

Finishing Well In Ministry

by Ademola Ishola

This sermon emphasizes the importance of finishing well in ministry, drawing insights from 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. It highlights the need for clear focus on Jesus, consideration of fellow competitors, strict training, self-control, awareness of disqualification, the cloud of witnesses, and the expectation of eternal rewards for faithful service.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:24, Hebrews 12:1, 2 Timothy 4:7, Ecclesiastes 7:8, Genesis 6:9, Proverbs 25:28, Philippians 3:14, Matthew 6:19

Topics: "Finishing Well", "Eternal Rewards"

Description

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Transcript

I started wondering, what is the spirit of the Lord leading me to bring to us? I didn't know what direction until a few weeks ago that I got to know what I think it was going to be. Finishing well in ministry. The Lord led me to the passage in 1 Corinthians chapter 9. I want us to read the passage from verse 24 to 27.

1 Corinthians chapter 9 from verse 24. From the NIV version, the word of the Lord reads, Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training.

They do it to get a crown that will not last. But we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly.

I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave, so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. I realize the Lord God majors in finished products.

He is not interested in abandoned projects. That is what we major in here in Nigeria. Especially by insensitive irresponsible leaders that we have at the moment.

Time after time they will keep awarding contracts after contracts, year in year out, over one single project. And it will still remain the same. I was reading through our newspapers the other day and I saw the mausoleum they were building for Nnamdi Azikwe.

Can you imagine how long ago they have been building that? And it remains just like they have just started the construction. And we are talking about, I don't know, over 20 years ago. And these kleptomaniacs will keep re-awarding and re-awarding and then keep chopping and chopping the money.

A national leader that served us well. Of course, mausoleum, what is the use of it? Rather than we want to honor a respected leader. But what about projects that will attract more money into the country? Provide jobs for teeming young people out there.

It remains comatose. The Lord is not interested in abandoned projects. And last night we heard what his mind is concerning you, concerning this individual standing before you.

Ecclesiastes chapter 7 verse 8 tells us that the end of the matter is better than the beginning of it. And the Lord stressed the importance of making sure that when you are called and you respond to him, you better make sure that you end well. There are so many in the Bible.

Joseph, a young man who started the race before him, finished so strong to the extent that he could even order his men, when I die, this is what will happen to you. Pack my bones back to the promised land. The man was even looking forward as if he would be alive to witness the return to the promised land.

Samuel was one kind of a servant of the Lord that really served the Lord from childhood until the very end. The man who was even looked for, sought after, when he was dead. What a way to finish.

David, in spite of the yo-yo, up and down, his waywardness here and there, finished so strong. And he was happy to pass on the baton of leadership. But before then he was even looking far ahead as if he didn't want to die without finishing some projects that God laid on his heart, especially like the temple.

And he gave all he had in the savings to make sure that the son, the young man, would be able to complete the assignment. Solomon, I would say he finished well too. After all, the testimony of God is found in Ecclesiastes.

To let you know that after he messed up and he now came back to his senses, he had to share that with you all. Please don't mess up the way I did. And wasted so many opportunities.

That's the reason for Ecclesiastes. He was pursuing some things that were not part of the assignment. I want to use Paul as a prototype of someone whom the Lord gave an assignment and he finished so well, so strong.

He stood tall among the pack, especially in the New Testament. And I want to share with you from this passage, and the Lord made it so easy for me to find my outline from the passage. And I'm borrowing our theme for this year as my topic.

Finishing well in ministry. Finishing well in ministry. The first thing that I see is that finishing well in ministry calls for clear focus.

Clear focus. Verse 24 says, Do you not know that in a race all the runners run but only one gets the prize? So run in such a way as to get the prize. Focus on the target and make sure that you end well.

As I was sitting right there, my eyes fell on this. Jesus. Our focus.

Our focus. You know, anytime in a race, and I suppose Paul decided to liken the ministry committed to you, committed to me, the job, the assignment, to a race. Or a race.

