

Don't Give Up – (Hebrews 12:1-4) 21 June'15

I count it an honour and a privilege to come, and just to open God's Word and to share it with you here in Gospel Light Christian Church, so join me this morning and turn to Hebrews chapter 12. You say, "Hebrews? I thought Pastor Jason was in Hebrews?" I'm just kind of skipping ahead for a moment, alright? I'm going to give you a glimpse and tell you what the last book is about and then when he covers that verse.. the beautiful thing about the Bible is this, although there is a common truth, there are lots of applications, all right? So don't worry if.. I'm not stealing a text from him, it'll take him a while to get to Hebrews chapter 12 alright?

So turn to Hebrews chapter 12 and we're going to look this morning at the 1st 4 verses of this great passage here in Hebrews chapter 12. Many of you know the name, Charles Spurgeon. He was without a doubt one of the greatest and most powerful preachers of his day. It is said that his direct style of preaching cut through many of the issues that kept men and women from coming to Christ, and as a result, he saw literally thousands of people trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour and as Lord in his day. He was greatly beloved, and when this man of God passed away in 1892 - this towering man of faith, the people loved.. they loved to hear his preaching because God used him in such a tremendous way, it is said that condolences flowed in from all parts of the world, expressing their sympathy at the passing of this great man of God. The streets were, literally jampacked with people wanting to pay their tribute and when he died, it is said that one of the first condolences to arrive was a message from the Prince and Princess of Wales just expressing their love for this wonderful man of God. But before Charles Spurgeon died, he chose to be buried in a very simple casket made of olive wood, and he had these words from Paul to Timothy etched upon the side.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.
(2 Timothy 4:7 ESV)

These familiar words found in 2 Timothy, chapter 4 in verse 7, which read, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my race and I have kept the faith." Do you know, when I read these words here from Paul to Timothy, or when I hear the testimony of godly men like Charles Spurgeon, I often ask myself, "Will I be able to say that?" When all is said and done, when my life comes to an end, I wonder, "Will I have been faithful to the finish?" Because there many of God's people today, who start their race of faith well, but they finish that race poorly. In fact, I think they're like me and exercise. You know, whenever I find this small spare tyre that

mysteriously gathers around your waist? You know what I'm talking about? How it gets there, I do not know. But when that small spare tyre begins to grow, I know it's time for exercise. So I get highly motivated, thinking, "Wow the first week, you know, I'm going to be jogging four laps." So I grab my running shoes, my water bottle, and off I go. And at first, everything is fine. You know, my legs are light. My lungs are taking in deep breaths of cool air. My heart is beating like a good Swiss clock. But halfway through that run, all of a sudden things drastically change. These legs, now feel like beams of iron. My lungs are screaming for air, and my heart is racing faster than a bird in flight. Soon, this jog becomes a trot, the trot becomes a walk, and I'm looking for the nearest park bench to sit and rest this tired and slightly overweight body. And invariably with exercise, I start well but I finish poorly. And yet, that is a picture of many of God's people today. Sometimes, due to the encouragement, others.. you know when we're just saved, the excitement that we get as a newfound believer were like a tornado of zeal, were a burst of energy, you know we're.. Remember those young days as a believer, you know, it just seems that we couldn't get enough of God. We're in his word, we're praying, we're sharing the Gospel. But something along the course of life happens. Maybe it's due to the discouragements and the disappointments of life. Maybe it's simply due to the lure and the lust of the age, or the hustle and bustle of the world in which we find ourselves. It seems though, that that zeal dies out, that passion seems to fade away and if we're not careful, we begin to slowly drift away from God.

In fact, the Bible is filled with many examples of men and women who started their race of faith well, but they finished that race poorly. For example, do you remember Israel's first King, King Saul? Here was a man who, humanly speaking, had it all together. I mean, he had a great package. He had natural leadership ability, he had the anointing of God, he had the favour of the people upon his life, and for a while, things went well. But because of his continual disobedience, his pride, and his paranoia, he finished his race poorly. In fact, he died a spiritual failure.

Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I have acted foolishly, and have made a great mistake."

(1 Samuel 26:21 ESV)

In fact, Saul sums up his own life with these words. He says, "I played the fool and I erred exceedingly." I think of Samson, remember him? That He-man with a She-weakness? Samson?

