

Run the Race

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[0 : 00] On your marks, get set, go. Are you in the race? Is the question. You have a race to run.

! So make a determined effort to run well, to run it well, to run for your life, to run to win.

Wherefore seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses. It says we're surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. A cloud of witnesses all around us.

Can you imagine being in a big coliseum, a big arena and being surrounded by a cloud of people filling the stands. Every seat in the coliseum is filled.

And we are like athletes in the arena. That's the picture here, isn't it? And there's a crowd of others who have gone on ahead of us. Think of some loved ones that I know.

[1 : 17] Some dear ones who have fellowshiped with us who have gone ahead. And I think of other Christians that we all know. We can all think of someone, can't we? I know there's been some who have lost loved ones.

And you think of that crowd of witnesses. There's people, as it were, who have gone on ahead. And some of those have been God's faithful ones.

God's faithful. And they spur us on. They spur us on, as it were. And we see in the prior passage of Hebrews chapter 11, which leads up to Hebrews 12, we see the heroes of Hebrews chapter 11.

The great men and women of the faith. The champions. The heroes of God. And we think of them. We think of all the people that God has placed into our lives.

Examples to us. Consider the faithful people of Hebrews 11. And many others through the word. We read of them.

[2 : 18] Get yourself some good Christian biographies. It'll help you to grow. It'll encourage you to grow. We've got some probably in our bookcase at the back there. Feel free to take them. Borrow them. Pass them on.

We don't care. Get some good Christian biographies. Read some of them. They'll encourage your faith. Read about missionaries. Read about the revivalists of old.

The reformers of old. How God has used faithful people. It'll inspire you to do exploits for God.

These witnesses that surround us have gone through some things.

And they occupy the seats that surround the track, as it were. And I can imagine that they rise up to their feet as you approach that finishing line. I can just imagine, can't you?

You can just picture them rising to their feet. And say, yeah, come on. Can you imagine it? As you're running that race. As the roar goes up from the crowds. As you finish well.

[3 : 16] As you finish well. It's encouraging when you look through Hebrews 11. That you see that many of the people were quite ordinary in some ways.

They had their weaknesses. They had their faults and failings and failures. And sins to overcome. Just like you and me. They were just like you and me in lots of ways. And they've been through those trials.

They've gone to their home. They've gone to their reward. And they're cheering on right now.

They're cheering you on right now in that race. As you're on that race track. They are there barracking for you.

Can't you hear them? Can't you hear them? Come on! They're in the stands cheering for you. And so we are in a race, brothers and sisters. And this is the picture that the writer of Hebrews paints for us.

The race of our lives. So how must we prepare for this race that we're in? It tells us that we are to lay aside every weight. And the sin which doth so easily beset us.

[4 : 19] If you're going to run well, you're going to have to leave some things behind. Leave some things behind. What's hindering you? What kind of baggage are you carrying?

Have you any excess baggage? Running with baggage will slow you down. I can remember Julie and I were in an airport. And we had someone helping us.

And we're carrying all these things. And we're running late to get to the next flight. And having a lot of baggage to carry can slow you down. That's the picture here.

Can you imagine a champion athlete carrying his suitcase and his backpack. And you know, a big heavy overcoat and stuff in his pockets and various bags and pushing a wheelbarrow at the same time as he's running that race.

Can you imagine that? Would a champion athlete be like that? Of course not. They would lay aside every weight. And those things that would slow them down. And so it's good for us to take a stock take.

[5 : 23] Who's ever had a spring clean? Who's ever cleaned out their shed? And thought, well, rubbish. Well, I've got that stuff in my shed for. I should have thrown it out years ago. And Julie said, Amen.

But it's still there though. I've boxed it up nice and neat now. So it looks neater and tidier. But it's still just as much rubbish and junk. But you know, it's like that spiritually, isn't it? Isn't it time for a spiritual spring clean?

I think it is. I know for me. I could do better. So check out that you don't exceed the baggage limit. It's a big problem when you're at an airport and you've suddenly got to think, what have I got to throw away to make get on this plane or whatever it be.

So you're going to have to leave some things behind. What am I talking about spiritually now? Letting go of those things that weigh us down as Christian people.

What might it be? Maybe bitterness. Maybe it's those hurts from the past. Maybe it's an unforgiving spirit. Something that you just can't shake it off.

