

Keep your Eyes on the Prize

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[0:00] 1 Corinthians 9, if you've got your Bibles there. I think we'll stand as we read this one. Just stretch your legs one more time! Before I keep you for an hour preaching to you.

! 1 Corinthians 9, verse 24. Paul writes, 1 Corinthians 9, 24. Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize.

So run that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.

I therefore so run, not as uncertainly, so fight I, not as one that beateth the air, but I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Amen. Please be seated. My message today is, keep your eyes on the prize. Keep your eyes on the prize.

[1:16] Paul says, Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize. So run that ye may obtain.

Keep your eyes on the prize. The Christian life is compared to a race. It's a fight. It's a battle.

A race where there's a prize. There's a crown. There's a victory to be won. Will you run so as to be a winner?

Will you win the prize? Are you even in the race yet? Today let's look at how to be a winner in life.

How to be a winner in life. How to be a first class gold medal champion in life. How you can be your best in what really counts, what really matters.

[2:21] How can you reach your highest potential? Keep your eyes on the prize. Paul compares the Christian life to running a race.

And there's many analogies, many reflections we can make on this analogy. Verse 25, Paul says, And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.

He's saying this is something that you have to master. It's something that you have to work hard at. It's something that is a striving for mastery. It's the sense of self-discipline here.

Of course we know the worldly athletes who compete for a mere gold medal have to strive for the mastery. They have to master whatever discipline they are engaged in, whatever sport it is.

They want to strive for the mastery. There's a certain self-discipline. It's going to take self-control.

The Christian life has a sense of self-control.

[3:34] And I know I was talking with some work colleagues at a session where we were learning about something at the time.

And there was a bit of self-reflection about people and about their different characteristics and qualities. And one of my colleagues said to me, I've never seen you angry.

I've never seen you angry. And she thought that was something that was a bit unusual because she's a person who's got maybe a shorter fuse than me. But that's not to say I don't get angry because I do.

Ask my wife. She'll tell you all the horror stories about me. And she said, how come you don't get angry? And I said, self-control.

Self-control. Because some of the people I work with don't seem to have self-control. At times, they blow up and say things that I wouldn't say.

[4:41] Self-control is something that is a good quality to have, isn't it? To have that self-discipline. That self-control. And now, let me just say this, that I do get angry.

And the Bible says getting angry isn't a sin. It says, be angry, but sin not. So we all have a... the point where we reach, where you get a bit frustrated, a bit angry, a bit annoyed about something, someone, something.

But it says in the Bible, be angry, but sin not. So, in other words, have self-control. We can be angry. We might be fuming, mad about something, steam coming out of our ears, but we don't have swear words coming out of our mouth.

You know, we have a self-control, don't we? That's what we have as Christians. And it's self-discipline. That's what the Christian athlete should have. Self-discipline, self-control.

[5:48] There was an international golfer. Now, I don't know why on earth people play that stupid game called golf, but there was this man, and his name was Gary Player. He was one of the most successful international golfers of all time.

And people lost count of how many times he'd won and how successful he was. And someone said to him, as often people did, they said, I'd give anything if I could hit a golf ball like you.

You know, this is something people often would say to him because he'd just got that knack, the way he hit that ball, and it just went where it should have gone. And I'd give anything if I could hit a golf ball like you.

And there was one particularly gruelling day on the links, and someone came up to Gary Player, and they said this same thing. I'd give anything to hit a golf ball like you.

And he corrected them. He said, No, you wouldn't. You'd give anything to hit a golf ball like me if it were easy. Player then listed the things that one would have to do in order to achieve his level of play.

[7:04] He said, You've got to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning, go out and hit a thousand golf balls. A thousand golf balls. Walk up to the clubhouse to put a bandage on your hand where it started bleeding, then go and hit another thousand golf balls.

That's what it takes to hit a golf ball like me. He strove for the mastery of that sport called golf. And Paul used the same analogy about the Christian life. Paul said that we're in training for a spiritual journey like a world-class athlete.

Keep your eyes on the prize. He says he wanted to have the self-control to finish the race well. He wanted to finish the race well. The race of life.

And the effective Christian will identify the habits that they need to build into their life. Habits like fitness, spiritual fitness, balance between work and home, being responsible in their work and home life.