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Here was a man who likewise, like Saul, he had the anointing of God upon his life. You know, he had natural leadership abilities. In fact, here was a man who single-handedly defeated Israel's enemy. But because of his continual compromise, because he was not able to control his flesh, he likewise ended his life as a failure. I think of Gideon. Here is a man who had the anointing of God upon his life. Again, a man that God had hand-picked, a man that God had chosen, and for years, he and his men successfully defeated Israel's enemies. But he lowered his standard, he dropped his guard, and although he had his moment in the sun, he spent the remainders of his life in the shadows of compromise, and he too died a failure. Similarly, there are many of God's people who start the race well and they finished their race poorly. There are many of God's people today who are lowering their standard and they're dropping their guard, and maybe that's where you find yourself today. Maybe today, maybe due to the discouragement and the disappointments of life, maybe due to the hustle and bustle of life, the cares and affairs of this world, you find yourself, for whatever reason, slowly drifting away from God. Maybe today it was a cutting word from a careless Christian that has cooled your zeal. Or maybe it is the pressure to marry that has driven you into the arms of a person that has caused you to enter into this immoral relationship. Or maybe it is simply a desire to succeed that has cooled your zeal for God. Or maybe it's simply through discouragements and disappointments of a person you looked up to, that has caused you to begin to drift from God. If this is where you find yourself today, can I tell you something? You're not alone.

You know, you're not the 1st person in history to find yourself in this situation, slowly, for whatever reason drifting from God. In fact, when we come to the book of Hebrews, that's exactly what we find. We find a group of Christians, who through pressures of life, they found themselves slowly drifting from God. And as a result, the Holy Spirit came to these Hebrew believers and said this in Hebrews 2 in verse one.

Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

(Hebrews 2:1 ESV)

He says, "Therefore, we must give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest we drift away." If you find yourself today, a little bit discouraged, a little bit weary in this race of faith, if you find yourself for whatever reason, sitting up on the sidelines and slowly drifting away from God, then God has a message for you

today. And that message is found for us in our passage here in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 1 through verse 4, and in this passage we are told how we can avoid drifting from God, and how every one of us can be faithful to God, even to the end of our life. And so, I want to do something with you this morning that I don't do very often. Is that okay? It's not a big deal okay. In fact, the first service didn't even know the difference. I'm going to give you an outline. Can I do that? I rarely give an outline when I preach because I just kind of roll-on, right? You've did the same thing the other service did. They looked at me like, "I really never noticed, you know?", and maybe because I'm not speaking to enough. But I'm going to do something I rarely do- I'm going to give you an outline because I want you to write it down if you can, alright? Because these little principles will help you in your walk and relationship with God. They will help you, because every one of us are overcome with pressures. Every one of us will be discouraged. Every one of us, one day, will trip and fall in this race we call life, and at that moment, we need to go back to some principles that can help us to get up and get back in that race so we can be faithful to the finish.

And so, here are some principles. Principle number 1, if we're going to live in such a way that our lives will be faithful even to the end of our life, you need to number 1, remember your encouragers. Remember your encouragers, because everyone of us, we need motivation. We need reasons for doing the things we do, and yet we need encouragement while we are doing them. And one of the greatest encouragements in this race of faith is to realize the race that you are running, has been successfully run before. Let me say it again. Hey, listen. One of the greatest means of encouragement in this race of faith is for you and I to realize, the race that you're running has been successfully run before.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,
(Hebrews 12:1 ESV)

In fact, when the author of the book of Hebrews said in verse one, "We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses," he was not saying that there is, in heaven, a grandstand of all of these men and women of the past that are watching us run our race. It's not what he's saying. In fact, the cloud of witnesses he's talking about are those men and women, those great heroes of the faith found in Hebrews chapter 11. And so he's not saying that these heroes of the faith in Chapter 11 are sitting in the grandstands of heaven watching you run your race, clapping as you go by. It's not what he's saying, because the word "witness" here, is not the word

"spectator". It's that Greek word "martus" and from it we get the English word "martyr".