[6 : 26] You still bear that grudge. Maybe it's ungodly ways that just hang on. You just can't shake it off. Is it an addiction to drink or immoral appetites or things that are just going to hinder your walk with God and be a poor testimony for Him?

Is it false teachings that you're hanging on to that are just dragging you down and causing you confusion? Sin can hold us back and weigh us down. And it's sad to see when people are in that state like the athlete trying to run along with a wheelbarrow and a backpack and cumbered up, entangled with those things that we cherish that can hold us back from the Christian race.

To run well, we have to leave some things behind. To run well also, we're going to need some endurance. Endurance. It'd be like that ever-ready battery, you know, that just keeps on going. We need to have that kind of keeping on, keeping on. We need patience in this race that we're called to live, to walk, to run.

And it's a marathon effort. The marathon was 26 miles. It wasn't just a walk in the park. It's a long-distance event. And the Christian life is like that too.

[7 : 45] Now some people are a bit like a firecracker and they just have a lot of excitement and then just kind of shh, fizzles out. And there's not much to show for it. But it's a long-distance event, the Christian walk, the Christian race.

It's a cross-country event. It means hills to climb. It means valleys to go through. It might mean some rivers to cross, some obstacles, some hurdles to get over and get through and get on the other side of.

And you're going to need some patience, some endurance, some perseverance to make that race run well. There's a struggle there. There's a degree of difficulty there in this race.

It's not plain sailing. Now you might think, well, I've tried and failed and made a mess of my Christian walk and I can think of all the furthest things I've done and the things I'm ashamed of and the times of backsliding, the times of failing God.

It's common to man. It's common to man. It's a cross-country race. You're going to get dirty. You're going to get tired. You're going to go through some obstacles and have to get back on your feet again when you fall over.

[8 : 52] The Bible says that the righteous fall seven times, but God raises them up. There's need of endurance, of going through those times of struggle and that exercising of perseverance and patience.

The sense of it here is a cheerful endurance, a constancy that is hopeful. It's an endurance that's got a hope to it. There's a joy to it. That's the joy set before our Lord.

There's a joy to this race even though, wow, those hard times. You know, when you look back at those hard times, you think, wow, that was a victory, wasn't it?

Don't you reckon? When you went through that awful time in your life and you got on the other side of it, wow, God helped me through that. God gave me the victory over that, through that.

And there's even a joy looking back that I got through that struggle, through that battle and I'm on the other side of it now. There's a hopefulness, there's a cheerfulness there. And it's interesting in running this race, the word race that we have here has a sense to it that puts another complexion on it.

[10:01] You could transliterate this verse as let us run the agona. Agona. Sounds like an English word that you might know of.

Agona, what does it sound like? Agony. Agony. There's a sense we're running this race, there's an agonizing there. There's a degree of pain there. There's a degree of strain involved here, a degree of effort.

A race can be difficult, grueling, exhausting. Who remembers running at school, going through those school times? I can remember when I was in the Army Reserve and going through running around this big long track and how you had to get up at some ungodly hour of the morning and go for this long race and you had to compete, you had to achieve a certain achievement to get through the course as it were.

And a race can be difficult, it can be grueling, it can be exhausting. When Paul elsewhere urges us to fight the good fight of the faith, it's the same word here.

The fighting and the faith are of the same word. Agony. Agona. Agon. I'm not much of a Greek scholar and no one needs to be. But there's that sense there, there's that correlation there of a fighting, of a struggle.

[11:24] You could put it like this, struggle the good struggle. There's an agony, there's a struggle, there's an effort, there's a, this race takes a certain application of intensity, of contest, of conflict.

It's a race. In other words, you have to put one foot in front of the other. If you're in the race, that's the main thing. You might not be in the leading pack, but it's about putting one foot in front of the other.

That's the Christian race. And so, as someone has put it too, that God wills that we make progress in our Christian race. One man wrote it like this.

He said, one of the greatest dangers of the Christian life is to remain stationary. And not advancing beyond the beginnings of Christ.

God doesn't want us to remain stationary. He wants us to put one foot in front of the other and the other foot in front of the other. Alright? Run the race. Keep going forward.

[12:27] To run well, we have to leave some things behind. To run well, we're going to need some endurance. To run well, thirdly, we're going to need exercise. Who loves exercise?

I could watch it all day. You know, exercise. 1 Timothy 4.7 it says, but refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.

