

Running the Race

by Erlo Stegen

To receive the prize of eternal life, one must run the race with focus, self-control, and discipline, avoiding the hindrance of sin and being sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Galatians 5:24-25, Philippians 2:5-11, Hebrews 11:24-26, Hebrews 12:1-2, Hebrews 12:4
Topics: "Perseverance in Faith", "Spiritual Discipline"

Description

Erlo Stegen emphasizes the importance of running the spiritual race with focus and discipline, drawing parallels between athletic competition and the Christian life. He illustrates that just as athletes strive for a perishable crown, Christians should aim for an imperishable one, remaining steadfast and avoiding distractions. The sermon highlights the necessity of self-control and the rejection of sin, urging believers to prioritize their relationship with God over worldly pleasures. Stegen warns against complacency, reminding listeners that even those who preach must be vigilant to avoid disqualification. Ultimately, he calls for a commitment to the race, encouraging believers to persevere and keep their eyes on Jesus as the ultimate prize.

Transcript

1Cor 9:24-27, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.

25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.

27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."

1) All run in the race but only one receives the prize. Run to be first.

Such a runner does not look around or look back. Neither does he get involved with other things. He has one goal and that is to be first to the finish line.

The story is told of two princes who claimed the right to the throne of their father who passed away. So the nation decided to have a race between them to determine which will be king. They had to swim across a

wide river. The one's hand to touch the opposite bank first will be crowned king.

As the two princes swam they remained close but at last the one saw that he was going to lose to his brother. So he took his knife, cut off his hand and threw it with his other hand to the opposite bank. And he was crowned king.

He was desperate and the kingdom meant more to him than his hand.

What does God's Kingdom mean to you? Only the one who is completely focused on the goal and distracted by nothing will receive the prize. But the one who makes other Christians his standard for Christian living and indulges in the things of the world because other Christians do, will not receive the prize.

We read of Jesus' constancy and focus on the goal in Phil 2 and Hebr 12.

Hebr 12:2, "... Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Phil 2:5-11, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Moses was brought up as the son of the princess of Egypt. All the royalty and pleasures of Egypt was given to him. But when he saw the suffering of the children of God he chose rather to suffer affliction with them than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season (Hebr 11:24-26). Young people, take note of this!

Where are the young people who will despise the pleasures and riches of this world to rather suffer with the children of God, because they look towards their eternal reward.

Many parents are disappointed when their children give up their careers for the sake of serving Christ full-time. But the family and nation that put education and career before Christ will not prosper.

God is calling us to the heavenly race where Jesus Christ Himself is the prize.

2) Everyone who competes is temperate in all things and exercises self-control.

To exercise self-control in all things is of utmost importance. Put aside anything which could be a hindrance to you in your race.

There is no greater hindrance than sin. If you are not careful sin will entangle, suffocate and eventually destroy you. Sin will hinder God's working in your life.

In the testimony of Evan Roberts, whom God used so mightily, there were four points which he emphasised.

Remember all your sins and confess them thoroughly.

Do away with anything doubtful in your life.

Obey the Holy Spirit instantly.

Confess Christ publicly.

Evan left school when he was 11 years old. He did not have a good education. But when God started working in his life, within one week he lead 60 people to the Lord and approximately 100,000 within the first year. What has happened since you met the Lord? What are you doing for Christ with your good education?

Every sin separates you from God. No matter how big or small you consider your sin. A Christian is not allowed to sin.

One can easily differentiate between a true Christian and one which is only a Christian in name. The person who avoids and parts from sin is the true Christian.

The one who is only a Christian in name does not take God's Word seriously. He regards sin as a minor mishap and not so important. Such a person cannot stand against the devil and the flesh.

Sin becomes bitter to a true Christian. He wages war against sin. He doesn't take sin lightly. He knows that sin, no matter how small in appearance, is the work of the devil. That's why a true Christian say, "I'd rather die, get wounded or lose my possessions than sin". As we read in Hebr 12:4, "You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin."

3) "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."

Watch, lest while you preach to others you yourself become a castaway. That's why a young convert should not quickly preach or become a leader in the church. He must first show by his life that he is truly converted.

Even the lusts of the flesh must be controlled by the Holy Spirit and reigned in. As we read in Gal 5:24-25, "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." Obey the Holy Spirit of God instantly. Be sensitive when He speaks. Do what He bids you do and leave what He tells you to leave instantly.

Run God's race and do not be slack! May you not stop short of the goal but persevere to the end.

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