

Running the Race

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[0 : 00] Everybody, hope you're fed up and drunk up or whatever your key was. And good to have you here for this one o'clock service. And let's say our memory verse together.

Remember how it goes? Psalm 119.97. Oh! Oh! Yeah, oh! Remember, it's emotional, okay? Oh, how love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day.

Say it with me. Are you ready? Psalm 119.97. Oh, how love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day. Psalm 119.97.

May I just encourage you that I hope that this book is constantly on your mind. Even you children, even you teenagers, all you those retirees, we're all about this book right here.

That's what David's talking about in that psalm. Oh, how love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day. Good to have you here this afternoon. And let me begin by just saying that a very famous preacher by the name of Charles Spurgeon started a college at his church.

[1 : 08] That college was for men only, and it was for the ministry, and often numbered anywhere from 200 to 300 students. You'll find this interesting, I think. Not one of those men paid a penny in room board or tuition.

The church paid for everything. They were so burdened to see young men go into ministry. And Spurgeon himself used to stand in front of that student body a lot and share his heart. And we know what he shared because it's in a book that I had to read for seminary called Lectures to My Students.

And one of the things that Spurgeon would share with these young men is he'd stand in front of them and he'd say, Guys, whenever you're preparing a message, whenever you're putting together a sermon, always make sure to insert into that message, that sermon, stories, illustrations, pictures.

Because guys, they're like the windows of the auditorium. This is before electric light. They're like the windows of the auditorium. They let the light in. That is so true, friends. Because theology, doctrine, can be abstract and hard to grasp sometimes.

But when you liken it to an object lesson or a story, an illustration, it's like, Oh, I get it. Now, lest you be tempted to debate that, may I remind you that the world's greatest preacher ever did that all the time.

[2 : 14] His name was Jesus. Ever heard of him? And he was always using stories, illustrations. We call them parables. But what I think a lot of Christians don't know is the fact that parables are all through this book cover to cover.

And one of the pictures that God gives us, now understand, this picture is heaven sent. It's Holy Spirit inspired. It's a picture that God said, Christian, I want you to look at this picture and learn some lessons.

And that picture, people, is that of a marathoner. I was so hoping that my running here for the one o'clock service, but I don't see her. I told her I was going to preach this. Maybe that's why she left. But God says, look at the marathon.

What's implied there is if you know the Lord is your Savior, if you personally have a relationship with him, you are a marathoner. Now, I don't care if you ever run a block in your life.

That's not the point. By analogy, by metaphor, you're a marathoner, and we've got a race. And what I'd like to do here this afternoon, and I won't be long, at least I'll try not to be.

[3 : 18] I'd like to take you to what, there are a number of different references. I'm going to get down here on the main floor. There are a number of different references we can go to that talk about the marathon. But I'd like to take you to my favorite. Is that okay? Hebrews 12.

Would you please, I know it's a very, very familiar portion of Scripture. But let's just kind of, again, just kind of hit it this afternoon and get some blessing from it.

Okay? Sound good? Hebrews 12, and verse number one. And just to kind of refresh your memory, I know many of you haven't memorized, but read along with me, would you please? As I read out loud, he says, Wherefore, which takes you back, and we'll talk about that here in a moment.

Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about or surrounded with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which does so easily attack us or beset us, and let us run with endurance or patience the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus.

Would you look at me, please? So, just kind of to underscore my point, you are a marathoner. Every one of you. Okay? I'm talking about spiritually, you're running a race. And let me tell you about that race.

[4 : 26] A lot of people think, well, my race is, you know, my going to job and providing for my family. Well, no, that's not your race. The unsaved do that. What is your race? Your race, Christian, my race, is anything in your life that you're doing that counts for eternity.

See, the unsaved raise their children. But a Christian is raising their children to love Jesus Christ. That's the race. Your job, the unsaved go to their jobs. But when a Christian goes to their job, the race is using that job to promote Jesus Christ.

Your race, people, is what you're doing, what you're doing today, that counts for eternity. What are you going to do tomorrow that counts for eternity? That is the race. And if you're like most Christians I've seen, you're kind of standing on the side.