[8:15] It's about the whole of life. You know, Christianity isn't something we clock on and clock off of. It's not something you think, oh, I'll just, you know, put my Christian persona on and then you're something else, elsewhere.

Self-control is important. Brother, sister. There was a preacher called Sam Jones and this preacher was holding revival meetings.

In America, they call them revival meetings where they have a special campaign with lots of preaching and inviting people to come and hear the gospel. And he called his revival meetings quitting meetings.

He called them quitting meetings. And he was preaching to Christians, urging them to give up the sinful practices in their lives. So he was urging them to get right with God, to live right.

And many people were promising at these meetings, so promising, for example, to quit swearing, to quit drinking, smoking, lying, gossiping, or anything else that they felt was displeasing to the Lord that was holding them back, stopping them being an effective Christian.

[9:34] And one day, Jones asked a woman, he came up to a woman and he said, just what is it that you are quitting? And she said, preacher, I'm guilty of not doing anything.

And I'm going to quit doing that too. You know, sometimes we can just be a Christian who doesn't do anything. We need to quit not doing anything, don't we?

Get doing something. So even though she had no bad habits to give up, she wasn't actively living to please God. And she wanted to quit doing that too.

She wanted to quit not actively living for God. She wanted to start actively living for God. Keep your eyes on the prize.

So strap on your shoes and get going. Discipline yourself to run the race, the earthly race of your Christian life with strength and purpose, self-control.

[10:39] It's one of the fruit of the Spirit. Temperance. Paul says in this passage that we read, every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.

Temperate. Temperate. It means self-control. It means self-restrained. Self-control. It means keeping you cool.

It means keeping you composure. Not being a hothead. And what's the operative of temperance? It's going blotto, paralytic, drunk.

It's quite a contrast, isn't it? Be rather temperate. Self-controlled. Self-control. Self-control will transform your character. It will hold you steady.

It will bring you under the Holy Spirit's control. That you'd rather be filled with the Spirit. Temperate. Self-control.

[11:41] It means being persistent. Self-control. Look to Hebrews 12. Another running passage. Another instruction instruction from God's instruction manual for the Christian racer.

Another picture of this running race, this keeping your eyes on the prize, this Christian race that we run, that we're all in, that know Him.

Hebrews 12 from verse 1 through 2. A familiar one. It says, Wherefore, seeing, we also are compassed about, so we're surrounded, it's saying, every point of the compass, we're surrounded, we're compassed about, with so great a cloud of witnesses.

Let us lay aside every weight, every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us. And let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We've heard about self-control. Another aspect for the Christian runner is stamina. Stamina. Hebrews 12 1 through 2.

[13:13] Run with patience. Patience or perseverance. There's a stamina here.

Keep your eyes on the prize so run that you may obtain. Life is a training ground. This is a long distance event. The Christian walk, the Christian life.

Life is a training ground. It's a place of training. Sometimes you don't know what's going to be thrown at you next, do you? Who can identify with that? You don't know where it's going to come. What's going to hit me next? And sometimes we've just got to keep our eyes on the prize. Amen? Stamina. Persevere. Run the race with patience.

Living the spiritual life takes training. It takes stamina. It takes grit. It takes exertion. And it's going to take faith.

[14:11] Verse 2. looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. The author, he starts it, he wrote the book, and the finisher.

He'll see us from A to Z, A to Z, alpha to omega, beginning to end, author to finisher of our faith. Looking unto him.

It says, run the race with patience. It means perseverance. Aiming for the long haul. It's not a sprint. It's a long distance event. And this word race, agon, if you've got a Greek Bible, agon.

Where we get the word what? Agony. Agonize. Agony. The race, this word race, is an agon. There's a certain amount of exertion to it.

There's an agonizing. There's an effort. And it signifies in a race where there's that aching desire in our body to say, I'm over it.

[15:17] You know, when you, I know as a young man I would run obstacle courses and longer distance events and up hills and down dales and round this and that and all sorts of things to race around and through.

And if you've ever run such a race, it's easy to feel like I'm over it. I just want to quit. I just want to stop and have a rest, have an afternoon siesta already.

And it's not this race, if you ever run distance, you know what I mean. It's not a sitting down, a walk, a crawl, a jog, a lying down.

