

Running the race

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[0:00] Verses 1 and 2, which follows on very well from the song we've just sung. That was presumably, reasonably, we can conclude, written, because the writer who wrote to the Hebrews knew that hardship, challenge, can cause us to lose heart.

And he's written this so that we will not lose heart. But there are two things that I just want to point us to as we begin to get into our first text, which isn't this text, actually.

But it's this. It says, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

And, you know, God has called us to live our lives as believers, as those in a race who are running to win the race.

In other words, we want to go in it with everything we've got, to give our best to live in for him. But two things can trip us up.

Sin, we all understand that. In fact, there's always a lot more to learn about it. But sin can trip us up.

But also, it just says, to throw off things that hinder.

[1:50] There are so many things, often good things, that actually can hinder us from running. And we should treat those things, it seems, the same as sin.

Throw it off. Get rid of it. If it's hindering us, it doesn't matter if it's good, it's hindering. Just like sin, get rid of it. And one of the many things that can be a real hindrance to us is speculation over things we don't really know about.

Or is worrying about things that we don't know the answer to. And there's a lot in life that's like that. We live in a world, don't we, that is absolutely filled with anxiety.

Lots of anxiousness. Lots of people are anxious. And lots of believers are anxious. And maybe you're anxious. And if you're not, there will certainly be times when you will understandably be tempted to be anxious.

You might find yourself just getting anxious. Maybe you're not an anxious kind of person. But there are times when there will be things that will cause anxiety. And those things can hinder us in terms of our walk with the Lord, in terms of our running for him.

[3:17] So, the first verse that we're going to spend a little bit of time thinking about is Deuteronomy 29 and verse 29.

And that is this. It says this. The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of the law.

Okay? So, there's two main parts to that, isn't there? He tells us there are the things that are hidden that belong to God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and our children forever, that we may basically obey him, that we might live well for him.

Okay? And I want to spend a few minutes really thinking about the things, the hidden things that belong to God. Okay? Because it's helpful to think of hidden things as things that, you know, things that we just don't know.

You know, there's, when you think about it, there's so much that God knows that he hasn't revealed to us. In fact, most things, the vast majority of things that there is to possibly know are with God.

[4:33] And we know, really, a tiny fraction of what there is to know. And the things hidden, okay, many of them trouble us.

And I'm just going to go through a whole load of things that are hidden from us, at least for a lot of the time. And those things that are hidden, sometimes they become clear with time.

But for the time being, they're hidden. Okay? So here's one thing. This might particularly apply to anyone who is student sort of age.

Will I get a good job? How will my career pan out? Okay? That might be something that you might think about and put a lot of energy into thinking about.

Here's another couple of questions that are hidden, at least for the time being, for many of us. Will I find a spouse? That's a big thing for many people.

[5:32] So many of these things are to do with the future, aren't they? Will I have security in my life? Lots of people feel insecure.

And one of the main purposes of all that they're doing is to try and get security. Starting out, young families.

And we've got my own daughter. She's about to have a baby. They live in a one-bedroom flat. It's like housing. What am I going to do? You know, you look, particularly if you're sort of still quite young and you've not got onto the housing ladder yet.

Big question, isn't it? Housing is a massive insecurity nowadays. If you're about to get married, or maybe you are married, will I be a good husband?

Can I cut it? As a father? As a mother? As a wife? Will we do a good job of raising up our children? Here's a question.

[6:39] Will my children follow the Lord? These are big questions. And perhaps you have loved ones in your family that aren't following the Lord.

You might still ask that question about them. Friends, relatives, neighbours. Perhaps you're not working.

Will I get a job? Will I ever get a decent job? Perhaps your job is insecure at the moment. And you're wondering about your financial future.

All these things, they're like these things are with God. He knows. But he hasn't revealed them to us. At least not yet.

If we're getting older, how's my retirement going to pan out? How will I age? Where am I going to end up?

[7:50] Will I be separated from my spouse? Am I going to get dementia? So many people do. How will I die?

What's that going to be like? Am I going to be in a home somewhere on my own? We could think about financial worries and concerns.