That's very sad. God wants you doing stuff every day that counts for eternity. That's our race. And it's easy to get discouraged. It's easy to quit. And so you've got this admonition in Scripture over and over again, like Hebrews 12, that's telling you and imploring with you, run the race.

Don't quit. Run the race. Even though you're retired, run the race. The word retired, by the way, is not in the Bible. Keep running the race. What are you doing? Counts for eternity. One of the greatest soul winner that I've ever seen in my life was in his 80s.

[5 : 41] And he was a dynamic soul winner, passing out tax. He was my father-in-law. And just a phenomenal witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. Folks, we're never done with the race until God calls us home. So your race, all of you, your race is what are you personally doing that counts for eternity.

God has got you in that neighborhood for that reason. He's got you at that job for that reason. He's got you in this area, living in this area for that reason, for you to run the race, to do stuff that counts for eternity. But let's kind of dissect this verse here a little bit, okay?

If you look at it again, it says, Well, folks, let me tell you something about the marathon. The marathon is 26.2 miles.

26.2. That .2 is 385 yards. Why in the world did they tack on two-tenths of a mile? I mean, the marathon, it's based on a famous race way back during Bible times where it was a 26-mile run.

But they've added .2. Why? Do you know why? Why is there a .2 on the 26? Let me tell you why. When they established the Olympics in England, they wanted the finish line to be in front of the queen.

[6 : 51] So they added two-tenths, 385 yards to the race so that the finish line was right in front of the queen because the marathon is the crown jewel of all the events in the Olympics.

It's on the last day, and it's considered the greatest, oldest, most significant race in the Olympics. And so they wanted it to be right in front of the queen. Well, so, friends, a lot of times if you run a real marathon, when you get to that .2, you'll hear, this is for the queen.

This is for the queen. You know, runners, this is for the queen. We hate her. This is for the queen because you don't want to do .2 miles. But I would admonish you that you're not running your race for the queen.

Your finish line is going to be in front of the king of kings and lord of lords. We have a race to run. But you'll notice there in verse number one, it says, Wherefore, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.

Now, I don't know about you, but I have heard well-meaning preachers get on the radio and say, Oh, that cloud of witnesses. That is the saints who've gone on before us.

[7 : 55] And they're watching the race as it unfolds here on the earth. They're watching us from the battlements of heaven. No. No. Why would anybody in heaven want to watch this cesspool called earth?

It would be depressing. There is no depression in heaven. There's nothing but joy. How in the world could you watch what's happening here on the earth and have joy? You can't. They're not watching us. They could care less what's happening down here in this outhouse called earth.

They're all about heaven. That's not what it means. What that great cloud of witnesses, folks, the clue to the meaning of that is the word wherefore. Did you catch that? Wherefore. The very first verse, the very first word of verse number one is the word wherefore.

Now, let me tell you about wherefore. Wherefore and therefore are both what we call literary bridges. Let's pretend I'm standing on wherefore. What the writer of Hebrews, and by the way, Paul and Peter both adore this technique, where they use what we call a literary bridge.

I'm standing on wherefore. What that word does to you, Bible reader, is it takes you back to stuff that has just been written. And because of what's been written, may the following be true.

[9 : 02] This over here is a result of that. This will cause that. Okay? So he's relating two different islands by this bridge wherefore. Well, if you go back to what he has just said, folks, you've just come through Hebrews chapter 11.

Many of you know that Hebrews chapter 11 is famous because it's the great faith chapter. What you have in Hebrews 11 is a hall of fame. A hall of fame for Christians.

When you read Hebrews 11, you're going from episode to episode about Noah and Abraham and all these great men and women. There's some women there. Men and women who lived for God.

They ran the race by faith and were very much used in the kingdom of God. And so what's happening there, friends, is when you read Hebrews 11, you're walking through this hall of fame. Have you ever been to a hall of fame, people?

Well, I was a youth pastor in Springfield, Massachusetts for two years. Many of you know Springfield, Massachusetts is the home of the basketball hall of fame.