Every one of us has a specific course mapped out for us. Your race is different from mine, but I trust that you're heading down that same track to that one prize looking unto Jesus.

That's what counts. We've all got a different course mapped out for us and it's unique to each one of us. And some roads are relatively straight, some are windy, some are, they seem like they're all uphill.

[16:27] or it's a long track. And some, it seems longer, longer and longer still. But the common characteristic that we all should have is to run the race with patience, stamina, perseverance, stick to it, stick to it.

It's that determination that nothing is going to stop me, nothing is going to deter me. I'm going to go steadily onwards and upwards and I'll refuse to be deflected, no matter what gets thrown at me through life.

So the Christian race, the Christian life is for the faithful plotters who will put one foot ahead of another by faith, one foot in front of the other, fast or slow, strong or weak, to keep on keeping on. God, that's what we need to be, such a people. And there's many bumps and bruises and strains and pains and disappointments and challenges along this life's track.

But we must never give up, persevere, keep on trusting the author and the finisher of our faith, looking unto Jesus.

[17:48] believers. So I urge one and all to this stamina, this perseverance, to keep on keeping on, keep on loving each other, keep on serving others, keep on praying, keep on witnessing to your family, to friends, keep wanting more of God, keep faithful in church, keep on serving, keep on giving, keep on reading the Bible, run the race with patience, with perseverance, run this race with determination, with courage, run this race, keep on running.

And we're called to run the race with endurance. You know, tired and weary runners need the help of endurance. You know, there's some wounded and hurting runners on this race track.

Amen. Sometimes we need to get our arm around people and help them get back on the track.

Amen. That's what we need to be, such a people that we can support one another, the wounded and the hurting, who need the healing of endurance.

That hope of endurance that holds us steady. And I know I've reflected on this of late too, but the writer of Hebrews 12, he says to cast away that weight, the things that hold us, that dog our steps, that weight of sin, to reduce that.

So those things that we hang on to, we need to let go of them. They're holding us back. They're holding us back in this race. You know, it's the company that we keep taking us away from living for God.

[19:34] And the things in our life that we need to get rid of that dead weight, those things that slow us down, those things that hang on to us, and we hang on to, let go of it, let it go.

Looking unto Jesus. Keeping our eyes on the prize. Our goal is the Lord Jesus. And our eyes are fastened on him. It's got the sense of it, we really got that tunnel vision, we've got that real, our eyes are glued on Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

We're looking unto him. Our eyes are fastened on him. As we live our lives, here's the one focus, the one foundation of our faith. And we're aiming for excellence, we're keeping our eyes on the prize, we want to please our Lord and Master.

Not settle for second best, but to aim high. Philippians 2, 12-13, Paul says, wherefore my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. There's a sense where there's an exertion, there's a work. Not that that work saves us, but that our salvation works.

[20:54] our salvation prompts us to do, to be. Stamina. It's got the sense of working at it, keeping at it, and you'll get results.

Keep your eyes on the prize. We've talked about self-control.

We've talked about stamina. The prize. France, there's a sure reward. This reward is sure. It's certain.

Paul understood the importance of discipline in this analogy of a running race as a picture of the Christian life as like a running race.

And the importance of discipline, of perseverance. And in 1 Corinthians 9, he talks about this Christian life and character. it's like an event in the Olympics, like a marathon race.

[21:56] And in those days, back in that time, in the time where the Olympics was kind of just a new kind of thing in ancient Greece and the various marathon and athletic events they would hold, they had this marathon race.

And in those days, the winners of the race wore crowns that were made out of leaves. And I've said this in recent time, but this laurel wreath, so this leaf out of flowers and leaves.

And it would wilt within a few hours. So it was corruptible. It would corrupt. It would wilt and die, dry up, frizzle up and fall off, just like leaves falling off a tree.

And Paul compared this with how some people live their lives for such a crown. You know, how vain and hopeless and empty to live our life for a corruptible crown.

Even if it's a gold medal. Pfft. It's nothing. In the context of eternity, it's nothing. And Paul compares with how some people live for the glory and praises of this world, which are short lived.

[23:18] You know, one day you'll be a has-been. You know, your body's not going to go the distance. And yet some people live for the glory and praise of some short-lived, earthly fancy, fancy.