Any sport at all. And you consider the athletes, he considered the athletes, the sportsmen and sportswomen who participate in a competition. He likened the ministry to that.

Recently, the Green Eagles lost. And my people were very angry. You know I don't watch football much.

The reason is I always want Nigeria to win. And therefore for me to sit down and for them to lose, it makes me sick so I don't even watch it at all. But if they win, I will now sit down after the match to now watch and enjoy.

That's me. I run away from it. You know, I also decided not to go to stadium anymore.

I remember, I think that was maybe 1971. And then stationary scores were played in Kumasi Stadium. And the stationary scores beat the Asante Kotoko.

You don't know that one. And I wore a dansiki, the Yoruba, you know, dress. And anyone that looks like Nigerian, the Ghanaians pounced on them.

Oh, I removed my dansiki. And I look like Ghanaians. I speak a little bit like them.

So I was able to save myself. The same happened, was it two weeks ago, when the Green Eagles lost. And my people were petering them with rocks and all kinds of things.

Because maybe they lost focus. They lost focus. Many times I keep wondering why should we even win any game when we have not won the economic war.

Me? We should keep losing like that. Until our leaders realize the need to get things right. The Yoruba people will say, You know, these Yoruba people, they have a way of saying some things.

What makes a spinster to keep whistling, whistling, whistling? And he decided to eat panded yam. And he put yam on the fire and all of that. And the Yoruba will say, after he finished preparing the thing, who will eat it with him? And he's just Nyanga around, you know, blowing whistle for nothing.

Who will enjoy it? And you enjoy panded yam with several others, apparently. I read 1 Kings chapter 20 this morning. And about a parable of Heha that allowed Ben-Hadad to get away.

And the Lord sent a prophet, go, disguise yourself and present this message to Heha. As I was watching, you know, I'm a soldier and as I was watching this prisoner, and as I was looking here and there, the prisoner ran away. Heha himself said, you have pronounced a judgment yourself.

You are going to die. Your life for the life of that prisoner. The man removed the bandage and he gave the message of the Lord to Heha.

You allowed someone who was supposed to die so that my people will live and my people will not have to suffer in the nearest future. You allowed him to go. Your life for his life.

Unfortunately, there are so many innocent ones that will have to suffer because of your negligence. How many of us are like Heha? We've lost focus. When I begin to hear of some of our pastors engaging in one business after another, pursuing one business or another, rather than focusing on the ministry, making sure that the pulpit ministry is so strong, I keep wondering, what will you get from all of this? You know an athlete will always focus on the end.

That tape, that he will be the first to eat it and win the prize. They say the goalpost, the players will make sure that they will keep, you know, dribbling each other and making sure that the opponents will not score while they would rather prefer to score. Keeping their eyes on the prize.

Finishing well in ministry calls for clear focus. I realized I was given 10 years or even 5 years, first term. And by the grace of God, I was given the opportunity of second term, making 10.

So from the first year, April 2001, I asked the Lord, oh God, oh God, 2011 is just ahead. Help me. Help me.

And with the prayers of God's people, the Lord made it possible. And finished. Leading a denomination, coordinating, facilitating their activities, birthing a university and all of that, by the grace of God, finished well.

Where the Lord has graciously placed you, positioned you, are you focusing your whole attention on him for that particular assignment? Or are you looking here and there? Who are you looking at? Your competitor? Some of us from mainland denominations. Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians and all of us put together. You begin to realize that this new generation churches will pitch their tent close to your own and they begin to draw your members.

Especially the young people. The young people. Invariably what you will begin to do will be to become so jittery.

What must I do now? And you begin to borrow from them and you begin to do certain things. And you begin engaging in spiritual gymnastics, thinking that that's where the answer lies. Forgetting that these individuals use business tactics and all of that to whip up the psychology of our people to attract them.

Now, I hope you are not losing your focus. And I pray the Lord will enable you so to do. I don't know what kind of books you are reading.