[10 : 04] I planned an activity where I took my youth group to the hall of fame. I thought that would be good. That would be a good local thing to do. So I took them all down there, a large group of 20-some teenagers. And after we toured the hall of fame, I took them back to the church and fed them pizza and gave them some soda.

And our speaker that night was a guy that had played basketball. And a very, very phenomenal basketball player and now a pastor was our speaker. Okay? So great activity. So here, let me tell you what happened. I took all these teenagers down to the hall of fame.

And I had gotten a group raid, and so I told them, I said, okay, we're going to be here for two hours. You know, watch your testimony. Nobody leave the building because it was on a busy highway, busy freeway. And nobody leave the building.

Stay in the building. But, you know, be careful. Well, folks, you know how teenagers are. I said, okay, I'll see you back here at 5 o'clock. And, you know, get away from the leadership. Get away from the adults. And especially the guys, boom, they were gone.

There were a few girls left behind. And my wife was with me. And when my wife is with me, I have to behave myself. I can't act like the teenagers. And so the instructions, and we always have to obey the instructions when my wife is with me.

[11 : 07] The instructions say, follow the yellow line. So we followed the yellow line into a large room. And the yellow line took us right up to what looked like a curio cabinet, kind of a glass case.

And inside this glass case was a pair of high-top Converse sneakers that you could have used as kayaks. They were massive. There was a pair of shorts that you ladies could have used as culottes.

There was a jersey that you men could have used as a pup tent. I mean, it was massive. And all this gear, sweatbands and autographs and pictures of the guy that wore this uniform, his name was Wilt Chamberlain.

There was a big, huge plaque on the side that talked about the career of Wilt Chamberlain. And my little wife, who's very, very smart, opposite to track, likes to read information like that. And so we stood there for a while while my little wife kind of got educated about Wilt Chamberlain.

I already knew all about Wilt Chamberlain. But I was very patient as a good husband and waited for her to read it. And then the yellow line took us to the next glass case. The next glass case had a massive pair of sneakers, shorts, jerseys, pictures of Bill Russell who played for the Celtics.

[12 : 08] Bill Russell was Wilt Chamberlain's nemesis. The both of them went at it for years and years. And so we read, my little wife read all about the career of Bill Russell. But then the yellow line took us to another glass case of Cassie Russell and just, you know, all these great, well, folks, after about 15 minutes of this, I said to my wife, I said, Lori, I really probably should check on the guys.

And she laughed. She said, you're bored, aren't you? I said, yeah, but I really should go check on them. Well, I'm going to stay in here. I'm enjoying this. She said, you can do it and I'll be fine. She's very, oh, she's that sweetie.

And I know some of you have met her, so you kind of know where I speak. But anyway, so I left them to go find the guys. And I needed to find those guys because they could be ornery. I know that shocks you, teen guys being ornery.

But I thought, I better find them. Well, I went all over the first floor. I couldn't find them. I did find some of the girls. They were already bored sitting on a bench in the hallway. I went up to the second story.

Went all over the place. Couldn't find them. I thought, where are those turkeys? I bet they left the building and went to the 7-Eleven next door. I finally went up to the top story. And I went to the last room on the right. And there they all were.

[13 : 17] And let me tell you what happened. I stepped into that last room. And immediately, I was on a conveyor belt. The conveyor belt was going sideways about this fast. And right here in front of you was a whole rack of constantly being fed basketballs.

And out here where all of you were sitting were rims and backboards of various heights and various distances. And you could take one of these balls and shoot your heart's delight at all these different rims and backboards.

And then the conveyor belt had you back out in the hallway on the other side of the room. But I learned from the guys, because that's where they all were. I learned from the guys that all I had to do was just run around the back wall.

All you had to do was run around the back wall and you could get right back on the conveyor belt. And friends, I'll be honest with you. That's where I spent the rest of my time. And I have no desire.

I have no desire ever to go back to the Hall of Fame. Let me tell you why. I know this is going to shock you. I know it's going to hurt my love offering. But you are looking at a dude who has never played in the NBA.