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And he's simply referring to somebody who has given their life for a cause. And so he's not saying that these great men and women in heaven are watching us run our race. So they're not watching us, but we are to be looking back to them. They're not watching what you are doing, but they stand as our encouragers. Are you with me? So they're not watching what we're doing, but we're to be looking back at their godly example, and we are to realize, as we look back to their godly example, that the race that they ran, is the very same race that we are running, and all the struggles and difficulties that they encountered in their race of faith, and they were successfully brought through their race, what the Lord wants us to know is this. Is that the difficulties that we encountered, they encountered. And as the God of heaven brought them faithfully through their race, the same God, their God, our God, will successfully bring us through this same race. Their God is our God. The God of yesterday is the God of today, and just as that God delivered them through their struggles, hey listen, our God will deliver us. Are you with me? Let me show you a Bible verse, it's found in Romans chapter 15 in verse 4, (it) helps us to understand this.

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

(Romans 15:4 ESV)

Paul said that, "For whatever things were written, they were written for our learning, that we through patient endurance, the endurance and comfort of the Scriptures, that we might have hope." In other words, what Paul is saying is this. He's saying, "Do you realize that the Old Testament, the Bible was written to leave us an example?" These great men of the past, these men of Abraham, Isaiah, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel.. Their examples are left there that their example might encourage us in our race of faith. A man, one day, came to this pastor and he said, "Pastor, I rarely read the Old Testament, except maybe for the Psalms and the Proverbs." And then the Pastor says, "Then you're probably missing a great deal of help in the Scripture." And then he quoted here Romans 15 in verse 4 and told him, "Don't you realize that the Lord has left us the record of these godly men and women of the past, these men and women found in Hebrews chapter 11? And he has left us a record of them, and their

testimony and their record reminds us that the race that they are running is the race that we are running. And just as God delivered them from their difficulties and their trials and their setbacks and their struggles and their discouragement, that same God can deliver you. And that's what he wants us to know. You see, if you're feeling a little bit weary in this race of faith, you feel a little bit discouraged, if you feel like you want to give up and cash it in, and you feel like you just cannot run anymore, here's what God wants you to know. God wants you to know that you need to look back to these.. your encouragers, and realize that their God is your God and as their God brought them through that race, our God can bring us through that same race of faith. Are you with me this morning? The God of Elijah is your God. The God of yesterday is your God. This cloud of witnesses stand as our examples. They're not watching us, but they stand as examples to us, and there they remind us that just as God delivered them, our God can deliver us. In fact, let me just put it this way. I'm going to do something kind of odd. I'm going to read the Scripture. Can I do that? It's not on the PowerPoint but I'm looking at your face and I'm sensing you're not getting what I'm saying. You're looking at me going, "I know there's something there." So can I read to you for a moment? Alright? Listen to this.

When you feel a little weary, when you feel a little discouraged, when you feel like you cannot carry on, when you feel like giving up in this race of faith, God says, "I want you to remember these men and women who went before you. Remember those who, in Hebrews 11 in verse 33.

who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.

Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated-

(Hebrews 11:33-37 ESV)

Remember these who went through faith, who through faith subdued kingdoms, who worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions. Remember these who quenched the violence of fire, who escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong. Remember these who became valiant in battle, they turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Remember these women who received their

dead raised to life again. Others who were tortured, not accepting deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection. Remember these still others who had trials of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and of imprisonment. Hey, they were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute and being afflicted and being tormented.

He says, "Listen, when you feel like you cannot carry on," He says, "Remember them!" And I want you to know something, your life is nothing in comparison to them. But just as their God, who is our God, delivered them, our God, who was their God, can deliver us. The God of yesterday- He is your God! Just as He encouraged them, and just as he strengthened them and delivered them from their trials and their discouragements and their pressures, hey listen, that God can deliver you.

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When you grow a little weary, the Lord says, "Come back, and remember this great cloud of witnesses. Remember these men and women who went before you, and let them stand as your encouragers." Are you with me now? I'm thinking now we're back on the right page, right, you with me? Alright number 1, remember your encouragers.