But the Christian's prize, this sure reward, this ultimate prize that lies ahead for us, is eternal. Eternal. It's incorruptible.

In other words, it will never fade or wear out. It is forever. Forever. We have a sure reward. 2 Timothy 4, verse 8. Paul again pictures this running race.

He says, Henceforth, so, down that track, he says, There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me at that day.

And not to me only, but unto all them also that love is appearing. Keep your eyes on the prize.

We're getting closer to the finishing line every day. Every day you're closer to your sure reward.

[24:27] That great reward lies ahead. There's nothing in this world as valuable. No other crown compares. No praise, honour or glory compares with this.

When you think of the champions in the Olympics on TV, and as we know, the Olympics is full of all kinds of questionable things, particularly the opening and closing ceremonies and all the goings on to do with the Olympics.

I'm not supporting the Olympics because of many of the messages and things that are associated with the Olympics are ungodly, in fact.

But just as a picture of this athletic competition, when you think of the champions of TV, of the Olympics on TV, and you see how they have just given their complete devotion to performing these amazing feats of the human body, being the very best at what they can be.

And it's amazing that some of these people, they spend their whole lives, they spend their entire childhood already. with that in mind, and preparing for a single event, that in some cases is over within a few minutes.

[26:04] And the amount of training and sacrifice is enormous, all for that single goal, that one event that they strive for, a gold medal, worldwide recognition, to be the best in humanity and that particular thing.

And what a picture that is of the devotion. Life is a marathon, it's not a sprint. And in the marathon, it's not how you start, it's how you finish that matters most.

You might think, well, preacher, I'm a bit of an average kind of Christian, I'm just doing the best I can, just plodding along.

Look, that's true for all of us. That's true for all of us in the sense that we all could do better, we all could aim a bit higher, we could all lift our game, be a bit stronger, a bit more faithful.

It's a marathon. It's not how you start, it's how you finish that matters most. So you might think, well, I've fallen down on that racetrack quite a few times, preacher.

[27:13] I've fouled up, I've committed some penalties, I should be disqualified. It's how you finish, that's what matters.

And you can get back on your feet again, and get back in the race again. Now the Christian race, it's not a competitive event to see who comes first, but it's an endurance run to see who finishes faithfully.

Now there's a story told about a man called Bill Broadhurst, and he entered the Pepsi Challenge, some kind of marathon event, a road race, 10,000 metres, in Omaha, Nebraska.

And ten years earlier, he had surgery for an aneurysm in the brain, and it had left him paralysed on his left side. So his whole left side was paralysed.

And on the misty July morning of 1981, he stood with 1,200 lithe-looking men and women at the starting line. You know, they were all pumped up, all are fired up, muscled up, ready to run, all ready to hit the ground running.

[28:25] And the gun cracked. Bang! The crowd surges forward, and Bill throws his stiff left leg forward. It pivots on it as his right foot hits the ground, and he goes plop, plop, plop as he kind of ambles down the racetrack.

10,000 metres. He's sort of impaired by his left leg being all kind of out of sync. And the pack fades into the distance, and sweat rolls down his face.

Pain pierces his ankle, but he keeps going. Six miles. And two hours and 29 minutes later, Bill reaches the finishing line, and a man approaches him from a group of bystanders.

Bill recognises this man from pictures in the newspaper. He is Bill Rogers. Another Bill. Bill Rogers, the famous marathon runner. Here says Rogers, putting his newly won medal around Bill's neck. You've worked harder for this than I have. Amen? So Broadhurst had also been a winner. It doesn't matter how you start, it's how you finish.

[29:33] Keep your eyes on the prize. Amen? And that's what awaits us, a sure reward. It's crossing the line. It's crossing the finishing line. Now just one last thing to consider, we've looked at, thus far we've looked at self-control.

We've looked at stamina. We've looked at the sure reward. Now let's go right back to the start. To the starting line. To the starting line. Are you in the race yet?

That's what matters. We've been talking about how the Christian life is a race. We've talked about the finishing line. Keep your eyes on the prize. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

He is there at the finishing line. There is a sure reward. And it's important to be sure that you are on the race track. I'm not making an assumption here that everyone is on the race track.