[14 : 19] I have never played professional basketball. I don't have a whole lot in common with that world. I know that shocks you. But I am not. And I really, I don't. It doesn't buzz my buzzer.

You understand? I don't have a... But friends, let me. I'm having some fun with you. But let me tell you about this Hall of Fame. Unlike the NBA Hall of Fame, this Hall of Fame called Hebrews 11, you and I have a whole lot in common.

We're just like those dudes. We're just like those dudettes. They had never seen heaven. They had never seen Jesus Christ. They had never seen God.

But by faith, they lived. I live. I live. Oh. That's me.

As we go to... .. What's all happened? But he knew there was a city prepared for him by God.

[15 : 22] You go to another glass case called Abraham. You go to another glass case called Jonah. You go to another glass case called David. You go to another glass case called Daniel. And you go to all these glass cases. Folks, why?

Why do you and I need a Hall of Fame? Because the Bible tells you in Romans chapter 15, for whatsoever things were written aforetime, Hall of Fame, for whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we, I'm talking about New England Christians, that we through patience and comfort of Scripture might have hope.

When you read the Bible, people, and that's what Hebrews 11 is all about, when you and I read the Bible, we get encouraged, we get strengthened, we get motivated, we get energized. I'm using my words very carefully.

You and I get energized by the Word of God. When we spend time in that Hall of Fame, you and I are encouraged to run our race. And what is our race? What are you doing that counts for eternity?

I don't care what your job is. I don't care where you live. What I do care about here this afternoon is what are you doing that counts for eternity? What are you doing tomorrow that counts for eternity? Are you with me?

[16 : 32] Do you understand that? And so when you come to a picture like this, God is trying to get you to understand that you are a marathoner, that you're going to be held accountable for the way that you ran your race.

You're not accountable for your pastor. You're not accountable for your wife. You're not accountable for your husband. You are accountable for you. And you by yourself will stand in front of the Lord and give an account for the way that you ran your race.

So you come to this verse called verse number one of Hebrews chapter 12, and you're being encouraged after reading that hall of fame to be just like Abraham, be just like David, be just like Noah.

None of you have seen God. None of you have seen heaven. None of you have seen Jesus Christ. But by faith, you do what pleases him. Could I get an amen? You do what pleases him. All right? So he says, does he, in verse number one, you look at it again, he says, Now watch this.

Let us live every way that so easily be set as though. Lay aside, people, describes a phenomenon that I did this morning. I'm an evangelist.

[17 : 42] And by virtue of my calling, I sleep in a lot of strange places. And I believe by virtue of my calling, God has gifted me. There could be some debate here.

I'm not going to argue with you. But I think that God has gifted me with the ability to sleep anywhere, anyhow, anyway. I can sleep in any bed. I can sleep in the plane. In fact, I like to tell congregations that I like to die like my grandfather, peaceful in his sleep, unlike the other three screaming passengers in his car.

I can sleep anyway, anyhow, anyway. Okay? So let me tell you what happened. And this morning, I slept very well last night in a hotel. Thank you very much for putting me up there.

I love hotels. And the first thing that crossed my mind this morning when I opened my eyes was, where am I? And very quickly, I was able to do this. Oh, yes, I'm in Maine.

I like Maine. I do. I like Maine. I love Maine. I love coming here. Not during this weather, but I love Maine. I'm in Maine, and I'm going to be preaching in a couple hours. If we have a service, and I looked out the window, and there was all ice skate in my parking lot, and I thought, but Maine's tough.

[18 : 51] They'll probably still have church. And you did. Good for you. I'm impressed. But I was wearing at that moment an article of clothing that we call in my family, jammies.

Now, if I showed up this morning to preach, if I were to bed last night, that guy over there would not let me in the building. It would be obscene. It would be weird. Some of you are thinking, well, what do you wear?

None of your business. But we call them, we call them jammies, okay? So I'm going to throw a Bible word at you, Christians. In order to do what I'm doing right now, I had to lay aside my jammies in order to put on what I thought would be appropriate.