Are they related to the ministry? Are they re-equipping you, re-firing you? What kind of programs do you watch on television that will remove your focus from the Lord? There are so many. Who lost focus? Top evangelists. Some of them you know here in Nigeria.

Some of them you have heard, you have seen on television in the U.S., in Britain. They are no longer there. I pray you will not become one of the ministerial casualties.

Secondly, finishing well in ministry calls for consideration of or for fellow competitors. Finishing well in ministry calls for consideration, the awareness that there are other individuals whom God has called alongside you to be part of the ministry. Verse 24, don't you know that those who engage in a race, see the way, do you not know that in a race all the runners run? You are not alone.

You are not alone. So it is extremely important that you will not be a lone ranger when it comes to the ministry the Lord God has called you into. And if you know that, are you going to be a rolling stone, tripping other runners? Or are you going to be a source of inspiration, encouragement to those who are running alongside with you? And I know there are so many of them so close to you, close to me.

My wife is one of that competitor. My wife is one of them. We run the race together.

Oh, there is the tendency for me to ignore her, to simply just, hey woman, you didn't go to seminary, so keep your mouth shut. Ah, Lord have mercy. And thank God for the kind of woman the Lord brought into my life, who will always be picking on me.

And I know there are others apart from my wife, even children. Thank God for those who are committed, devoted to the Lord. Those who recognize that their father is simply a country preacher, a pastor to the core.

And there are so many fellow pastors with whom I run the race. They are there. And you, you know when you are running or playing football, there are referees, there are linesmen.

Those who will check your exercise. It is important that you will pay attention to messages from the Lord through these competitors. Many times I warn our pastors, do you pray with your wives? Do you ask them to pray for you? If possible, while you kneel, let them pray over you.

Those women can pray, oh, they really pray. You know while I am busy here and there, they may be agonizing on my behalf, because I just don't want my husband to fail. The worst thing you can ever do to a woman is to mess up.

Where will she hide her face? That's the bottom line. That's the worst thing you can ever do to a woman. That my husband messed up with another woman.

Ah, they accuse my husband of stealing money. They accuse my husband of cheating. They accuse my husband of causing division in the church.

Can you see this woman becoming literally or living like a widow? Withdrawn. Please, as you are running, the race set before you. As we were told a few minutes ago from Hebrews chapter 12.

The ministry, the law committed into your hand. Remember, you are not alone. There are others.

You must pay attention to God through them. You need to realize there are coaches too. The equipers may be in our own case mentors, your teachers, older folks in the ministry.

They are part of the competition. Number three, finishing well in ministry calls for strict training, discipline. Verse 25.

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last. But we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

Who is an athlete who will not be asked to wake up maybe 5 o'clock in the morning to run about 5 miles? And then a football coach that will count the players in a secluded area where they will not be disrupted. And he will be telling them the secrets of their opponents. And he will be training them to make sure that they overstretch themselves physically, emotionally.

Number three, strict training. When Paul told Timothy, from childhood you have been trained, so don't give it up. Even to the point of your ordination, you continue to be trained.

Those of us that are in discipline, lazy, it's about time to wake up. If you will indeed finish well in the ministry God has committed into your hand. I hope you are not one of the clergy or ministers who will still be in Rapa even at 12 noon.

Just yawning as if you are just waking up. Even if you held vigil for the last 7 days, make sure you will hide yourself from people seeing you in a way, in a manner to suggest that you are a lazy pastor, minister of the Lord God of Glory. And there's a whole lot of strict training you will have to go through.

Why should I come to Boko? That's the question I ask myself every now and then. And it is simply because I just want to be trained again and again and again. I want to be stretched.

I want to make sure that I am kept on my toes. That someone reminds me what I needed to know. Why should I participate in a Bible study? Why should I sit where others are preaching or teaching? And especially when I see my students either preaching or teaching and I sit down there and I take notes and someone will be wondering, what kind of notes are you taking with this young man teaching? Oh no, you may be missing out.