Not everyone is on this race. Some are heading that way. Instead of unto Jesus. Some are heading in some other direction.

[30:41] They're not looking unto Jesus. They're not keeping their eyes on the prize. Not everyone is in this race. So how does it start?

Now I was privileged to talk to a couple of young women yesterday. That wanted to express their faith in Christ. They're looking to be baptised.

And we talked through the message of salvation. And I believe that they had already made such a profession of faith. But we refreshed that commitment.

We revisited that commitment. How do I become a Christian? How do I get on the race track? Not everyone is on this race.

But these young women committed their lives to Christ. They're on the race track. They're heading towards the finishing line. They're keeping their eyes on the prize. And what a blessing.

[31:39] What a joy it is to see such men and women. Who will want to be on the race track. And I put to you today. It's important.

So important. To be sure that you are on the race track. How does it start? It starts when we receive the Lord Jesus Christ. When we receive the Lord Jesus Christ.

As our Lord and Saviour. And we commit ourselves to Him. We trust His work at the cross. In dying for our sin. In paying the price. And we commit our hearts and lives to Him.

Now the great saints of faith in Hebrews 11. In Hebrews 11 it goes on to tell a story. A number of stories about a number of people. Of men and women of faith.

It says by faith Abraham. By faith Isaac. By faith Jacob. By faith Moses. By faith the harlot Rahab. [32:42] By faith. By faith. By faith Noah. By faith Enoch. By faith Abel. By faith. By faith. By faith.

By faith. By faith. Now these ones I was talking to. Were saying. Well what if I die before I get baptised. Baptism has nothing to do with it. Nothing.

By faith. The baptism. Symbolises it. It gives voice to that faith. It declares. It witnesses that faith. By faith. That's the starting line. And. It tells us here. In Hebrews 11. The great saints of faith. In Hebrews 11.

They demonstrate the life of faith. That it really works. And it says we're surrounded about. We're compassed about. With so great a cloud of witnesses. Those men and women.

[33:38] Of yonder year. Who have stood for their faith. They've declared. I stand for Jesus. They've lived the life of faith. Hebrews 12. Gives us one of the most glorious looks.

At the Lord Jesus. Keep your eyes on the prize. Looking unto Jesus. As we run the race of our lives. We must run with our heads up. And our eyes focused on Christ.

And if we run the life of faith. As we trust him. We'll continue to trust him. We'll resist the distractions. And look deeply into his eyes.

Looking unto him. He's the source of our faith. And he's the one. Who makes our faith grow. And he's the one who finishes it. At the finishing line.

As he completes it. As it were. As we're in his presence. And made. Glorious. The Lord Jesus.

[34:32] Has run the race ahead of us. It says he. Endured the cross. Despising the shame. He. Yet he had a joy. It says. There was a joy. That Jesus had. In the cross.

We can't reckon that. Can we? How could anyone. Get joy. Their hands and feet. Nailed. Their back. Thrashed. And bleeding.

And torn. Their skull. Smashed. With thorns. Into their skin. The brutal. Plucking of his beard. The spitting upon him.

The joy. Set before him. He endured the cross. Because of the joy. Set before him. Our Lord. Has run the race ahead. He made himself nothing.

He became a servant. He became. A brutal. A. Bashed. Bruised. Bleeding man. He became human.

[35:31] And then he experienced death. Not any death. But the death of the cross. And the writer of Hebrews says in effect. If the Lord Jesus can do it. You can too.

Because he didn't. He was. He was doing this. For us. For the joy. Of saving us. He endured the cross. Despising the shame.

And he is our model. Our coach. He's there beckoning us on. Come on. Come on. Keep coming. You can do it. You can make it. You know. I know as a.

As a young dad. I would do that. And really embarrass my kids. You know. Who's ever done that? You know. Come on. You know. I must have gone from someone I know.

But you know. But the Lord Jesus is like that. Isn't he? Come on. He's our model. He's gone before us. And he's our coach. In Philipians 2.

[36:28] It says. Let this mind be in you. Which was also in Christ Jesus. Who being in the form of God. Thought it not robbery to be equal with God. But. Made himself of no reputation.

And took upon him the form of a servant. Was made in the likeness of man. Now the Lord Jesus Christ. Is the perfect and ultimate one. Who shows us the course. He shows us the right attitude. He is there. Barracking for us. And prompting us. And encouraging us. He sets the pace. And he leads us to victory. Ultimately the finish line is out there.