I guess we're probably all familiar with some of them, at least to some degree. All sorts of questions that might plague us about finances. Pressures right now.

What am I going to do about the rent this month? And then there's all sorts of other things that have been hidden from us. Past experiences.

Maybe you've gone through some really hard times and you're still left with a question. Lord, why? Why did you allow that to happen? Well, these, and we could think of lots of other things, are hidden things, aren't they?

[8:57] They belong to the Lord, our God. And there's not a huge amount that I want to say about that, apart from two things. We'll be spending a bit more time on one of those things.

But here's the first thing. God keeps things from us because he loves us and because he has a purpose and he's working his purpose out. And he knows that revealing his purposes to us could mess up those purposes.

Let's just think about one. Will my children... If I have children... There's another question. Can I have children? Will I have children? But if I have children, Lord, is my child going to come to know the Lord?

Imagine the Lord said, no. Imagine he revealed to you that your child, your firstborn child, you've not got any at the moment, is not going to come to know the Lord. What would you do?

What would you do? Perhaps think, maybe I won't have any children. Now just think, though, if your second child was going to come to know the Lord and you make the decision not to have any children because your first child isn't.

[10:09] Now I know these are difficult things, but you can see the Lord's wisdom in not revealing these things to us. You know, sometimes there is a lady in our church, she's not in our church anymore, but she had a few sons, none of them were following the Lord, and she said, you know, God

told me that they're going to follow the Lord, and she had that sort of faith.

And, you know, I mean, I can't get inside her head, but I'm always suspicious about that because there's nothing in the scriptures that guarantee that our children are going to follow the Lord. And it would seem to me, if God was to start giving individuals guarantees and not others, it's kind of like, what does that say to all the others, you know? But these are hidden things, and God doesn't reveal them because he has his purposes.

And that's just one example. You know, if you knew how you was going to die, or you knew what was going to happen when you get older, that could terrify you now and rob you.

Okay? So, God is wise. In his wisdom, he doesn't reveal things to us that we might think we need to know, and we feel we need to know.

[11:34] Again, let's just think about finance, very briefly. Okay? When we don't trust God for our finances for the future, often that manifests itself something like this.

Lord, please give me security. Give me the answer. We want to see the money in the bank, or we want to know that we're going to get that job, or whatever it might be.

Or we want to know that, you know, whatever it is, the nest egg, the pension scheme, whatever it is, it's all going to come good. We want to know often now. We want to have the security for the future now.

And here's what that's like. It's like saying this to God. Father, give me the money now, because I don't know that I can trust you with it.

That's what it's like saying. I'm not sure that I can trust you with it, so just give it to me now, because actually I think I'm more reliable than you are. That's what it's like saying, isn't it?

[12:35] A lack of faith. And it's understandable that we might get anxious about these things, but it's important for us to recognise that often it's a lack of faith, a lack of trust in God.

So when it comes to the things hidden, okay, we need to recognise that this is God's wisdom, because he has his purposes. That's the first thing. The second thing to recognise is that we need to learn to trust him.

Just to learn to trust him. Realise he is trustworthy. Jesus is trustworthy.

And it's helpful maybe to have an imaginary box. And when something is worrying you that you can't really know the answer to, just have a box, and it's marked things hidden, things belonging to God.

You just put it in that box. That belongs in there. And leave it with the Lord. That's easier said than done, but that's it. That's what we need to do.

[13:49] Just file it. Know that that belongs in that place. That's the Lord's. Okay. But the things revealed belong to us and our children that we may obey the word of the Lord, or the laws of God.

Actually, before we move on to that, let me just give you one other bit of help in terms of the things hidden. For all those things hidden, God has revealed other things.

So, for example, from worrying about our future financial security, what does Jesus say? Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto you.

So, he hasn't told us how, but he has given us his word. He will provide us with everything we need. I'll give you just one more.

And I'll just mention this, because I found this helpful. Will my children be saved? Or you can think of other loved ones that seem like a million miles away.

[15:00] Isaiah 65. I have revealed myself to those who did not ask for me. Isn't that an encouragement? I was found by those who did not seek me.