We have need of spiritual exercise. Exercise. The sense of the word exercise here, it's alike to the English word gym. You know, G-Y-M.

Gymnasium. To exercise means, as you could understand it, get in the gymnasium. Have a bit of a workout. And you can see that's what I do all the time.

Look at this specimen here. The exercise. It just builds up those muscles, doesn't it? As you get in that gym. I know there's people that really do get in the gym.

[13:25] And it shows. It shows because they've got muscles. They've got something to show for that effort they've applied in the gymnasium.

And the sense of this exercise here is to train yourself with one's full effort. Train yourself with one's full effort. With that complete physical, emotional force that comes when you're working out intensely in a gymnasium.

And we need to work out in godliness. Don't we? You can work out and build up your muscles, but one day those muscles are going to get eaten by worms.

And you're just going to be bones. And then not much left after that. But, you know, you can work out those spiritual, those physical muscles, but more importantly, your spiritual muscles.

How are they today? Are you toned and trimmed in those spiritual muscles? We need to do a workout in godliness. Someone has expressed this term exercise to mean, exert yourself intensely like a pro athlete.

[14 : 35] Exert yourself intensely like a pro athlete. It speaks of a full discipline. A full discipline to get yourself in top working condition by constant rigorous training and practice.

How are you going with your workouts? With your workouts? With your circuits? How are your spiritual muscles today? Are you in good condition?

How committed are you to your own spiritual development? In shape spiritually? Spiritually.

Don't neglect the training. The training. Exercise yourself. Exercise your faith and grow spiritually.

Grow stronger in the Lord. The word calls us to that, to that exercise. This is God's gymnasium, as it were. you get your Bible out and build those spiritual muscles. And with others who want to train with you. Now someone this morning was saying they wanted to have some Bible studies.

They said, yeah, go for it. Go for it. Go for it. with others and encourage one another. Study the word together. Build up your muscles. Get into God's gymnasium. 1 Timothy 4 verse 8 it says, For bodily exercise profiteth little.

[16 : 05] So it's good for you, a little. But godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and that which is to come. Brothers and sisters, God's people tonight, my prayer, my hope for you is that every believer will not be stationary but moving on, moving forward. Not stationary and stagnant but moving forward, making progress in your spiritual life. That we grow. To run well, we need to leave some things behind. To run well, we're going to need endurance. To run well, we're going to need exercise and to run well. We need to apply some effort. Effort. 1

Corinthians 9, Paul tells again of this analogy of the running the race. He says, Know ye not that they which run in a race run all? But one receiveth the prize. So run that ye may obtain. So run, says Paul. To obtain, to obtain. This word obtain, it means to seize eagerly that which you have your eyes on.

And your heart set upon. Seize it. Obtain it. Have that desire for it. To obtain it. To expand your effort, your energy, your passion, your eagerness to obtain it. That prize is worth all that it takes. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying we're saved by works. We're saved entirely by His grace. Yet the race speaks to us of that sanctification. It speaks to us of that walk. The moment you're saved, you're on that race track. And He wants you to run well. He wants you to run well. Make your life count. Seize eagerly that which you have your eyes and your heart set upon. Obtain the prize. Obtain the prize. There's an eagerness. There's an all-consuming power. There's a passion as we want to obtain the prize. Verse 25 it goes on, and every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it. They will be corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. The fool speaks of that which will corrupt and decay and fade and fall away. Just yesterday I was at an event and it was a Bhutanese event and they gave some people these garlands of flowers. I got one of these garlands of flowers. I thought I could bring it along tonight but the flowers are starting to get droopy and drop off. It just illustrates how that crown corrupts. And this is what the Greek runners of the day would have received. A garland, a wreath, a flowery, leafy crown that they were given as they won the race. It was a corruptible crown. It would just fade away and the leaves would fall off, the flowers would fade. A corruptible crown. So that's the intent of it. Whereas an incorruptible crown is a crown that will not corrupt, it will not fade away, it will not fade or fall away. It will be forever, lasting. I therefore so run not as uncertainly but so fight I not as one that be to 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 cast away. Paul says there's importance to this race. Don't race uncertainly but race with certainty. The successful athlete in these times, in these foot races received this crown of green leaves, placed by the judge on his head. In itself it was of little value. It was what it counted for, what it marked.

It marked victory. The crown that lies ahead for you, for me as God's people in this race of life is incorruptible.