In eternity. In heaven. But you've got to be on the right track. Because not everyone's going to that destination. Amen. Looking unto Jesus.

Keep your eyes on the prize. Make sure you're on the running track. The finishing line. Is out there. How can we end well? Not everyone in the Bible. Made it into the hall of faith.

[37:27] Of Hebrews 11. You might want to. Take that as your homework. Read Hebrews 11. But we could see. Men and women. Women of ill repute.

Harlot.

Rahab the harlot. She's listed. As one of the heroes. The heroines of the faith. There's hope for all of us. Amen. That we can be such.

That can be saved. In the hall of faith of Hebrews 11. We could say also. That the Bible has a hall of shame. A hall of shame. Men and women. Who ought to be in Hebrews 11.

But they're conspicuous. By their absence. Christians. And. It tells how. Some. There's a potential for some. To be ashamed before him.

At his coming. You know. That we might have. Really fouled up. But not got it sorted. Brothers and sisters. You know. There's some Christians. Who'll be. Ashamed. Before him.

[38:24] Yeah. Let's finish well. Finish well. The first king of Israel. Saul. He should have been in the hall of faith. But he was in the hall of shame.

He focused more on pleasing the people. Than on pleasing God. The wisest man who ever lived. Solomon. He should be there. But he wasn't listed. He focused more on foreign women.

And their gods. He was led astray. Balaam. Was a good prophet. But he had his eyes on money. That can be a falling. For many. His eyes were so out of focus.

Distracted. That he could not see. The angel in front of his face. And his donkey. Was more focused on God. Than he was. That's Balaam. There's many other examples.

We could give. We're talking about the finishing line. The finishing line. Now. By analogy. We could consider the finishing line.

[39:19] Looking unto Jesus. He's at the finishing line. We could consider the finishing line. I guess the earthly duration of our life. Ends at a finishing line. When we ultimately.

Pass away from this earthly life. And. The Bible says we're going to get a new body. I'm really looking forward to that one. Aren't you? You know.

It says that. You know. We might. We might spend. Lots of money on. On. Extreme makeovers. And. You name it.

But. Ultimately. We're just patching up. What's falling to bits. But. One day. It says that we'll have a new body. Amen. A new body. And that's going to be. Just wonderful.

I'm looking forward to that. But. That's another thing to look forward to. At the finishing line. That he'll remake us. We'll be resurrected. We'll be refashioned. And we'll have a glorious new.

[40:15] Eternal. Existence with him. What about the finishing line? Let me just. Give you a. A quick story here. There was a woman called Florence Chadwick.

In 1952. And she wanted to break a swimming record from. An island. Called Catalina Isle. To California. 26 miles. It was 26 miles.

The water was cold. Sharks had to be fought off for a. Couple of times. There was dense fog. Finally she gave up. They pulled her in. She had gone 25 and a half miles.

But could not see the shore. Because of the fog. If only she knew. She could have hung in there. Run with endurance. Run with patience. The race that is set before us.

Friends. Sometimes. You know. We can have. Times where we just feel like. It's. Hard. We might feel. Naturally weary.

[41:15] And worn down. And sometimes. Even as a strong Christian. We can have times of weakness. Times of. Despair. Times.

Where it just gets too hard. For us. Let's not make the mistake of this woman. Half a mile. 26 and a half. 26 miles. But she gave up.

Half a mile short. Of. The finishing line. There's a great cloud of witnesses. There's. There's many. Have gone before us. That are an inspiration for us.

You know. Read your Bible. People like Abel. Like Enoch. Like Noah. Abraham. Moses. Joshua. They're in the. In that Hebrews 11. Hall of faith. We can learn from their example.

What an inspiration. There's a cloud of witnesses. It's like. I like to think of it. Almost as like a stadium. Filled with all these. People watching on. Who've gone ahead of us.

[42:11] Now I don't know if that is the case. But we know that. There is that. That sense where. There's many who have gone before us. Who are now with our Lord. Those faithful saints. And it's as if they're cheering us

on.

