

Running the Race Carefully

by Phil Beach Jr.

The sermon emphasizes the importance of running the spiritual race with care, patience, and humility, and of focusing on Jesus in order to avoid divided desires and spiritual injury.

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1-2, Hebrews 12:7, Hebrews 12:11-13, Hebrews 12:15, Hebrews 12:25, Hebrews 12:28

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Faith Endurance"

Description

Phil Beach Jr. preaches about the spiritual race we are in, likening it to running a physical race, emphasizing the importance of following God's Word and listening to His voice to avoid serious spiritual injury. He highlights the need to lay aside weights and sins that hinder us, to run with patience and endurance, and to keep our focus solely on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Additionally, he discusses the significance of not despising or becoming weary of the Lord's correction and child-training, as they are meant for our growth and maturity in Christ.

Transcript

"Let us run....the race set before us..." Heb. 12: 1b. Many years ago, I became very devoted to running, During that time I spent many hours reading about the proper ways to run, different types of clothing to wear, the best kind of foods to eat, etc. At one point, I was actually running 50 miles weekly! Some of the lessons I learned about running were very important to insure safety and to prevent injury. Interestingly, God's Word likens our walk with Jesus to running in a race.

We must learn deeply of our Lord and His Word, walking in His love and following His voice, if we are to be able to run this race properly and finish without serious injury to our spiritual health. At times, while running, I would take my eyes off the path to glance at a house or passing landmark. Usually when I did this I stumbled on the path and twisted my ankle, suffering severe pain for several days. Sometimes I would fail to stretch before my run and this would result in experiencing severe leg cramps and soreness that could last for days.

Just as there are consequences to not following the proper rules for physical training, so likewise there are consequences to not following God's Word or not listening to His voice. Let's look at God's Word and listen to His voice to see what He tells us about the spiritual race we are in. We will learn the proper way to run, and will also learn the dangerous consequences of not running according to God's Word. Be On Guard While Following Jesus In Hebrews chapter 12, God gives us very important admonitions that are intended to help us finish our spiritual race without suffering serious spiritual injury.

These commands are designed to assist us in keeping a watch, in the light of God's Word and His Son, upon our heart condition. God wants us to maintain a spiritually healthy heart. Yet, because of indwelling sin together with the evil in this world, it is easy to develop an unhealthy heart. This will result in not properly running the race set before us and suffering serious injury. There are some injuries so serious that we can miss finishing the race and not win the prize.

Of course, the prize we are called to run for is not an earthly award. This prize is the joy of entering into the highest intention of God's eternal purpose, both in this age and in the age to come. This intention is that we may come to know God's Son deeply and that our lives are shaped and conformed into His moral likeness so that we are able to express His beauties in our words, deeds and actions. We should have no greater desire as God's people than to be able to come to know our Lord Jesus in the most intimate way possible.

Then we can know Him and make Him known by expressing His great love and ways in all our actions and deeds, together with our words. Just like the famous song says, "I'd rather have Jesus...than silver and gold... than to be the king of a vast domain...", so our heart's cry should be! Let's look at God's Word now and see the Lord's admonitions, asking Him to help us to heed His warnings so that we may run the race set before us and finish our course remembering that if we fail to listen to His voice, we will suffer injury, and in some cases such serious injury that we may forfeit the prize.

Lay Aside All the Weights The Holy Spirit first tells us in this chapter to say aside every weight and the sin that so easily entraps us. The idea is of a runner who must strip himself of all unneeded weights and clothing so that nothing hinders him from performing his best. As our hearts are filled with a vision of the Lord Jesus and the goal He has set before us to know Him in His fullness, we are compelled to put away from us all that may keep us from obtaining. Anything in our lives and hearts that does not build up the life of Christ and further His interests should be laid aside.

As we ask the Lord about this, He may show us that even some legitimate things may be hindering us from running this race and may require us to remove them out of our lives. Unnecessary baggage in our lives can wrap itself around our hearts and minds and hence, choke out of us the very life of the Lord. This is the idea of this warning, dear one. This illustration the Holy Spirit uses is to describe the idea of extra clothing that a runner may be wearing that can flap in the wind and entangle itself around the runner and cause him to stumble and fall!

We must come to the Lord and ask Him what the sin is that so easily entangles us and is choking the spiritual life from us, hindering us from running the race? Perhaps it would be good to ask the Lord to give us very honest hearts in this matter so we can hear him speak to us about the sins that entangle us? Let's not assume that we are free from such a snare! Maybe in our own eyes, we seem to feel we are quite above reproach in this matter, but should we ask the Lord, He most likely would have much to say to us.

Maybe a loved one can help us in this matter and we are unwilling to listen? We will not finish the race set before us if we do not put away the weights and sins that often weight us down. Running with Patience As we run this race set before us we are also told to have patience. This means possessing endurance, fortitude and perseverance. So often during a time of testing or trial we are greatly tempted to give up. We lose sight of the Lord's promises when we are in a time and season of deep suffering if we do not stay close to Him.

Sometimes a strong desire or distraction can turn us aside from patiently waiting on the Lord. Abraham became impatient regarding the Lord's promise to give him a son, and so had a child with another woman. This son, who he named Ishmael, brought much sorrow to Abraham and even today, the sons of Ishmael are fighting against the son's of Isaac. King Saul also became impatient and failed to wait for the Lord's Word to come to pass. His actions resulted in being rejected as King over the nation Israel!