Incorruptible, it's a symbol of God's victory and reward. Now Paul says there's a victory ahead as we are mastering or striving for the mastery, for the victory. Will we be a champion athlete for God? A champion Christian?

Let's not shirk the training. Don't shy away from the effort, the application that we call to. That resolute aim and purpose we call to. That application of effort and determination in our spiritual lives. Not that that merits us heaven. Because heaven is not by our own merits.

[21 : 06] But as a Christian, as a Christian, we want to run well. We want to run well. So that our lives, God helping us will matter.

There will be something incorruptible that shows for this corruptible life. So someone has said this, my face is set, my gate or my direction is far away.

My direction is fast. My goal is heaven. My road is narrow. My way is rough. My companions are few. My guide is reliable. My mission is clear.

I cannot be bought, I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, diluted or delayed.

I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of my enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander at the maze of mediocrity.

[22 : 13] I won't give up, shut up, let up or slow up, till I've preached up, prayed up, paid up, stored up and stayed up for Christ.

Can we have that kind of resolution? Now there's a man, Jonathan Edwards, and I think he filled a book full of resolutions. And he resolved to do this, he resolved to do that. He made some decisions about how he was going to make his life count.

He said, I am resolved. Let's make some resolutions. Now let's wait till 2016 and make those resolutions right here and now. The athlete is temperate, temperate in all things.

He has self-control. It literally means that there's a strength, there's a control there. And people of God tonight, our Lord wants you to be a champion.

A champion for God. Apply the effort, the self-control. Don't be deterred by the discouragements that come across your way. Think what it takes to be a champion in the earthly sphere of things.

[23 : 22] They exercise very strict disciplines, don't they? You see the champion swimmers, they've got to get up early in the morning, jump into that cold pool and do lap after lap after lap.

Just for that few minutes in the competition. They practice self-restraint in their diet. In every effort they make, there's a strictness, there's a carefulness about how they live.

And it's a feature that runs right through their whole life. In order for that prize that they long for. And the athlete is called to moderation, to self-restraint.

What is it that we allow into our lives? We think, wow, maybe I should think twice about doing that. You know? As someone has commented like this, this story is kind of an amusing story.

When you think about it, this is what happens. Whenever the Olympics are coming, or some big sports thing, what do you see on the McDonald's wrappers and the McDonald's cups and paraphernalia?

[24 : 33] I'm not having a go at McDonald's but, you know, plastered all over everything. There's merchandise everywhere. It's got the pictures of the champion athletes of the nation. And these pictures of the elite athletes of the nation are all over the place.

And it's kind of humorous, isn't it? Because when you think about it, the Big Macs and the Chicken McNuggets are not part of their diet. Are they? Let's face it. And so those who are preparing to compete in the Olympics in some great sporting event, they're careful about what they put into themselves and what they do with their lives.

It's not that Big Macs are wrong. But they are wrong for the Olympic athlete who wants to win gold, aren't they? It's the same with us as Christians.

You might think, well, I can get away with this or, you know, I've got a free conscience about this or that. If you want to be a champion athlete, you might be a bit stricter on yourself for a good reason. For a good reason. Amen? It's a good cause to consider. So as we want to live in holiness, in godliness, we want to aspire, we want to be careful and watch what we do with our lives.

[25 : 51] Be cautious about what we watch, about the people we follow, about where we go, about who we are. What are we saying to everybody?

By our lives. Strive for the mastery, it says. There's a certainty, there's an aim, there's a striving for the mastery. Our desire is to be like Christ, to be like Him.

To be Christ to those we know. To be Christ to our family, our friends, our workmates. To be Christ to them. There's a prize worth fighting for, a prize worth working for, worth running for.

He extends it by His grace anyway, but we want to be running well, don't we? We want to be running well. How will we run the race? It's important that we know where we're going.

Get in the right direction. Easy to get detoured, isn't it? You miss that sign on that race track and you end up miles away from where you're meant to go. Check your direction is right.

[27 : 03] Haggai 1.5 it says, Now therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, consider your ways. Consider your ways. Choose carefully the way, the ways that you go.

What are you aiming for in your life? What is it that you're putting your effort and energy into? I can ask that question too. You've got to be careful. The choices I make, the choices we make, how can we make it count, our life?

To run towards the goal. To press towards the mark, the prize. And even when our strength is flagging, what are we to do? When someone makes your nose out of joint and you want to take your bat and ball and go home, like your dog with his tail between his legs.