I was sharing with a few of us yesterday morning as we were preparing for Bible study. But anytime I go to a meeting of the clergy, I usually don't respect so-called, whether you are a GO or you are one big man, a Baptist or Episcopalian or Methodist or what have you. That you will not want to come and sit down and listen to others.

You will only be interested to come, preach or finish your own assignment and then bolt away. I don't respect people like that. If you do that to me, I can walk out on you.

If a meeting starts on Monday and my own assignment comes on Wednesday, I want to be there on Monday and make sure that I get the necessary training, discipline, growth that I need. Do you discipline yourself? I don't know how many young ministers are under you. Do you sit down to really listen to them? You may be surprised.

You may be surprised. What the Lord God will make sure you are revealed to you when you pay attention to training. Now if those who collect money will wake up early in the morning like a boxer, 4 a.m., going to pummel the air, punching aimlessly, what about me? What about you? Where else can you get training if not a place like this, if not a place like where you work and you pay attention to what others are teaching? Number four, finishing well in ministry calls for self-control.

It is almost like discipline, almost like training, but self-control. When Paul talks in verse 26, therefore I do not run like a man, running aimlessly. I do not fight like a man beating the air.

I make sure that I place myself under strict control. You know people like us, when you travel here and there, you pray, Lord have mercy upon me. You sleep in one hotel today, maybe another tomorrow.

Virtually every week you are out of your house. You don't sleep in your own bed. And you travel without your wife around.

Oh, that's part of the self-control. What do you watch when you enter that hotel room and you see a pornographic film going on? You want to enjoy it? After all, nobody is watching you. Ah, my Lord is watching.

God of mercy is watching. Especially the assignment that I have before me may be waiting for me. How am I going to waste precious time watching illicit film? Self-control.

You know we have so many gadgets today. I wanted to bring my iPad here to maybe use it as my outline. The laptop.

I carry all of these things around me. And actually, this thing, I was just reading this morning as part of my devotion. Something about some people that cost their company several millions of dollars because they lost focus.

If you don't take care, all these gadgets can enslave you. Do you know that? Where, if you don't take care, some of these my, you know, ICT compliant pastors, one of them came to me and said, As for me, I am paperless now. In other words, I don't even carry my Bible around.

And I said, please carry the thing. The reason why I wanted to carry it around is that you may not be able to mark, underline, highlight a verse on this. You may, sometimes, especially if it is on your laptop.

It may be the iPad today. But here, you will see red, you will see blue, you will see yellow, anything to make sure that as soon as I open my Bible, something caught my attention. Self-control.

How do you handle your wife when she is not in the good mood to have sex with you? Do you rape her? Don't you realize that rape actually takes place in a bedroom sometimes when the other partner is not ready, is not willing, tired, worn out. Oh, I am ready now. I just can't stand this.

Self-control is part of it. I am a spender. You see, I spend money on electronics and books.

And my wife is the saver. She, you know, is just like, is that what you are going to eat? Is that what we are going to eat? And I say, woman, hey, I am interested in this thing. Leave me alone now.

Self-control. Would I be willing to submit to say, I listen to you? Self-control. So many things you can say about it.

But we have to go on. Number five, finishing well in ministry calls for awareness of disqualification. Finishing strong in ministry or well in ministry calls for awareness of disqualification.

Verse 27 says, No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. I beat that body so that at the end, I will not be served. As I left the office of, you know, leading a denomination, that I will no longer be useless because maybe I didn't even finish strong or well while serving the Lord there.

That nobody will look at me, seek me, invite me any longer. Usain Bolt, I think you have heard of him. The Jamaican, I think he is from Jamaica.

That fastest runner, he was disqualified maybe about a month or two months ago, whether in Tokyo or somewhere where they were, you know, running. There was a rule or a new rule that if an athlete, a runner, takes off ahead of the gunshot, he is disqualified. They used to give runners chances maybe about

three times.

If you run ahead, they will say, okay, start all over again. If you run ahead, start all over again. This time around, you do it once and that's it.

And he was out. So many people paid to enter the stadium to go and watch this man run. And they were so angry, so disappointed because he was disqualified for that particular race.