Beloved, this call to patience is a very important one. There is much for impatience within our hearts and we live in an age that has come to expect to receive everything very quickly. We think we can bring this mindset into the Lord's work and expect Him to work very quickly as well. But when we do this we commit a great error. God's work takes time in our lives and His provisions, both material and spiritual, come to us according to His timetable and not ours. If we are not careful over this matter of being patient, we will act independent of God's will by our own impulses and desires and bring much damage to both ourselves and others.

Today the Lord is telling all of us to be patient and wait for Him. We must not seek to take things out of His hand and place them in our hands. Nothing is safe in our hands, dear one. Nothing at all! Only as we place all things in His hands and patiently let Him guide us, teach us, instruct us in the way we are to go...can we have assurance that His full intention will be carried out. Sometimes we are led astray into thinking that things are safe in our tight grip. This is dangerous to believe.

Anything the Lord has given to us is only safe if we take it and give it back to Him, for His keeping and use for His purposes! If we fail to do this, we will abuse and misuse the trust the Lord has given to us and be led astray! There is no exception to this truth. Anything we fail to give back to the Lord for His keeping will be wasted by our foolish and ignorant wisdom. We are all depicted in the story of the prodigal son. Because he demanded his inheritance for his own use, he wasted it all and ended up living with the pigs and eating their food.

This is exactly what we do when we demand to run our own life. May God give us ears to hear and the grace to place all that we are and all that we possess into His holy and competent hands! Looking Unto Jesus Next we are told to look to Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith. Oh, how important this is! Where are the eyes of our heart today? To look to Jesus actually means the act of turning away from anything else so as to be able to fully focus on one object alone!

We cannot say we are looking to Jesus if the eyes of our heart or mind are fixed on something other than Jesus. Satan can deceive us by making us think we are looking to Jesus when we are yet still looking at our hopes, our dreams, our wealth, our possessions, or the people in our lives. If we try to look at the same time at Jesus and something or someone else, we are not at all looking at him in the way God's Word commands us to. This is like trying to love God and money at the same time.

It is impossible to do this. Jesus said you cannot serve at the same time both God and mammon, the material world of possessions and money. We are either devoted to one or the other but cannot be devoted to both at the same time. Likewise, we cannot be looking to Jesus, as the gaze of our soul and heart while at the same time looking at anything else. Only as we stay focused on Jesus, as the gaze, passion, desire and longing of our heart can we know how to follow Him and His leadings and know what we are to do from day to day in our busy lives.

Remember, Jesus is our prize and the goal of our Christian life! Nothing down here on earth is our goal. So, may the Lord help us today to see how most of the time we are not looking to Jesus because we are

trying to see both Jesus and other things at the same time. May God give us a single eye and desire and heal us from being divided, or double-desired in our hearts! Only then will our bodies be filled with His light and we will see clearly in His light and know what He is doing and follow Him alone, being kept from following our own selfish ambitions and desires.

Remember, we will become just like the thing we are seeing! Be very careful dear one what you are after, what you are focused on, what your labor is being spent for. Jesus said not to labor for what is perishing but to labor for what is heavenly. He also said not to make buying, selling, homes, lands, food, clothing and money the focus of our lives. Instead, we are to seek first, with all our passions and strength, His kingdom and what we have need of He will provide. Do not Despise or Become Weary of the Lord's Chastening Perhaps one of the greatest temptations we face is to begin to despise and resent the correction and child-training the Lord brings into our lives, because we fail to see His loving intention.

God's chastening in our lives has a two-fold meaning. First it means to be corrected and disciplined because of moral failure. Second it means to be trained and taught so as to prepare us for adulthood. Both of these ideas are included in this passage of God's Word. To despise is to take lightly by not taking to heart. When we are being taught and disciplined by our Father in heaven we are always tempted to treat it too lightly and miss the lesson He is seeking to teach us. We are just like our children.

Sometimes when we are seeking to correct or train them, we are compelled to say to them, "Please pay attention to me". How annoying it is when we are trying to teach our children or punishing them and we see their eyes wander away and by their actions we can tell they are taking the whole experience lightly. We are just as guilty before the Lord as our children are before us, dear ones! Our pride and ego resents being corrected by the Lord and even worse, when the Lord chooses to use another person to correct us!

Some may be quite willing to endure God's correction when they are receiving it from His hand directly, either from His Word or by His Spirit. But if God should use another person to correct and chasten, oh, how our hearts can well up with anger. God uses many ways to teach and correct us and we must not ever despise any of those methods He may choose. Is there festering resentment in your heart today because the Lord has tried to correct you? Are you fainting and feeling like giving up because you are heavy hearted over the Lord's dealings in your life?

Perhaps it has been a long trial you have been called to endure and you feel you have no more strength. Sometimes the Lord's rebuking hand upon our lives that is intended to bring us to deeper repentance is almost unbearable. During this time, we can very easily close our hearts and become hard and calloused. Our emotions can rage out of control with feelings of despair, confusion and a sense of hopelessness. We may be tempted to isolate ourselves from others and become unwilling to acknowledge our faults or seek help.

This happens because our pride fights very hard to die and tries to use all these emotional attacks to get us to resist the Lord's convictions in our life. Pride despises the call from God to humble ourselves and admit to guilt and our need to confess our faults to others. Should this happen, we will be in danger of serious injury and may not finish the course the Lord has chosen for us, if we are not delivered from this condition. We must remember that God loves us very much and all His dealings in our life, as painful as some of them may be are always for our good, so that we may come to know Him more fully and partake in His moral likeness and holiness, so that together we may become the body of Christ through whom His fullness may be revealed. It is the Lord and His voice that we must learn to both listen to and obey and

God's chastening and child training in our lives is so that we may learn this vital lesson. To be continued....

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