Number 2, if we're going to be faithful to the finish, you need to remove your encumbrances. Several years ago, I was reading a newspaper and I read the story about an invitational track meet that took place in Los Angeles, California. And at this track meet, they had the world's fastest man. The man had just won.. broke the world's record. He was Olympic gold medalist in the 100m. And everybody believed that this man would, without a doubt, break.. or he would win the race. And so, when they lined up for that 1st heat, the gun was fired and they took off running, this man didn't even qualify for the next round. And you could imagine, all of the television reporters were a bit amazed. They were shocked and they came to the man and they said to him, they said, "I don't get it. I mean, you are the fastest man on earth. What happened? You didn't even qualify for the next heat!" And here's what he said. He said, "I ate too much and I trained too little." But you know, humanly speaking, man if this guy were to take off his shirt, we would look at his six-pack, and we would say, "Wow." You see, this man had not even gained enough weight that the human eye could notice, but it was enough to hinder him from winning his race. You know, in the very same way, there are many things that will hinder us in our race of faith.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,
(Hebrews 12:1 ESV)

That's why Paul said, talking about a race, he says, "We need to lay aside every weight and the sin which just so easily beset us." Because there are many things, even good things in this race of faith, that will hinder us from being faithful even to the finish. Good things. Because a good thing can become a bad thing, if we allow that good thing to consume us, and we begin to overindulge in it, and you know what I'm talking about. It doesn't matter what it is. It could be a habit. It could be a hobby, it could be a pastime, it could be an extracurricular activity, it could be a relationship. But you see, when we allow these things to dominate us, so much so that it keeps us out of the house of God, it drives us from the people of God, it causes us to slowly drift away from the Word of God, keeps us from spending time with our God and growing in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord, then that good thing has become a bad thing and that thing needs to be laid aside, lest it lay you aside in this race of faith.

Listen, as God's people, it's not so much that we get involved in the bad things, sin. It's that we allow the good things of life to dominate our time and it begins to slowly draw us away from God. And if we don't lay that thing aside, that thing will eventually lay us aside in the race of faith. Let me give you an example of what I mean. Let's say, for example, we're flying on an airplane, and we're going to our favourite holiday destination, whatever that may be, and as we're flying, the captain gets on the intercom and he says, "I'm sorry to tell you, but 3 of the 4 engines have just stopped working, and if we don't remove all of the excess weight upon this plane, this flight is going to end in disaster." May I ask you a question? What would you do besides panic? Alright, what would you do? I guess you would not do this. I'm sure you wouldn't go up to the captain, knock on his door and say, "Captain, isn't there another plan? Isn't there any other way? Captain, are you telling me that in order for this plane to make it safely to its destination, we got to get rid of all of the excess weight?" And he would probably say yes. You'd say, "You're telling me that I have to get rid of my luggage? I mean it's a brand new luggage! It's designer's stuff! And I was just in Hong Kong and I bought all this beautiful stuff! Don't tell me I have to get rid of that!" And he would say yes. Well, what would you do? I think I know what you would do. You would probably do what I would do. I would start with my neighbour first. I'm just kidding, that's what I would do, I don't know what you would do, but I know we would get rid of all of the excess weight. You know why? Because we know

that if it was a matter of life and death, it doesn't matter what it was. Could be your brand new luggage, could be your brand new golf clubs, could be your whole series of Apple stuff, right, you'd get rid of it. Why? Because your life was in the balance. And yet, the same is true in this race of faith. Oftentimes, the difference between spiritual success and spiritual defeat, spiritual life and spiritual death, is what you and I do with the excess weights in our life.

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Friends, if there is something that has gripped our life, and it doesn't matter what it is. Maybe a good thing, such as, you know, an extracurricular activity, a hobby, a habit, a lifestyle, and if that is beginning to drive you away and drift you away from God, you need to lay it aside. It could be something stronger, more severe. It could be, as the Lord says, it could be a sin which so easily ensnares you. It may be, for you, an addiction to pornography, alcohol or gambling. It may be that you're just overcome with greed, or maybe your heart is poisoned by a spirit of unforgiveness or bitterness and it is slowly driving you away from God. Listen, you need to lay it aside, because if you don't lay it aside, it will certainly lay you aside in this race of faith. You see, if we don't lay our sin aside, that sin will wind up shipwrecking your spiritual life. In fact, as somebody once said, "You break the commandments, and the commandments will without a doubt break you."

Do you guys know what an ermine is? An ermine. An ermine. You don't know what an ermine is. Good, I get to teach you something, and I know you're going to Google it just the moment I say it, right? An ermine is a little beautiful animal that you find in the alps of Europe and it's about that long (Pastor gestures), beautiful white fur, a beautiful little black face, an ermine, and one of the unique characteristics about this ermine is it's very particular about its fur. In other words, it doesn't like to soil its fur at all, this ermine doesn't. And so hunters take advantage of this good trait. And so when they're hunting an ermine, they find its hole and they put oil around the hole. And so when they are chasing and hunting this ermine, the first thing that the ermine does, is it runs back to its hole. But when it gets to its hole, and sees it has been covered by oil, it will not go in. It will stop, and stand, and be willingly killed, rather than soiling its coat. What an intense quality. But you know, in the same way, we must have such that same commitment to purity of life and purity of soul, as that ermine does to the purity of its own coat.