Every one of you are called to do the same thing. Did you see what verse 1 said? Look at it again. Seeing we are encompassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside.

That word lay aside, ladies and men, literally means to take off clothing. And what are you taking off now as a runner? What are you taking off as a Christian? Christian, you're taking off sin.

[19 : 55] Stop it. Stop it. You're the one in control. And now that you're saved, you're going to run the right kind of race. If you don't, it's going to slow you down. It's going to ruin your race. You've got to get rid of sin, sir.

You've got to get rid of sin. And I'll be honest with you, and this is going to offend some of you, but I'm going to say it anyway. Some of the ornery Christians I've ever met are retired.

My point is you never outgrow it. You never outgrow your sin. Retirees can be stubborn, arrogant, belligerent. I've been doing it this way. Get out of my face, bucko.

And stubbornness is the sin of witchcraft. God hates pride. He hates stubbornness. And friends, so all of us, my point is this.

Are all retirees ornery? No, that's not what I'm saying at all. What I am saying is this. We're all in this together. None of you have outgrown this verse. None of you. It's a constant battle, even in my 60s, soon to be 70.

[20 : 55] I'm still in this battle where I have to daily, I have to have to, moment by moment, take off sin. Take it off. Lady, take it off, sir. Take it off your sin. If you don't, it's going to hurt your race.

And if you're really saved, you don't want to hurt your race. You want to be the right kind of runner for Jesus Christ, especially as you study that Hall of Fame. Could I get an amen? Are you with me?

Okay, so he says, therefore, laying aside every sin that does so, and it talks about sin. What does sin like to do to you? It likes to beset you.

Did you catch that in your Bible, Christians? Your sin likes to beset you. That's what the Bible just told you. That word beset, people, means to attack. It means to attack.

Every one of you that are runners, every one of you that are saved, you're under attack. What's attacking you? Your sin. Your sin. Every one of you, no exception, you're all under attack.

[21 : 52] Folks, I don't know what it is about runners, but I have been attacked so many times by dogs. I don't know what it is about dogs and runners, but I think that I probably have steak sauce on my legs.

I don't know, but I have been attacked so many times. I want to tell you about one. Many years ago, when my wife and I were newlyweds, we lived in the suburbs of Greenville, South Carolina, where we now live now again.

And I had a, I was a soccer coach at the time, and I was working in a sporting goods store, and I used to like to run, you know, a couple miles a day just to stay in shape for soccer and tennis. And, but, there was a, there was a four-mile course I like to run that went around a golf course there in Greenville.

And it was a beautiful run. It was kind of rolling hills, and I went right by the base of Paris Mountain, and there was a mansion right there where, where Clay Barrels used to live. He was the music teacher for Billy Graham.

And it was, it was just that run, that golf, it was a nice run. So I, I'd be on that run. I'll kind of act it out for you. I would be on that run, and I'd be going in this direction, and I would come to an intersection, a T, where I could go straight, or I could turn left.

[23 : 05] If I went straight, my four-mile run would turn into a five-mile run. But if I turn left, it was going to be a four-mile run. When I would turn left, I'm, I'm exactly halfway. I'm two miles from home. And right here at the corner, kind of cattywampus in the corner, was a house, kind of a ranch house.

And in the backyard of that ranch house, there was a pit bull. And every time that pit bull heard me coming in, or heard me long before it saw me, I would turn that corner, and that pit bull was always coming at me as hard as it could, but it would never remember.

And when it was coming at me, you need to understand, it was, just like that, okay? I hated my guts. But it would never remember, I'm on a leash.

And you'd see it come to the end of its leash, and you'd hear this. And the thing would fly up in the air and land on its behind in red dust that we have there in Carolina. But here was the fascinating thing, people.

It would then back up and do it again. So you heard this and saw this. I got fascinated by this idiot.

[24 : 10] And I shouldn't tell you this, but I used to stop and taunt it. It was fun. I mean, we get so mad, the hackles are all up.

I mean, it's drool and slobbering. Well, one day, I'm on that run. I turned the corner, and sure enough, what's coming at me? Loose.