Oh, some Christian offended me today. Oh, the pastor didn't shake my hand in church this morning. Or someone looked at me through there, sort of looked at me funny.

I'm not going to that church again anymore. Then they go to the next church, and the next church, and the next church, and they still haven't dealt with their hang-ups, what it is that they need to deal with.

[28 : 18] Press on. Press on. When you see your strength flagging, brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended. I'm not there yet.

But this one thing I do, this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and pressing, reaching forth unto those things which are ahead.

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Forgetting those things, I press toward the mark. Don't settle for average.

Don't settle for lazy. Don't settle for the minimum that you can do. And be for God. Live life to the max. Life to the max. Love God to the max.

Serve God to the max. We've got the resources to help us compete in this race. We've got our own personal coach. Personal coaches can be quite costly.

[29 : 17] This one's free. And he's available 24 by 7 by 365. He's available now and forever. Your own personal coach, your own personal fitness trainer, your perfect trainer.

Consider him. You've got your own personal trainer. And he wants to spur us on. I want to spur you on. Spur each other on.

We've got huge untapped resources. Think of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit. Who hovered on the face of the earth and creation happened. The Holy Spirit who empowered the prophets and the people of God to do exploits.

The Holy Spirit. He is here. He is here. An untapped resource. Power from on high. He is available. Wait on God. Worship Him. Wait on God.

Worship Him. And we've got the racing manual right here in our hands. It tells us everything that we need to know. It's right here. And there's no shortcuts on this race.

[30 : 23] Sister, brother, no shortcuts. This race is so important. We need to get it right. A race we're running right now, even now. And in every day that we live.

By God's grace, while we've got breath to breathe, we're in this race. We're a witness for God's glory and honour. Called to be in this race to show godly character and grace.

And we're surrounded by lots of witnesses. And sometimes those witnesses aren't that helpful. Are they? Many of the spectators. The spectators through your life.

The ones on the sidelines who are not really in the race. Some of the ones who just want to have a go at you. Maybe throw a few things at you. Some rotten tomatoes or some other obstacle to make it hard for you.

To mock you. To scorn you. As a Christian, what are you doing? Come and join us. The spectators aren't always supportive on the sidelines. They want to detour you and take you down another track.

[31 : 28] Read Pilgrim's Progress. See the detours that he had here and there. As he got off track here and there. Then he got back on track.

It's a good read. Maybe you've taken some falls and you've gone off on some detours too. Don't be discouraged. Be encouraged to keep on track.

We can overcome. All the setbacks, all the healing of hurts, all of the disappointments of life, we can get back on track. Get back on track. Don't be discouraged.

Even in this world that's saturated by an anti-Christ philosophy and as all around us our enemy strongholds, victory is assured. 2 Corinthians 2.14 it says, Now thanks be unto God which sometimes causeth us to triumph in Christ.

Is that what it says? No. It says, Always, always, always causes us to triumph. And maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.

[32 : 35] Always causes you to triumph. You're always winning. We can always triumph. You might think, I'm a defeated Christian. I've messed up really bad.

I've made a fool of myself. My Christian testimony is stained and soiled and I'm ashamed of what I've done.

God says, He always causes us to triumph. You can get back on track and be a winner. I'm calling all the champions today and that's you.

You might not feel like a champion but God says He always causes you to triumph in Christ. Calling you to exercise. Calling you to the race track. Calling you to discipline yourself.

Calling you to go the distance. Calling you to go on through the hard yards. And keep on going. And don't settle for average. Don't settle for it. Don't neglect your training.

[33 : 35] Keep your eyes on the finish line. Keep your eyes on the prize. On the Lord. 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. He's the author and He's the finisher. He'll help you start it and He'll make you finish it. He's going to be there from A to Z. A to Z.

Alpha to Omega. Author and finisher. He's the personal fitness trainer. He's your running mate. And he's there at the finishing line saying, Come on!

And His saving work has paid everything that makes it all possible. Think of this just a telling story that I read lately about what our Lord has done for us.

And it's a true story. In August 1987, there was a Northwest Airlines Flight 225. It crashed just after taking off from Detroit Airport.

[34 : 41] Killing 155 people. One survived. A four-year-old from Tempe, Arizona called Cecilia.

And news accounts say when the rescuers found Cecilia wandering around, they couldn't believe she was on the plane. They thought maybe Cecilia was in one of the cars that had been hit by the plane.