In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

(Hebrews 12:4 ESV)

And maybe that's why the author of the book of Hebrews said this in verse 4, "You have not yet resisted to bloodshed in your striding against sin." Because if we don't deal with sin, sin will deal with us. We break the commandments, the commandments will eventually break you, and you'll find yourself slowly drifting from God. If you want to be faithful to the finish, number 1, remember your encouragers. Remember, these who have gone before you. Remember the light.. the race that you're running has been successfully run before. Remember their God is your God, and as God carried them through the race of faith, that God, our God can carry us through the very same race. And then, lay aside these weights and the sin that so easily ensnares us. And then number 3, we need simply to run, the Bible says we need to run with endurance. Run with endurance. The author says, "Run with endurance that race that is set before us." And that word "endurance" is a beautiful word. It means, "a steadied determination". It carries the idea of running our race with the purpose of winning that race. In fact, I have never met a runner who has ever trained for years to get upon the starting blocks of a race and say, "I can't wait to lose today." Every runner runs to what? They run to win. And that's exactly what this word means. It means, "to run with a steadied determination", "run with your eyes fixed upon the goal", "run with a purpose of winning that race". In other words, when you fall in that race, get back up and get back in at race. Run with a determination that you are going to win, and you are not going to lose that race.

And if there's anybody who has, I think, successfully pictured for us this steadied determination, he was an athlete who has passed. The man by the name of Eric Little. Do you know that name, Eric little? Maybe you would know the movie that was made about his athletic prowess. It was a movie by the name of "Chariots of Fire" sometime ago. I mean, sometimes when you say "Chariots of Fire", they look at you, "Wasn't that a 1970s movie?" Well, I'd say not so long ago, I think it was an 80s movie, right? Was it 80s? Old people out there? Thank you. Okay 80s. I think I'm classified in that old group. So when I say "not too long ago", it's not too long ago in my mind, all right? But it was an 80s movie. Academy award winner "Chariots of fire", and.. but it was a movie that talked about the life of this man Eric Little. Well, it was said that in 1924, Eric Little was classified as the fastest man alive, destined to win the gold medal in the Paris Olympic Games, and he was a godly Christian man who had unbelievable principles. And so, when he found out after 3 years of training that the race was to be run on a Sunday, he refused to run the race. I mean, that is an

incredible principle. Right or wrong, that was his conviction. And so he said, "No I'm not going to run the race." After 3 years of training! And even the Prince and Princess of Wales could not convince him to run the race.

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1925, he went to China as a missionary. And in 1945, he died in a Japanese concentration camp. Well, the movie "Chariots of Fire" depicts his athletic prowess, not really his Christianity. But in that movie, there is a tremendous scene that pictures for us this steadied determination, and it shows Eric Little, there upon the starting blocks of a race. The gun is fired and they take off, and because he is the fastest man alive, he finds himself quickly ahead of the rest. As they go into that first turn, a man purposely trips him. And there, he falls to the ground, and for a second, he lies as a crumpled heap upon that track. And at that point, most runners would give up. They'd get up, they would dust off their foot, shake the fist at that runner and go back to their chair and sit down, thinking, you know, in a race like that, there's no way I can catch the pack. But not Eric Little. For there was that look of steadied determination upon his face for that purpose win. He stood to his feet and he got back in that race. And if you've ever seen how Eric Little ran, in fact, I won't demonstrate it, okay, because you would think it's silly. I'm not sure you'd listen to me for the rest of the sermon. But he would run, you know, with his hands just kind of flying in the air. You know, kind of a run with an abandonment, and there he ran with all of his energy, abandoned, with a purpose to win that race, a steadied determination. And when they cross the finish line, it was Eric Little who inched ahead of all of the rest. Friends, that's a steadied determination. You see, that is running the race with a purpose of winning that race. And see, if we're going to be faithful to the finish, then we too must have that steadied determination, because every one of us one day we will stumble and we will fall in this race. And when we fall, we need to have that steadied determination to get up and to get back in that race. In fact, some of us will stumble and fall into sin. And there, in sin, we'll fall upon that that race of life and if we're not careful, the devil will come at that moment and he'll begin to beat us down and tell us that you're finished. That the race is over. That you can't get back in the race. That God is done with you. How can you dare do to God since God has so wonderfully done so much for you. Sometimes we believe that lie and we lie there upon that track of life, then we wind up slowly drifting away from God.