Folks, this is a pit bull. Loose. I knew, I'm going to die. I'm going to die. I immediately looked for rocks or sticks to kind of protect myself, and of course, there was a shortage of them that day in Greenville.

Nothing. And so, when that dog got about from me to this fine young lady right here, when that dog got about that far from me, it leaped for my arm. I brought my arm up, and I hit it as hard as I could across the snout, and I knocked it off center, and it bit and clamped hard into my shoulder.

The momentum of that dog just about knocked me over, but understand, I'm 26 years old and a lot stronger back then than I am now. That thing just about knocked me over, but I kept my balance, and it lost its grip, no doubt tearing flesh.

[25 : 20] It lost its grip and went rolling along the pavement. My, as you can sure, I'm sure you can understand, my adrenaline is pumping. And I turned around, and I started running really fast backwards, ready for more fight, when just then, providentially, a little white car came screeching to a stop between me and that dog, and a woman jumped out of the passenger seat and grabbed me.

And literally, she literally grabbed me and threw me in her back seat. She was a big lady, come on. Threw me in her back seat while her husband or boyfriend or whatever he was got control of this dog.

Now, folks, let me tell you what happened. Excuse me, cigarettes. I'm in the back seat. I'm in the back seat just shaking.

I've had a near-death experience. Can you understand? Can you appreciate it? And I knew it got me. I knew there's got to be carnage. And I kept dabbing there and thinking, emergency room. And the lady saw me doing this.

She heard me first and she turned around and she said, son, relax. We had its teeth pulled. That dumb dog tried to gum me to death.

[26 : 39] They drove me a couple hundred yards down the road. They let me out, told me to have a good day, and I'll be honest with you, I never ran that loop again. Scared me so badly. But ladies and gentlemen, I share that with you.

And thank you for the two of you that laughed. It means you're awake. I share that story with you because what a picture of you and me. You're under attack. It's going for your throat.

That's your sin. Your pride. Your arrogance. Your stubbornness. Your agenda. Your flesh. It's coming after you. You're under attack, runners. You're under attack.

But let me comfort you with something. You've got a Savior. Who's removed the teeth. There's nothing you can't have victory over, sir, including your thought life. There's nothing, ma'am, that you can't have victory over.

You've got a Savior who's removed the teeth. You get his power by spending time in his book. You get his power by spending time with his breath called the Word of God.

[27 : 38] You and I are energized as it says there in 1 Thessalonians. You may hear this again this week. I love this verse. 1 Thessalonians 2.13. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing because when you receive the Word, you receive it not as a word of men but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

That word effectually worketh means to energize. Folks, the Word of God does. If you're not spending time, good time every day in the Word of God, I can guarantee you're not a very good runner. You're not having victory for sin.

That should bother you. If you're a real believer, that should bother you. You want to have a good race. If you want to use, you want to be energized. The Bible endeavors to do that to make you a good runner.

You've got to save your Christian. Amen. You all with me? Say amen, would you? I just want to make sure you're awake. Okay, now watch this, would you? Watch this. Verse 2.

Looking to Jesus. Folks, every good runner, every good runner, always has a goal.

[28 : 46] I'm doing a three-mile run tomorrow. I'm looking forward to the finish line. I can't wait until it's over. Every good runner has a goal. It might be a marathon, whether it's a marathon, you're looking forward to the finish line.

Every good runner is always focused on what's ahead. A bad runner, and you'll never see this in the Olympics because they don't let bad runners never make the Olympics. But you'll never see a runner in the Olympics doing this.

Looking back. Never. It's always what's ahead. And friends, what you are told by verse 2 is now that you belong to Jesus Christ, now that you're on His team, every one of you, you've got a goal.

And that goal is the Lord Jesus Christ pleasing Him, living for Him, knowing that you're going to see Him face to face, knowing that you're going to know Him personally face to face. That's our goal. That's what we're all about.

You're going to give an account for the way that you ran to Jesus Himself. Every one of us, we've got a goal. We're all about looking at Lord Jesus Christ. And let me tell you how that fleshes out, folks.

