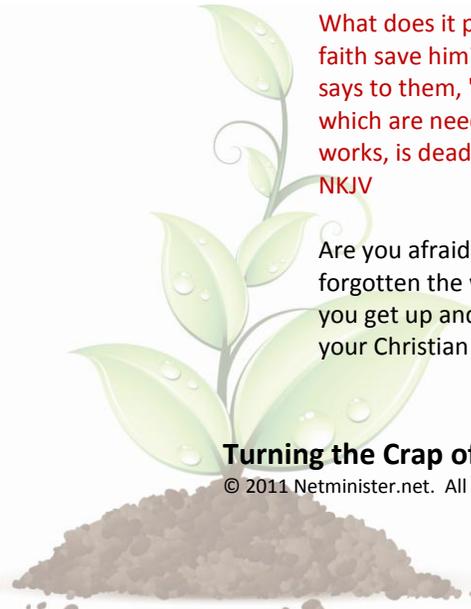
You know the Monday morning meetings. The ones that are three hours long, if you are lucky! Each person mindlessly gives reports. The noise of their voices becomes a cacophony of sounds that are indistinguishable from each other. You sit there, loading up with caffeine just to keep from falling asleep. Nothing happens, nothing changes, but you just sit there talking. How frustrating is that? Does that really seem to be the life of a Christian? NO! We are to be people of action. Our faith is shown by our works.

#### **James 2:14-17**

**What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**

NKJV

Are you afraid to do something? Maybe I will have to work harder than I want? Or, have you forgotten the way to the field because you have been sitting in the stands for so long. How do you get up and get going? You actively ask God to show you a place to work for Him. You ask your Christian friends to join you. From soup kitchens to youth meetings, try them all until you



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can tell where you are built to serve. And you serve, actively, because you are called to run the race.

## 2. Remove

Running the race requires preparation. You have to prepare to run it. You can't show up at the college two hours before a game to get your uniform and gear if you haven't done what is necessary to prepare. An athlete of any kind has to spend countless hours working out, reading the play book, and learning the rules so that when the moment comes, he is ready for the game. Are you ready? Have you spent time in God's word, reading, praying, and learning to listen to His guidance in your life?

So many people only turn to God when times are bad. When they don't understand what is happening, they get mad at God because he didn't heal someone, didn't fix the work situation or some other area of their life. They showed up the day of the game expecting to play. Guess what? They were beaten down. You can't take the field without preparation.

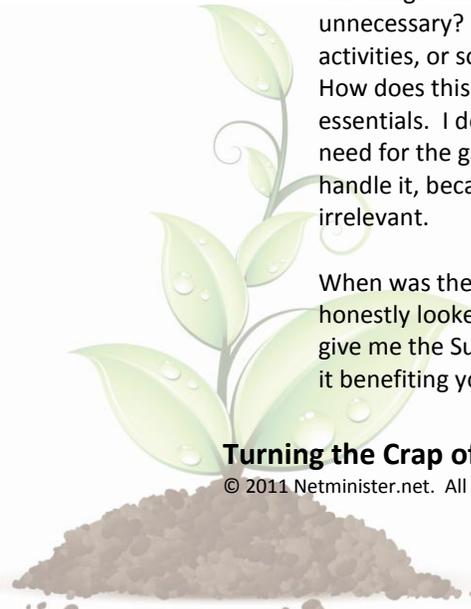
So how do you prepare? You have to remove what isn't needed. Have you ever decided you want to go for a hike? What do you take with you? Do you take the minimum you can? Because as you walk everything you carry gets more heavy. Ask a marathon runner what they take on a run. They strip down what isn't needed. They remove anything they don't have to have.

When I first started biking I would carry a lot of water, just assuming that the need for water would be worth the weight. I also assumed that I would need a bigger bike to carry all this water and me. What I didn't realize was that the water combined with the weight of this heavy bike, which didn't seem heavy at the beginning, really got really heavy at the end of the ride. I was carrying too much weight. The sad part was that I didn't even need what I was carrying.

After a few weeks of carrying more than I needed, I was resting on the trail when a lady and her husband rode up. She looked at my bike, at my water reserves and commented "you are going to kill yourself if you keep doing that!" I asked what she meant and come to find out, the bike I so prized was way too heavy and the amount of water I needed was far less. Once I changed those, the rides haven't gotten really easy but they are significantly lighter. I am now more prepared because I am not carrying the things I don't need.

When Paul tells us about "laying aside the weight", he isn't talking about sin. He is talking about the things that aren't necessary. What are you putting into your life that is completely unnecessary? Is it extra work, baseball, football, basketball, television, dance, children's activities, or some other thing that on the surface seems important but ends up ensnaring us? How does this happen? When more time is put into the nonessentials, there is less time for the essentials. I don't have time for God; for reading the bible; for praying for my preparations that I need for the game called life. Then, we blame God when trouble comes and don't know how to handle it, because we are not prepared. We are so easily ensnared by the things that are irrelevant.

When was the last time you did a person spring cleaning of your schedule? When have you honestly looked at the ways you are spending your time? What are you getting out of it? Don't give me the Sunday school answer, because I am not the one that you have to answer to. How is it benefiting you? And if it isn't, then why are you still doing it?