And how many were asked to return the gold they won several years back because they found out that they were on drugs. They enhanced their body illegally so as to be able to outwit their competitors. How many of us have been disqualified for many, many years now and we don't seem to realize it.

The heavenly referee already blew the whistle and the heavenly linesman already, you know, just waved the flag. This man is out. I ask you, do you know whether you have been disqualified some time ago and you didn't even realize it? And you now need to ask the Lord, please, Father, restore.

Restore me. Restore me. Let me move on to number six.

What I found in this passage. Finishing well in ministry calls for awareness of cloud of witnesses. It calls for awareness of cloud of witnesses.

If you are running a race before the largest stadium in the whole world, how will you run? You know, I wonder how the Lord led Oduwaju a while ago to read from Hebrews 11-12 in relation to the cloud of witnesses listed for us in chapter 11. Now, I know there are dead witnesses. They are no longer here.

Dead in the sense that you may not be able to see them. But actually they may be calling your attention to the fact that I didn't do well at a certain point. I better watch out.

Noah may be that kind of dead witness as you are running the race. Having done so well, he decided to entertain himself and got drunk. How many of us behave like Noah? Let me just have some fun now that I am the champion.

Whether in the secret of your room or wherever, I told you I don't know whether it was here last year or some time ago. I went to an Anglican church to worship and I decided to participate in the Lord's Supper, the Holy Communion. I went forward as people were kneeling and knelt.

Fortunately, the man of God didn't know who I was. And after taking the elements, the man of God in front of the people got more than half of the job. And as usual, you know the Anglicans, forgive me, they use real wine.

God be entertaining. I could see the man a little bit staggering. Cloud of witnesses.

I was a witness. And that was disturbing to me. Yes, the rule says that you don't allow anything to remain.

But how do you handle it discreetly in a way that the living witnesses will not begin to walk their tongues? Awareness of cloud of witnesses. My wife is one of them. I started wondering, Lord, if I fail, if I mess up, will I be able to face this woman again? And my children, who are so proud of their father, a pastor, and they are always happy.

He's a pastor. For me to mess up, when they didn't mess up, I had to appreciate my children. Three girls and a boy.

While I was away from them, my wife was away from them, they never messed up. They never messed up. And for me to now mess up.

Lord have mercy. Cloud of witnesses. Look at the church members that are watching you.

The laymen and women watching you. Handle the ministry. For me personally, my disciples are watching me.

They are cloud of witnesses. Some of them are seated here. Where will they hide their faces? When they say, they brag about Ademola Isola, Ademola Isola, he's our fellow, he's our guy, he's our guy, and then I mess up.

Just like Billy was telling us yesterday. Where will you hide your face? Cloud of witnesses. There are cheering spectators within the church.

And there are jeering spectators within the church. They are part of the cloud of witnesses. How are you handling the ministry? The last thing that I will share with you is that finishing word calls for expectation of reward.

Expectation of reward. If you go back to verse 25b, you know these competitors, runners, they are expectant that they will get a wreath that will fade, wither within a few hours. But the Bible says we will get something that will last forever.

But let me say this, just like the Lord Jesus says, that anyone who abandons everything in order to serve me, he will not wait until he gets to heaven before he will get reward. Even from here, the Lord will reward him. I believe that very strongly.

When you perform creditably to the glory of God, for the empowerment of believers, you will get your reward here. Oh, is it money or what have you? Much more. Much more.

And a crown of life, just like Paul says in 2 Timothy chapter 4, a crown of life is waiting for me. Not only for this individual alone, but for all who will finish well in ministry. Let us pray.

Father, into your hand I commit my colleagues, senior colleagues, fellow colleagues, junior ones. And I commit my life into your hand and name. Holy Spirit, we ask you to help us.

The ministry you've committed into our hands must never be handled flippantly. And so we pray for your divine empowerment. And even based on your reminder this morning, in any way that we have faltered, we have fallen short of your standard.

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