

## FINISHING STRONG: RUNNING THE RACE TO THE END

Hebrews 12: 1 – 3, 2 Timothy 4: 7 – 8

Ogumor, Sunny (Bishop)

When we talk about running a race the first thing that comes to mind is field and track events. Field and tracks events are usually exciting moments to cheer up the winners.



In athletics, some athletes will run a short distance and fall down due to muzzle pull, some will lose speed due to short breath, some will lose stamina and slow down their pace, but the strong ones will continue with strength, determination and eagerness to win a prize. Some persons are great at start-ups, others are good at keeping things going; still others know how to “finish well,” with determination and focus.

A sports man needs training and re-training and re-training. So also, is the Christian race. **2 Timothy 2:15** Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

A good Christian does not depend on my pastor say as some believe that the pastor’s word is a decree, no it is not. Examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. **Act 17:11**.

Know that every game has a rule or rules. And you must abide by the rules, so not to be disqualified. In the Christian race. Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of

heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. **Matt 7:21**.

### Running the Christian race:

**Heb 12:1-3:** <sup>1</sup>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, <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.(NIV).

### The Resilient Faith

Follow and learn from these crowd of witnesses **Heb 11**. That faith that will keep you going.

Throw away anything that hinders or disturb your faith. Remove your eyes and mind from that sin that will entangle you like **David, 2 Sam 11:2**

There is a race marked for us by our lord and savior; **John 13:14-15**. Continue steadfastly.

### Run the race with endurance:

Do not quit during hard times, “quitters don’t win and winners don’t quit”. Like a long-distance race keep your faith going, in Christianity there is always light at the end of the tunnel. You need perseverance to pass through the length of the tunnel. Fix your eyes on Jesus Christ, do not call His name in vain, for jesting or for play.

Jesus Christ knows what He is up to, so He endured the cross.

The shameful death the executors thought for Him became joy for the world. Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. **Jm 1:12, Rm 2:7.**

### **The implications of running the race.**

**Matt 16:24-26.** Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup>For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. <sup>26</sup>What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”

### **There is a reward in following Christ:**

**Matt 16:27.** For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

**John 12:26.** *Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.*

Christians need to put on spiritual practices (and activities) that open our lives to the action of God in our heart, mind, body, and soul, to progressively remake the Christian that we claim to be. Apostle Paul says “Run in such a way as to get the prize.” **2 Timothy 2:5** Anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor’s crown except by competing according to the rules.

Today you are in God’s children gathering tomorrow you in juju or

misbelievers gathering. Are you a good Christian, doing well?

**1 Corinthians 15:19** *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.* This is the view of miracle seekers. Then ask yourself, how are you running your Christian race, is finishing strong your goal? Or you are running just enough to be a partaker.

### **Finishing Strong**

**2Tim 4:7-8.** *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.*

This is a reflection on Paul’s life, his devotion to God throughout his life to the end of his earthly journey.

It takes a healthy person to complete a task successfully without breaking down. so it is with the spiritual race, it needs righteousness and healthy mind to run the race to a logical end.

Fighting a good fight of faith requires daily spiritual discipline, relying on the word of God as a weapon, actively pursuing righteousness and refusing to quit despite trials.

### **Daily routine in fighting a good fight of faith,**

- ✓ Abiding in the Word.
- ✓ Pursuing what is good.
- ✓ Avoiding self-righteousness.
- ✓ Looking beyond this life.
- ✓ Guarding the mind.
- ✓ Enduring hardship.

### **It is not over until it is over.**

There are numerous excuses a man gives for his failure.

Pual to the **Philippians 3:12-16**, Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Paul expresses his continuous relationship with Christ, a way of running the race to the finishing line.

Those who have heaven in their view, must still press forward to it, in holy desires and hopes, and constantly trying their best to reach the end.

### **Christ is our example, model.**

Christians should not lose sight of Christ as we run the race. Eternal life is the gift of God, but it is in Christ Jesus through him it must come to us.

Remember that Jesus saith unto him, *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.* **John 14:6**. Those who neglect Christ mind nothing but their carnal appetites. The way of those who mind earthly things may seem pleasant, but death and hell are at the end of it. If we choose their way, we shall share their end.

The life of a Christian is focused on heaven, where his Head and his home are, and where he hopes to be shortly; he sets his affections upon things above; and where his heart is, there will his conversation be.

### **The Need for Self-Discipline in running the race**

**1 Cor 9:24-27.** *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to*

*my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

Paul is focused on ending well and obtaining the price. That should also be our motivation when it comes to accomplishing our task. You need to be focused on finishing well, if Paul could do this, it's possible for us to accomplish such as well.

Finishing strong means to complete the race with a good overall performance or to have an outstanding overall result, it means to win a prize at the end of the race. We need to put into consideration why are we in the race. To win a prize of course.

So, whatever your goals, purpose, aspirations, and pursuits in life may be, you need to put effort to finish well. I believe very strongly that God has put into our hands the tools and resources that will enable you to finish well. **2 Corinthians 9:8** And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. **John 5:39**. The Scriptures reveal Jesus: *"They are they which testify of Me."* he who finds Jesus finds life, heaven, and all things pertaining to life and godliness. Happy is he who, searching the Bible discovers the Savior.