They thought Cecilia must have been someone that was on the ground already. Because it looked like there wasn't a scratch on her. And investigators then searched through the passenger list and they saw no, Cecilia was on the plane.

Cecilia survived because as the plane was falling, Cecilia's mother Paula Shikan unbuckled her own seatbelt, got down on her knees in front of her daughter, wrapped her arms and body around Cecilia and then would not let her go.

The mother wrapped her arms and body around Cecilia and would not let her go. Nothing could separate that child from her mother's love. Neither tragedy nor disaster.

[35 : 56] Neither the fall nor the flames that followed. Neither the height nor the depth. Neither life nor death. The mother's love had sheltered and saved her own child. Even as she gave her own life.

That's just a human picture, but think of what our Lord has done for us. He's sheltered us from the wrath of the Father. He's sheltered us. He's left heaven, lowered himself down to us, covered us with the sacrifice of his own body to save us.

Looking unto Jesus. The author, the finisher of our faith. Are you looking unto him tonight? Are your eyes fixed upon him? Keep looking unto Jesus. The sense of this looking is a definite looking away from and a looking unto.

A fixing of our eyes. A looking unto Jesus. A looking away from and a looking unto. So keep looking unto him. When you feel like you lack strength, look unto Jesus.

When you feel like you're lacking power, look unto Jesus. When you feel like you're not able, you're failing, you're falling, look unto Jesus. Keep unto him. As one writer expressed it, to run successfully, we must not look upon the ground to see where it is rough and rugged and where it is easy and smooth that we may pick and choose our way.

[37 : 20] our way, not to the right nor to the left to see whether the bystanders condemn or approve hiss or cheer, nor to our own strength or weakness or swiftness or slowness of foot, nor to the distance behind or the distance before, nor to our competitors to compare our running with them, not to any object that may distract from looking unto Jesus, looking unto Jesus and to him alone. Friends, tonight the main thing is that we finish strong. Finish strong. It doesn't matter where you've

been and how you've not been as strong.

The racetrack lies ahead of you. Are you going to finish strong? Finish strong. It doesn't matter whether you feel like you've tried and failed, get back on your feet, back into the race. He can turn your setbacks into comebacks. God's plan is that we finish strong. You're on the last lap. Some of you might be a bit ahead of me. Maybe I'm a bit ahead of some of you. But you're on the last lap. You're on the home stretch. There's a crowd watching on.

Can't you hear them cheering you on? Can't you hear them? You're compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses. Can't you hear them? They're on their feet. Yay! Can't you see your Lord cheering you on? Your coach, your running partner, your finish line. There's a crown awaiting.

Finish strong. Finish strong. Run the race. Not half-heartedly, but with determination, with the will to win, with the resolve, to train well, to train hard, train faithfully, to pursue spiritual growth, to run with resolve, to run well, to run to Jesus. 2 Timothy 4, Paul writes of that latter days of his life as he was about to be martyred and killed for his faith. For I am now ready to be offered. And the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course.

I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day. And not to me only, but unto all them that love is appearing. Do you love his appearing tonight? Do you want to see Jesus? Are you looking unto Jesus? He's going to give you a crown.

A crown. Not a crown. Not a crown of your salvation. You're already saved. But a crown to recognize the race you've run. A race to run. How must we prepare? What does race mean? Ag on. There's a struggle. There's a certain application. You've got to leave some things behind. Leave them behind. Leave them behind.

[40 : 48] Leave them behind. The weight. That which hinders you. Leave it behind you. You're called to endurance.

Exercise. Exercise. To get in the gym. Train. And keep on training. Apply effort. Energy. Passion. Strive for the mastery. Don't just have a, oh, I'll kick the can along. I'll strive for the mastery. No! Strive for the mastery. Strive for the mastery. There's a power to that.

How must we run? Get in the right direction. Looking unto Jesus. Press on. You've got resources. You've got a personal trainer. 24 by 7. You've got his training manual. You've got the Holy Spirit power. You're a witness.

He sometimes causes you to triumph. No. Always. Always. Always. All the time. He causes you to triumph. You might not feel like it, but you're a winner. Keep your eyes on the finish line. Looking unto Jesus. The crowd's cheering you on. He's cheering you on. The crowd is on its feet. Cheering you on. Come on. You can do it. By God's grace and power. You can do it. Let's pray.