Friends, may I say something to you today? We may fall and we may get down, but we're never out with God. Because the answer to our sin is what? It's not a trick question. The answer to our sin is confession.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(1 John 1:9 ESV)

In fact, the author of the book of 1 John, John said, "If we confess our.. (silence from congregation)" Okay, we can play, we can play together here, you want to? If we confess our.. sin, God is faithful and he is just to forgive us of our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. You see, when we stumble and fall into sin in this race of faith, what we got to do with this act of steadied determination, we need to get up and we need to confess our sin and get back in the race! Because although we may be down, we are never out with God. Because when we do sin, the answer to our sin is confession. And when we confess, God always forgives. When God forgives, God also accepts. And those to whom he accepts, God continually uses. Listen, you were never out with God. Are you with me? Can I give you an illustration of what I mean? It doesn't matter yes or no, I'm going to give it to you. Here it is. Do you remember the story of David? King David. Here was a man who, without a doubt, blew it big time in his race of faith. The Bible says, when kings go out to battle, David tarried in the city of Jerusalem, and why David was in Jerusalem and he was not with his men, fighting, we do not know. Maybe David, being at 50 years of age, was having a midlife crisis. Maybe David was just tired and weary of fighting, or maybe David, you know, was just.. he just wanted to be alone, some quiet time, some downtime. I do not know, but for whatever the reason, David was not with his men. And so one evening, he went to the top of his palace, and there he saw a woman bathing. Now why this woman was bathing in the public for all to see, we do not know, but there she was. And so David, rather than, you know, fleeing from the lust of his flesh, followed his carnal desires, and thus using his position as king of Israel, he submitted.. he told her to come to his home, and there, of course we know the rest of the story. She came. They committed adultery, and to cover his tracks, he had her husband, Uriah, put to death. For an entire year, David hid his sin, thinking that, you know, his sin has been covered, has been dealt with. And one day about a year later, an old man came into the palace and I always picture in my mind's eye this way- There is David sitting upon his regal throne, stroking his beard, readjusting his golden crown.

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And there, this man, Nathan, comes in and I can see, and you know, in his camel hair, hunched over with a wooden stick. You know, flies flying around him, dust flying off, you know, like Gandalf in Lord of the Rings or something. Here he's walking out without the hat and, you know, staff in hand and he's walking and I can see David just saying, oh no no, here we go again. You know, and so he comes and he tells David a story. And after he tells David this story, David, you know, kind of goes ballistic. How dare that man steal that man's one sheep, you know. Nathan, I can see him straightening himself up, taking his bony crooked finger, straighten it out and put it in the face of David and say, "David, you are that man." There, David's cover-up had been uncovered, his sin and been exposed. David, because he did.. although his actions.. he did have a heart for God. Immediately, the Bible says that David acknowledged his sin and he said, "My sin is always before me," and said, "God against you, and you alone, I sinned." And the moment, David asked God for forgiveness, at the moment David confessed his sin, His sin was forgiven. And you realize at that very moment, he was accepted. And where there is acceptance, there's always future usability, and the same as you would David. Do you realize of the 150 Psalms found in the Old Testament, 73 were written by David, and of those 73 psalms written by David, 43 of those were written after David's confession of sin with Bathsheba and taking the life of her husband, Uriah.