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Traditions are a big part in the continuation of certain activities. We just start doing things because that is what we think we are suppose to do. Our friends do it, and they go to church! Are they right? Have you ever even considered if they are wrong? You have to take control become active to deal with the areas of encumbrance in your life. When you are wrapped up in garbage that doesn't benefit you or your family, you shouldn't be surprised when you get a lousy return. Take the proactive approach; get rid of what you don't need NOW, before you spend your entire life ensnared in things that keep you from being what God wanted for you!

### 3. Encourage

If you run, bike, hike, or do any activity that takes you far from the car, you know there is a point in which your brain comments, "you know we are a long way from home, and only half way finished if I turn around right now." In that moment, I believe it is called hitting the wall, all your energy seems to ebb away. You just know that you should have stayed home. What were you thinking? Most Christians get lost at this point.

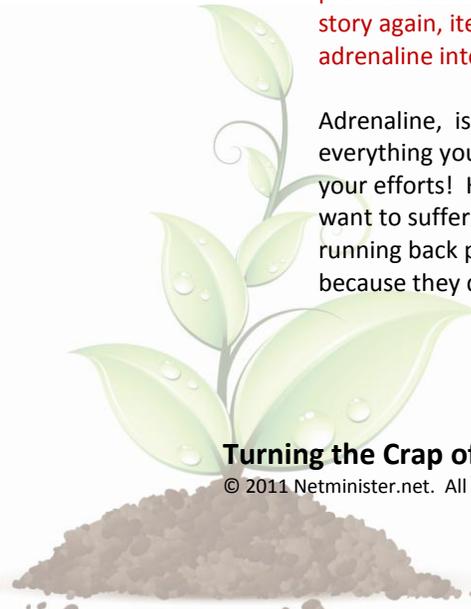
Many of us are ready to move to action figures. We tire of talking and get moving pretty easily, until the moment that the magnitude of what we are doing fully comes into view. In this moment we start to fall away. Paul tells us that we grow weary. This word isn't used often these days. But weary describes our predicament.

You can tell a championship team on the field because they are properly conditioned to finish the game. You can see it in the final quarter of any game, when that preparation comes into play. But it's also at the point you see each person on that team encouraging the others because each one knows the moment their brain says "that's enough, I'm finished." You can see it in the teammates' eyes: exhaustion, frustration, anger, the temptation to give up right at that moment.

Such is the same in the life of a Christian. There is that moment when the talking has driven you nuts, the inaction has forced you to work alone and the moment when you decide that you have had enough. You're not going to do it anymore. You are going to give in. That is the moment to look not to others but to Jesus! The Message Bible says that verse this way:

**Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because He never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now He's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility He plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!**

Adrenaline, is what the body needs to hit the runner's high, the second wind. The moment everything you have been working for suddenly inspires you to not just continue but to redouble your efforts! Keep your eyes on Jesus! Remember everything He did for you. He surely did not want to suffer but He did. I love the term, "He (Jesus) plowed through." What an image! The running back plowing through the defense; the point guard plowing through the defense, all because they don't take their eye off the end zone, the goal!

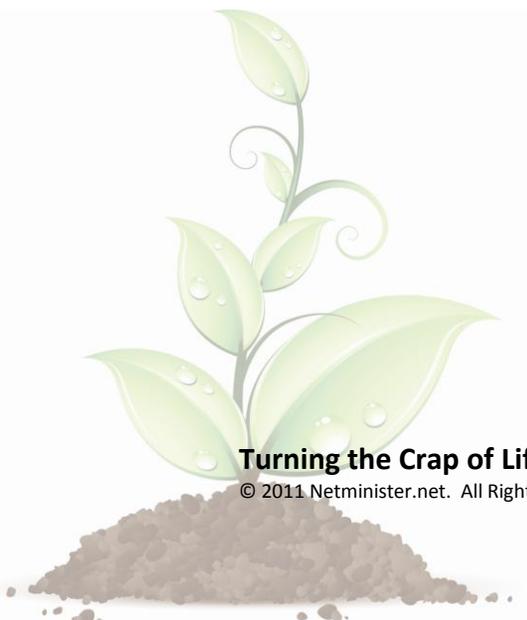


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Where are your eyes? If they are anywhere but on Jesus, don't be surprised when you hit the wall and fall down. Instead, get up! Run the race, remove what you don't need and keep your eyes on the goal, on Christ, and His calling on your life.

**Final Thought:**

Frustration made you sit down on the sidelines? Are you sitting there knowing you need to get back into the walk with Christ, but you really aren't ready? Change that now. See, I am praying that this study does more than just motivate you to become an action figure in your church, home, work and social life. Instead, I am praying for you right now that it changes you so completely that people will be asking what you are into. What has gotten a hold of you and light a fire under you. Know this; you are going to have to give up some things. You are going to have to let go of a few things you might not want to let go of. They aren't sin, but they are ensnaring you in areas that keep you on the sidelines. If it is your friends, get new ones. The team is on the field, come be a part of the team because we need you!



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