[29 : 46] When you're looking unto Jesus, you're very concerned about everything in your life pleasing Him. What does the Lord think of what I'm watching on TV? What does the Lord think about the internet side I'm going to?

What does the Lord think about my attitude towards my pastor? What does the Lord think about the way I'm treating my wife? What does the Lord think about the way I'm treating my employee? What does the Lord think of the way I'm using my mouth right now?

Folks, we're constantly obsessed with what in the world does the Lord think? That's what it means to look unto Jesus. We're very, very concerned with everything in my life being what He wants, what He's pleased with.

Folks, I'm not a weirdo. I'm a Christian. And that's the way a healthy runner's like. We're all about what does Jesus Christ think of my attitude right now? What does He think about where I'm at right now Wednesday night when I should be in church?

What does the Lord think? What does the Lord think? What does the Lord think? What does the Lord think? That's a good runner. That's a good runner, people. And that's what it's talking about here when it says looking unto Jesus.

[30 : 46] Now, here's the problem. Years ago, I used to live in Chicago. Ever heard of it? I used to live in Chicago. And I was there.

We lived there for four years. Actually, I lived there twice. The first time I was there, I lived there for two years before I was married. Then after I... Anyway, all that's irrelevant. One night, I came home from the ministry and my wife was in the kitchen.

She's a great cook. She's a wonderful cook. And she was making us dinner. My son was sitting in a high chair. That'll tell you how many years ago it was. My son was in a high chair and I walked in the front door and as I told you, my wife's in the kitchen and I had installed a little under the cupboard colored TV, wired cable to it because she loves to watch the news.

She loves the news. Every night when we go to bed at 11 o'clock, we have to watch 15, 20 minutes of the news. It's always been a bone of contention in our marriage, but I always give in because I'm a good husband.

But she was watching the news, okay, the 5 o'clock news. So I went into the kitchen, gave her a kiss, gave my son a kiss and got out of there because I'll tell you about me. I'm not afraid to admit that's not my shame.

[31 : 57] I hate the news. I never watch the news. It's always the same depressing stuff. I hate the news. I know you're not like that. I am. So just leave me alone. I hate the news.

I hate to watch it. I hate everything about it. It's not even news. Anyway, let's not go down that road. Thank you. Whoever said that. Thank you. As I'm upstairs, changing out of my suit into some sweats, no doubt, my sweet little wife's voice came wafting up the stairs.

Mike, come here. I want you to see this. Well, folks, let me tell you what's happened. She's already seen the 5 o'clock edition. She's now watching the 6 o'clock edition, and you know how they do that.

They report the depressing stuff at 5. They repeat the same depressing stuff at 6. She knew it was coming. So I fired back down the stairs. Lori, no thank you.

I'm good. There was silence. That sweet voice came wafting up the stairs. Michael. And whenever she uses the word Michael, it's over. I melt. Michael, please come here.

[33 : 01] I want you to see this. So I went down the stairs, not with the best attitude. Went down the stairs into the kitchen, and what they were doing is they're on the news. It was a commercial break. So we watched the end of the commercial, and here's the story that came on that she wanted me to see.

Evidently, the night before, in the Chicago area, there had been a dog race. I don't know if you know anything about dog racing, but it's nothing but a gambling event.

But what they do in a dog race is they've got these specially bred dogs called greyhounds. They put a bib on each dog with a different number on it. They then put these dogs, just like in a horse raid, in a stall.

And when the race starts, the front of that stall will fly open, and these muzzled greyhounds immediately take off chasing what is called a fake rabbit on the inside rail.

I'm told that they spray that fake rabbit with the aroma that makes a dog go, whoa. That rabbit's controlled remotely by some officer in the stands, and that rabbit takes off, and all 8 to 12 dogs take off as fast as they can after that rabbit.

[34 : 10] The track is probably about the same size as the horse track, so if you want to visualize this in your mind, that's kind of what you're looking at. These dogs are incredibly fast. They showed the whole race on the news. The dogs took off, and remember, ladies, they're muzzled.