Which reminds me, friends, you may be down but you are never out with God. If you find yourself crippled by sin, you found you have fallen in this race of faith, then God says to you, hey, listen, with that look of steadied determination, with a purpose to win the race, get up and confess that sin. Get back into the race! Don't let the devil have a victory in your life. We all can be faithful to the finish. Hey remember those.. your encouragers, remember those who have gone before you. Let them stand as your example, realize their God, yes, he is your God. The God of yesterday, yes, he is the God of today and he delivered them, hey, God can deliver you. Lay aside your encumbrances. What has gripped your heart? What is tearing you down? What is hindering you in this race of faith? Lay it aside! If you don't, it will lay you aside in this race of faith. And then run with endurance, you may be down but you're never out. And lastly it's this. In all of your running, remember to rely upon Jesus Christ, who is, without a doubt, our unbelievable example. You know, every runner knows that where you look is of extreme importance. You know what I'm talking about? You know that runner who is running and he's always looking at his feet, he's bound to stumble. That runner, you know who is running, and he's always waving at mom in the grandstand, or he's looking at the runner next to him, you know, he's bound to make a terrible mistake.

I remember a few years ago, we had some visitors with us in Singapore, and they've not been here so we took them downtown. I remember this one young lady about 21 years of age, was just so.. kind of overcome, you know, by the scenery in Singapore. She was kinda looking up and she did one, two, three steps and realized she'd been walking in wet cement. And I remember the guy was right there smoothing the cement. I mean, he looked at her, he had this look on his face like an "are you stupid or are you blind?" you know? But where you look is of extreme importance, is it not? Every runner knows that. But you know the same is true in the race of faith. Where you look is of extreme importance. You see, in this race of faith, if you're always looking to yourself, or you're always looking and comparing yourself with others, or if you're always looking at your situation and your circumstance, you too are bound to stumble. But you see, if you're going to be faithful to the finish, you need to gaze upon Jesus. In fact, as the Scripture says, you need to be looking unto Jesus. Why? Because he's the author and he is the finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, the Bible says that he endured the cross, despising the shame and then sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him, Jesus, who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your soul. Hey, listen, nobody ran a better race. Nobody ran a harder race, and yet nobody ran a more successful race than did our Lord.

Jesus left the glories of heaven. And he came to this earth, and there he took the form of a man, and as a man, he lived a sinless life. And when the time was right, he willingly submitted himself in the hands of sinful men, and there he submitted himself to death upon that cross, because there upon that cross, Jesus died for you. He endured the pain and the shame of the cross. As he was there dying for our sins, you remember the world gathered around him and they began to mock him and said to him, "Listen, if you are the Son of God," they said, "Save yourself! Others you have saved, but yourself, you cannot save. Come down from that cross!"

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But he didn't. Why? Because he knew, that if he was going to redeem you, if he was going to set you free from sin, death and hell, if he was going to change your address from hell to heaven, that he needed to stay upon that cross, and do for you what you can't do for yourself, and he did. He shed his blood to save us. Friends, you realize he shed (his blood), not just to save us from sin, death and hell. But the Scripture says he died so he might be your example, and just as.. although he may have grown weary, he finished his race. Jesus Christ died setting you an example, lest you become weary and you become discouraged in your souls. We need to be looking to

him. And you know this word, "look" is a beautiful word. Can I just stop for a moment? Since we have a lot of time, and I'm almost done, right? Can I deviate just a moment? Thank you for the nods. This side said yes, this side said nothing, so we're going to take yes. Here we go.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

(John 3:14-15)

You know the word "look" just doesn't mean "to gaze". It refers to a gaze of trust. Do you remember in John chapter 3 when Jesus was sharing with Nicodemus how he could be born again, and Jesus went back to that beautiful Old Testament example where Moses lifted up that pole there in the wilderness and he said to the nation of Israel, "Look, and you shall live." They were bitten by serpents. He says, "Look, and you shall live." And Jesus begins to record that story and he tells Nicodemus, "Nicodemus, you're a Jew, you know how to be redeemed, you know how your sins can be forgiven," He said, "Just look, and you shall live." It's a look of trust, it's a gaze of dependence. And if we're going to be faithful to the finish, we too need to be looking to Jesus as our example and trusting him to strengthen us in our race of faith. Friends, you need to draw your strength from Jesus, the spirit of Christ, who lives and dwells within you.

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

(John 15:5 ESV)

In fact, Jesus Himself said in John 15 in verse 5, he says, "Without me," He says, "You can do nothing."