### **The truth about finishing strong.**

1. Finishing strong is not automatic. It won't just happen like that; you need to be willing to apply yourself, your effort, determination, and even courage in order to finish well. Ask yourself what shall I do. **Acts 2:37**. When the people heard this,

they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"; **Philp. 3:14.** I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

2. Not everyone finishes well. Some people start well but end up falling. The fact that you started is not an indication that you will finish. When you have the mind that the one God gave to you is too small you will not act on it to increase it. Then you want be able to finish well. **Matt.25:21-26.** I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'
3. God wants you to finish well. So, make up your mind to finish well **Job 8:7** Though you started with little, you will end with much. Job was pure in hope, that if he were indeed upright, he should yet see a good end of his present troubles. This is God's way of enriching the souls of his people with grace and comfort. The beginning is small, but the progress is to perfection. Present troubles, does not drown the children of God but you need to be upright.

#### **Run Like It Matters to end well.**

Somebody who went to school, for what purpose are you going to school. Somebody who went to learn a trade, for what purpose. Why do you go into business or into employment.

#### **Be Purposeful, Not Passive.**

Paul says he doesn't run aimlessly.

He runs with purpose.

He trains with intention.

He brings his desires under the lordship of Christ so he won't be disqualified.

Not because he's afraid of losing salvation. But because he's afraid of wasting his calling. Most of us are not in

danger of losing our salvation. But in danger of losing our focus.

When you begin to neglect church activities you are getting spiritually weak. When you move from church to church you are joggling aimlessly.

When you lose focus on Christ you will be drifting instead of running the race.

Not because we don't love Jesus Christ, but because we forget what we're running for.

#### **Not for the Prize that Fade.**

**1 Timothy 4:8** Physical exercise has some value, but spiritual exercise is much more important because it promises a reward in both this life and the life to come.

There is nothing sinful in physical activities but they are temporary and tends towards emptiness, unprofitable pursuits in terms of running the race. Know that learning the way of salvation and operating by faith and a life that honors God is what is truly beneficial, because it produces is an eternal glory.

Paul says: The world does it to receive a perishable wreath, but we, an imperishable one. In Christ, we run for a reward that will not fade, or get lost overtime. We run for joy because our reward is eternity.

We run for holiness; Christ is waiting at the finishing line. He will come to collect his own for celebrations. He empowers every step of the righteous to finish strong.

#### **If salvation Matters to you then run the race with care.**

**Philippians 2:12** Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

- ✓ Do not drift through your days.
- ✓ Do not run aimlessly.
- ✓ Run like the Christian life matters—because it does.
- ✓ Run with your eyes on Jesus. He has set the example and paved the way.
- ✓ Run for the only prize that lasts eternity.

### “Living For Christ with Intention.”

There are a lot of things that we do halfheartedly. There are a lot of things in life that we do that way. Even cleaning the surroundings, we just don't care that much about doing it well.

When you walk to a point where your heart becomes detached from the service of God you have come to a place where you are no longer active and deliberately living the non-Christian life with purpose and with intention. You are no more in the race.

Paul has told us in **1 Corinthians**, that some brethren are carnal in the church. Though they had a relationship with the Lord, they were living their lives with one foot in Christ and the other in the world. They would show up to the church services on Sunday but during the week they are living their lives much like the unbeliever. This is a confused mind.

They considered themselves followers of Christ, but they are not following in a lot of areas of their lives. **Gal. 5:19-21**. Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Only those who follow in such a way in the fruit of the spirit will obtain a prize. **Gal 5:22-26**. Against such there is no law.

### We will be judged according to our works.

**2 Corinthians 5** tells us, according to our works, whether they were good or whether they were bad, and we will be

rewarded for the things that we did that were in obedience to the Lord.

**In Hebrews 12:1**. We are told to “*lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*” We get distracted by the things that this world has to offer us thereby derailing us from the way of God. At baptism our desire was to honor God with our life but after that, other things began to creep in. To run well, there are things that we need to do; there are things we need to stop doing. We cannot live like everybody else. Christians are in the world but not of the world.

A lot of times we as Christians are just living our day-to-day lives relying on chance that things will fall into place, that our walk with the Lord will take care of itself. Instead of relying upon a haphazard relationship with God, we need to be focused, we need to be disciplined in running race.

### Recap.

- ✓ No athlete wins without training.
- ✓ To finish strong, you must embrace discipline, patient endurance and perseverance. Lay aside every weight that restricts your progress. **Heb. 12:1, 2 Sam 17:38-39**.
- ✓ Avoid distractions **2 Tim. 2:4**. Do not allow worldly desires to derail your race.
- ✓ Pray without ceasing. **1 Thess 5:17**.
- ✓ Focus on Christ; Peter walked on water as long as his eyes were on Jesus, but began to sink when distracted. **Matt.14:28-30**.
- ✓ Daily obedience and faithfulness develop spiritual stamina.
- ✓ Endure Hardships **2 Tim. 2:3**. Hard times will come, but endurance builds character and strength. Joseph remained disciplined and

- faithful in every season—from the pit to the palace. Gen. 39–41.
- ✓ Finishing strong means holding on to your faith regardless of life's storms. Guard your heart against unbelief. Heb. 3:12–14.
  - ✓ Paul remained faithful despite shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonments, and betrayals. 2 Cor 11:23–28. A crown of life awaits those who endure to the end with joy and faithfulness.
  - ✓ Let heaven's realities shape your values and daily decisions. There is a reward for all who love His appearing and finish well.
  - ✓ Finish your assignment with joy, Act. 20:24, Every believer has a course. Run yours with purpose and passion.
  - ✓ Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him and now He sits at the righthand of God. Hebrews 12:2. Joy of heaven is set before us work for your own.

**Conclusion:**

The way you are living your Christian life now matters.

**Isaiah 40:31** says “those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength...they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.” So shall it be with us.

We can finish strong if we faithfully follow the words of the Lord.

**May the Lord Almighty add blessings to these words in Jesus Name, Amen.**