This is the kind of God that we have. And when we're worried and anxious for our children, verses like that, truths like that, give us hope, don't they?

Now, that's not a promise, but it does give us hope. In other words, we don't look at those that we care for, those we love, and think, there's no sign of any faith. They've got no interest. There's no hope.

No, we don't do that. We say, there's no sign of any faith. There's no interest. They're not looking for God, but you're the God who is found by those who aren't looking. That's how we respond.

And so knowing the truths of God and knowing the promises of God and applying them to those things, many of the things that we've just talked about, is really important.

[15:57] One of our biggest problems as believers is we don't know the truths and the promises of God. Or we've not learned to apply them to the questions that we have, to many of the questions that we have in life.

I'm not going to talk about any more of the promises of God. Actually, no, one more, actually. Let me just share this one with you.

My mother-in-law, she's in a care home. That's caused me to think a lot more about what happens when we get older. And where she's at, most of the patients there have dementia.

And we go and visit her, and the woman in the room next door to her just screams all day. Just always screaming.

She's verbalising things in a voice that I can only say sounds something like Gollum from Lord of the Rings. It's just really strange. And it's like, you know, she probably, you know, 20 years ago, a very different person.

[17:08] We don't know, do we, how we're going to end up. And I remember, I used to think this, I used to think, when I get old, I want to spend sort of the last years of my life while I'm healthy, smuggling Bibles into the most dangerous country in the world until I get caught and martyred.

And I remember people, I used to say, I meant it, and I used to think, people used to say, yeah, you're mad, or probably not take it seriously. But do you know what?

I actually think that's much easier than ageing in a care home over a period of years and remaining faithful to God and full of faith.

That's actually much harder, I think, to do that. But, what does the Lord say? Thinking about all these things.

The Apostle Paul says this in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, he says, talking about, well, we're not sure exactly what he's talking about, people speculate, so I'm not going to go into that, but something was a real problem for Paul, either people, false apostles, people say, or something to do with this health.

[18:21] He says, three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me, but he said, my grace is sufficient for you. My grace is sufficient for you.

You know, and here's what that means. That whatever the future holds for each of us, whatever the future holds, and particularly if it's suffering and hardship, and it might be, because as believers, we're not exempt from that at all.

And if it's suffering and hardship and deeply insecure circumstances, if that's the case, here's what we can do. We can anticipate the special grace of God in those situations.

We can anticipate finding in those very places the faithful Lord Jesus and discovering his faithfulness and sufficiency in ways we wouldn't have dreamed of knowing were it not for those things.

We can anticipate a deeper fellowship with the Lord Jesus. So, the things hidden belong to God.

[19:34] Let's not worry about them. We can pray and we can put them in that box marked hidden things and not allow them to hinder us from our walk with him now.

And, you know, that applies to the church as well. I know that as a church you're in a transitional situation just like we are. So many uncertainties about the future. And I don't know about you, but I want them in our situation all sewn up.

I really want them all sewn up. I want to know that everything's going to come together and really I want to be the other side of the transition and in a good place. And I'm sure that's the same for you. But there are many those things there are many things for you at the moment that are hidden with God. And we just have to trust him.

You know, in Ephesians chapter 6 or sorry end of chapter 5 Paul talks about husbands and wives doesn't he? Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her.

[20:45] You know, as you're in a sort of transitional stage, remember Jesus loves the church. Loves the church. And he's got plans and what you know now is everything you need to know now.

What you've got now is everything you need right now in order to do everything he wants you to be doing right now.

There's nothing that you haven't got that you don't, there's nothing that you need that you haven't got right now. Nothing at all. You have everything that you need right now.

Okay, so there are the things hidden but the things revealed belong to us and our children that we might obey the law of the Lord forever. That we might serve the Lord forever. And so let's turn now to 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

Now in the light of the resurrection, Paul, and all that's achieved by Jesus' life, death and resurrection, Paul writes in verse 58, therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm, let nothing move you, always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know.

[22:11] So here's a thing that's been revealed, right? We've got all the uncertainties, all the things that we don't know about, but here's the thing we absolutely do know about. You can take this to the bank.

Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain. So here's the thing, all those uncertainties, all those things that might cause you to worry and fear are always going to be robbing you of labouring in the Lord.

They're a distraction. Okay? And it says here, always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord. Yeah, you might be tempted to think, I can't give myself fully to the work of the Lord at the moment because I've got all these things going on and I'm worried about this and I don't know about that. Always give yourselves, in the midst of all of that, always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

It says there, therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. you know, when these things come in and plague us and the temptation is to get distracted, no, stand firm, don't let anything move you from being on course in serving the Lord fully.

[23:43] Let nothing move you, nothing at all. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

Now, it's not always obvious to us, is it, how our labour in the Lord is fulfilling purpose.

This is another, actually, of the hidden things of God. None of us knows really what the outcome of our lives and service and ministry will be.

In fact, when you look at your life and your service and your ministry now and you look back at all that you've ever done, you don't know what the outcome is. You might think you do, but you don't. When we get to glory, then the hidden things will be revealed, then we will know the outcome of our ministry.

[24:49] You know, every single encouragement that you ever gave to someone else that you've forgotten about has been noted by the Lord.

Every single act of service that nobody else saw, and you might think, what was the point in that, has been noted by the Lord.

Probably in serving the Lord, you've said things without even realising it, that set a chain of thoughts off in someone else's mind, and just cause them to begin to think about God, maybe.

In countless ways, as we serve the Lord, it all counts, and we have no idea what impact our humble lives, lived in quiet service to the Lord, might have.

life. But one day, it will be revealed. Always give yourselves fully. And so as a church, going through this transitional time, it might be tempting for some of you to think, well, I'll let them work out what's happening, and I'll just sort of sit back in the background a little bit, I'll take my foot off the accelerator, and once they've worked things out, then I'll sort of come back in and get involved again.

[26:20] I hope you can see that that's not the right thing to do.

Actually, now is the time to give yourself fully, because it says always give yourselves fully.

And for those of you, and it's so often the case, isn't it, that there are those in the church, often, I don't know if it's the case here, but it is often in churches where you get those who tend to carry the

lion's share of the weight of the church.

And if that is the case here, then those of you that don't carry the lion's share, you know exactly who you are, I don't, it's the beauty of not being a part of this church. And those of you that do, you know who you are as well.

And for those of you that do carry the lion's share of the work, I want to encourage you to release yourselves from that.

Sometimes we will say things like, but if I don't do it, no one will. Well, then maybe it shouldn't be done. Maybe it shouldn't be done, or at least not by you.

[27:28] But for those of you that tend to step back a little bit, don't do that. You're a Christian. Christian. You're not a spectator. You're a Christian.

You are a servant of the Lord. And he has told you, as well as those that carry the lion's share of the world, he's told you to give yourselves fully, and nothing less than that, to the work of the Lord.

And so, I want to encourage you as a church, and know this, it is not in vain. It is all worth it. And then, as individuals, as individuals in your own lives, of all those things that would hinder you from running, those things right now that are just weighing down on you, that plague your mind, that actually are the hidden things of God.

Maybe speak to an elder to Phil or to one of the deacons or someone else, and share it with them, and ask them to help you. What are the truths of God that I need to be hanging on to and applying and resting in so that I can put this in that box, hidden things, and get on running for the Lord?

Get counsel. That's why God's put you in a church, so you don't have to be plagued and hindered in your walk or run or labour for the Lord.

[29:06] Let's pray. Lord, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that you've called us to run, to throw off everything that hinders as well as the sin that entangles.

Lord, help us to recognise those things that hinder. Lord, I've not talked about the more positive things like pleasures or interests and things, and Lord, often they're good, but if they're hindering us, help us to just throw them off, because they are not worth it.

Serving you is. Thank you, Lord, that we can know deep joy in serving you. Thank you that when we serve you, that we don't serve you alone, but you are at work in us, working out your purposes. And, Lord, thank you for that revelation that we can absolutely stand on, that our labour in the Lord is not in vain.

This is something that we know we can fully give ourselves to. Help us to do it, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

[30:19] Amen.