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

(Philippians 4:13 ESV)

Paul said in Philippians chapter 4 in verse 13, he says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." And if we're going to be faithful to the finish, if we're going to overcome the pressures and the discouragements and the struggles that we encounter in this race of faith, and if we're going to carry on to the end and be able to stand before our God and say to him, "O Lord, I have been faithful to the end. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have run my race, then we need to be looking to Christ, our Saviour, as our example, and we need to be relying and trusting him to give us the strength to do what He alone has called us to do. Let me

ask you a question as we bring this to a conclusion this morning. Have you grown weary in your race of faith? Have you grown weary? Are you sitting on the sidelines watching the race go by? Have you lost your zeal? Maybe even tripped on the race of faith, maybe due to sin, you find yourself laying there on the track of life as a crumpled heap. If this is where you find yourself, slowly drifting away from God, do you know there's always time to get up and get back in that race? There's always time to change.

How many of you know the name Alfred Nobel, do you know that name? Likely you do, but if not, let me tell you his story, can I? Alfred Nobel. One day, Alfred Nobel was reading the newspaper in his home, and lo and behold to his surprise, he came across his name in the obituary column of his newspaper. Could you imagine? And how disconcerting to realize that you're no longer classified amongst the living. But you're now classified amongst the dead? Well, realizing that the world thought he was dead, he wanted to see what the world thought of him, because he didn't write his own obituary. And the article went on to explain that Alfred Nobel was a man who gave the world its most destructive weapon, dynamite. And he was horrified to realize that if he were to die today, the world will remember him as a man that gave the world its most destructive weapon, a weapon that resulted in the death of literally millions of people. And so he was horrified and so he said to himself, right there, he said, "Today, I'm going to make a change, and when I do die, I will not be remembered as a man who gave the world its most destructive weapon, but I will be remembered as a man who gave the world peace." And today, Alfred Nobel is not being very well known as being the man who gave the world dynamite, but he is very well known as being that man who gave us the Nobel Peace Prize. But you see, there came a point in his life where he decided to make a change, that he was going this direction, but no, he was going to start going this direction.

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And if you find yourself laying there upon that track of life, you've stumbled, you have fallen, maybe you've just been discouraged, maybe it was the cutting word of a careless Christian.. just derailed your walk with God. Or maybe you know, it was just the pressures of life that began to rob you of your time with God, and if that's where you find yourself, listen, it's time to make a change. It's time to stand up and say, "Lord, no, enough is enough. I've been drifting long enough and I want to be faithful. I want to fight the good fight, I want to finish my course, I want my life to mean something for your glory." And so God says, "Hey, look back to your encouragers and remember, the race that you are running has been successfully run before." The God

of yesterday, yes, he is your God, and just as he brought them through, he says he can bring you through. You are not alone. You're not experiencing something that has not been experienced before. There is success with our God, and then lay aside that which has gripped your life, and you know what it is. What has gripped your life? What has taken you away from God? What has caused you to drift? You know what it is. Whatever it is, the spirit of the living God is placing his finger upon it right now. You know what it is. Will you lay it aside? And there, with just that look of steadied determination, just stand up and get running. If you need to confess, confess. But in your running, listen, keep your eyes upon Jesus. There's no greater motivation in this race of faith than you and I realizing what he has done for us. Many times, we talk about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ made for us, but rarely do we talk about the sacrifice he requires of us. And when you keep that in perspective and we keep our eyes upon him, we draw our strength from him. Listen, everyone of us, it doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter what your struggles may be, doesn't matter what has happened on the road of life. Listen, you can get up and you can get back in that race and God can use you again for His glory. And may each and everyone of us be faithful to the finish.

Let's bow for a prayer, shall we? With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, Lord we just want to say thank You today. We want to say thank You for Jesus. Jesus, thank You today, that as we look to the cross, it's bloodstained but it's empty. As we look to the tomb, it is empty. Because You have defeated sin, death and hell on our behalf, and You sit today at the right hand as our Author and as our Finisher. You stood as our example and You empower us as our strength. Lord, I want to pray today for each and every person within this auditorium. Lord, maybe there are some today that are struggling with the issues of life. Lord, maybe there are some that are. Find themselves at the crossroads of life, about ready to make a poor decision. Lord, maybe some have tripped and fallen into sin, and they're lay there upon that track of life, wondering, is God done with me? Lord, I pray for those today, that they would look back to those who have gone before us, they lay aside in confession whatever it may be, that You would enable them to stand up, and to get back in that race of faith, that they too might be faithful to the finish. Lord, bless, these Your people. And may each and everyone of us live a life that brings glory and honour and praise to Your name, and we ask it in Jesus' Name, Amen.