They're cheering us on. They're. They're rising to their feet. You're nearly there. You're nearly there. At the finishing line. Let's refocus our. Eyes on the goal. To fix our eyes on Jesus.

And here's the one who said. The race. That agon. That struggle. That contest. That agony. He set his eyes on the joy. That was set before him. The joy that we would be saved.

That we who know the Lord Jesus. There's a joy in heaven it says. There's rejoicing. When someone trusts God. When there's repentance. When there's faith. There's joy in heaven.

And he saw that joy. Even as he was on the cross. And he set the track ahead for us. Now there's many. Worldly analogies.

[43:11] Here's just one other quick one. An Olympic runner from Tanzania. He came in last. He was bleeding from a bandaged knee. He fell earlier on in the track.

And almost everyone was gone. It was getting dark. You know most people had gone home. The race was well and truly over. But he wanted to keep on running. And when asked why he kept on running.

He said. My country did not send me 7,000 miles. To start the race. They sent me 7,000 miles. To finish the race. And the Lord Jesus did not come all the way from heaven.

For us to start the race. He came so we could cross the finish line. As we keep our eyes on the goal. We can make the mistake of taking our eyes off the Lord Jesus.

Like Peter did. When the story was of the time he walked on water. The Lord Jesus sustained him. But when he looked at the storm. He started to sink into the water.

[44:09] Because he took his eyes off the Lord Jesus. And Satan will try everything he can. To cause us to lose focus. You can be a lean, mean running machine.

You can be a Christian who goes the distance. Who finishes the race. What we need to do is lay aside those things. That hold us back.

Those things that stop us running well. Get serious about the Christian race that we're living. That we're in. To throw off those weights.

What could it be? Are we running? Or are we coasting? Can we aim higher? Can we press harder? Faster? Stronger? Maybe there's things that we need to drop off. That are slowing us down. Those things that stop us from prayer.

[45:10] They stop us from reading the Bible. They stop us from fellowship. They stop us from taking up our cross daily. Those things that hinder us of sin, of self.

And rather let us aim for the finish line. To not be hindered. Now the good news is that Florence Chadwick, the swimmer, a couple of months later she tried again and made it.

She swam that 26 miles. And she made it. And you have another chance. You that have failed. We have much grace from God, don't we?

I don't like to write anybody off. God doesn't, does he? He doesn't write them off.

We're still not at the finishing line. And let's not be casual, meandering along. Let's not stop or wander around. Let's keep our eyes on the prize.

[46:19] Run as in a race with a finish line. With everything hanging on to it. The Christian life should be something that lifts us to that higher plane.

That this is a powerful incentive for us to please our Lord. Because he is there. And we want to please him. We want to look unto him. Focus on him.

The joy was set before him. It says in Luke 19, The Son of Man, the Lord Jesus, is come to seek and to save that which is lost. The Lord Jesus saw you and he saved you from the fires of hell.

That's great joy, isn't it? Joy unspeakable. How to be a winner in life. Just to recap real quick. Self-control.

You're an athlete. Self-discipline. Self-control. Stamina. Endurance. Keep on keeping on.

[47:30] A sure reward. A glorious eternal crown. The very presence of your Saviour and Lord. A sure reward.

The starting line. Have you started yet? Are you on the track? By faith. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Put your heart's trust in him. That at the cross, he paid the price for our sin.

The Bible says the wages of sin, the cost, is a deathly death penalty. The wages of sin is death. Jesus paid the price.

If you will but trust him. Receive his saving love. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you today that we can know the grace of God. We know, Lord, that in ourselves we're weak.

[48:31] Lord, yet you give grace. Lord, we thank you for that. Help us, Lord, to see life as this marathon. Help us to get on that finishing, that starting line, Lord, to know faith in Christ.

And, Lord, that you are the author of it, you start it, and you're the finisher of it. Lord, we know that you hold us steady, you give us strength, you pick us up, you help us to dust ourselves off and get back on the track when we failed and slipped and fallen.

Lord, help encourage each one. Lord, we pray that each one here will be really encouraged, really encouraged that there's a finishing line, there's a sure reward.

And we know, Lord, that your promises are absolutely 100% assured. There's no doubt about what you've promised, and you will deliver.

Lord, we thank you that we can keep our eyes on the prize, we can look unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith. In Jesus' name, amen.