The dogs took off. They went down the straightaway. They went around the corner, and they went around the back stretch. The finish line's right here where Jared's sitting right down there.

These dogs came around that corner, and this is at night under the lights, came around that corner, and just as they're coming around that corner about to go down the straightaway, you see a silhouetted figure down here by the wire mesh fence, and this dude was standing there just as the lead dog got close to him.

This dude tossed right in front of that pack of dogs, a live, furry cat, a live cat. The cat, as cat always do, landed on all four paws right in front of the lead dog.

The cat was fast. It immediately turned as fast as it could and ran to the fence and went up the fence and leapt out into the safety of the darkness of night.

[35 : 22] In the wake of that cat, you saw the lead dog finish line down there going as fast as he can after that fake rabbit, peripheral vision, cat. The lead dog immediately veered off course and went as fast as he could right into that wire mesh fence along with all 11 dogs behind him.

I don't know if you've ever crashed into a wire mesh fence. I can tell you from experience that it will send you back as fast as you went in. It's almost like a trampoline. And so on the news, you saw all 12 dogs go crashing into that fence.

There was a massive, massive dog wreck with hooves and muzzles and noses and this stuff all over the place. Where's the cat? Where's the cat? The commentators came back on.

They were all laughing. I'm in the kitchen laughing. And I'll be honest with you, people. If that always happened at a dog race, I'd go. I'd go.

In fact, I would even pay extra to be the cat tosser. Would you? That sounds kind of fun. Yeah. Yeah, it sounds kind of fun. And the race got ruined, folks. And thank you for the two of you that laughed.

[36 : 30] That was intended to be funny. Some of you are just glaring at me, but that's okay. I'm glad you're tracking. But friends, what a picture, what a picture tonight, this afternoon, of you. Of you.

I doubt there's anybody here right now that doesn't want to please Jesus Christ. I doubt there's anybody here that doesn't have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Your job is to please right to the finish line.

What does Jesus think? What does Jesus want? I want to please Jesus Christ. I'm his. He's mine. We're a family. We're one and the same. He's in my heart. I'm all about the Lord Jesus Christ. And folks, that's always the position of a real believer.

But yet, all of us have distractions. Cats that come into our lives. Dogs that attack us. Veering us off. That cat might be that money is your agenda, your flesh.

and I wonder how many of us are being distracted from what God really wants to do with your life by all the distractions and they're all over the place, aren't they, Americans?

[37 : 38] Your TV's a distraction, can be. Your money's a distraction, it can be. Your money can be a distraction if it's not a godly marriage. Your children that are wayward can be a distraction.

You know what the Bible says? You're focused back on the Lord Jesus Christ. You're all about what the Lord wants in your life. You're all about pleasing Him. Where does He want you tomorrow night at 6.30?

Where does He want you tonight at 6.30? What does He want in your life? Friends, that is a healthy marathoner. And I would just challenge all of you to examine your race.

What are you like? What are you doing? What are you going to do tomorrow? How many tracks are you going to give out tomorrow? What are you going to do tomorrow that pleases the Lord Jesus Christ? That is the race. It's not going to work.

There's nothing wrong with that, but the unsaved do that. It's not even going to church. The unsaved do that. There are more people this morning in the Catholic than there are in your church. Is God pleased with them? Absolutely not.

[38 : 42] That's a cult. So going to church does not necessarily mean the race. It's going to church for the right reason. To please the Lord Jesus Christ is the right reason. What are you going to do tomorrow?

What are you going to do this week that pleases the Lord Jesus Christ? That is the race. Could we close with a word of prayer? Pastor, shall I dismiss you? Do you want to come up? All right. Folks, good to have you here.

And may I just, before you bow your head, would you like to ask me, could I just pray with you to be in prayer and get on your phone. Use your phone for a good reason. Text people that are not here.

Call them. It would be very loving of you to call people that are not here. Encourage them to come out tomorrow night at 6.30. Tell them you'll take them out for ice cream before or afterwards. You know, that would be a great thing. Again, that would be a godly.

Okay.