

# World's Toughest Race: Run Free

2020-08-23 by Ben Deaver at Tallgrass Church on Hebrews 12:1-3

## Welcome

### Fall 2020 is here!

- Long's Park on Sundays
- Young Adult Study on Sunday evenings
- Tallgrass Youth Group on Monday evenings
- Guys' Group and Women's Study on Tuesday evenings
- Park Parties on Wednesday evenings
- We're kicking all this off with 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting starting August 31. We'll talk more about that next Sunday. We'll also take the Lord's Supper together next Sunday.
- Right Now Media is there to spur on your engagement with God this fall.

### Pray over teachers, parents, and students.

Isaiah 40:28-31

<sup>28</sup> Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.

<sup>29</sup> He gives power to the faint,  
and to him who has no might he increases strength.

<sup>30</sup> Even youths shall faint and be weary,  
and young men shall fall exhausted;

<sup>31</sup> but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;

they shall run and not be weary;  
they shall walk and not faint.

## Nothing But the Blood

### World's Toughest Race: Run Free

*World's Toughest Race: Eco-Challenge Fiji with Bear Grylls*

- We like to watch people go through challenges and emerge victorious.
- We love hearing their stories and what's motivating them.
- This is why we like watching sports.

I've been loving the analogies in Scripture recently. We've talked a lot recently about trees with their roots going deep. We've talking about replacing the sand in our lives and building on rock. We've talked about being like animals, like an ox with the need for burdens being lifted or a lost sheep in need of being found. What a great way to study Scripture, dive into the figurative language and let that guide you from start to finish. This morning we're talking about running a race.

Each human being is in a race!

- Are you running your race?
- Do you want to run the race you're in?
- Have you settled in your heart that you have to run this race?
- This race is more marathon than sprint and more adventure race than marathon.
- And we've come to a section of our race this fall that is extremely difficult, difficult to see what's ahead and difficult to navigate with new challenges. And there's not many, if any, who've ran a section of the race quite like fall 2020 here on planet earth. So, it's a good time to talk about running the race.
- Get out a Bible and let's make the most of this time together this morning addressing three questions. Divide your paper into thirds.

## Three Questions:

1. How will I prepare to run?
2. Who will run with me?
3. Who is cheering us on?

### Hebrews 12:1-3

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, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

## PRAY

### 1. How will I prepare to run?

- We have to understand what kind of race we're in. What's the nature of the race? **ἀγῶνα (agōna)** Where we get the word agony from. This is a terribly difficult but rewarding race.
  - Can you imagine treating a marathon like a 100-meter sprint? You finish 100 meters and then realize you have 26.1 miles left.
  - It's not enough to make a solid push at the beginning of the race and then coast to the finish line. We've got to run the whole race.
  - We need to take time to develop our race strategy and then try to execute it.

- When running a half marathon you try to run negative splits. That means you want the second half of your race to be faster than the first half so you can have a nice kick at the end. This means you have to discipline yourself to go slower at the beginning than you're inclined to.
  - Two Bill Snyder Highway Half races and two results:
  - Tried to catch someone early instead of running my race and I had nothing left at the end (although I still beat that person!).
  - Ran with Steve Thorpe who helped me execute a great race strategy. Faster, felt better!
- What's the actual goal of the race? To finish. We need to know where the finish line is.
  - I remember running a race on K-State's campus for some cause. The race path wasn't clearly marked. There was mass confusion. We were all wondering who to follow. Eventually we all ended up in the same place. There was no clarity on times and definitely no clear winner but it was all fun and games. The cause was supported and we had a good laugh.
  - The race of life has much higher stakes than that one.
  - Why are we actually here doing this thing called life? What's the end goal? What's the finish line? Will we end the race with a medal or a disqualification?
- Listen to the Apostle Paul's intentionality with his race training.
- **1 Corinthians 9:24** <sup>24</sup> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.
- **Philippians 3:14** I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.
  - Becoming like Jesus is the goal, not just spending eternity with Him, but becoming like Him. Big difference.
- So these last few weeks we've been in a mini-sermon series called Lifting Burdens where we've been talking about easing the yoke on our shoulders as we head into the fall. So where is the burden lifting in all this talk about running this agonizing yet exhilarating adventure race of life?
- Here it is: Let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely or so easily entangles (NIV)
- The Greek Olympians used to run naked for a reason. They were unhindered by any burden preventing them to run free. There's stories about what led them to compete naked. One story is that an athlete tripped on his loincloth and so they decided to just get rid of it. Now, I'm not proposing that we get rid of our race clothing. But I am highlighting what the author of Hebrews is saying, that we all are carrying stuff with us that's keeping us from running free.
- Weights AND Sin—So there are weights you're carrying around with you that are not sin but are preventing you from running your race well.

## EXTRA WEIGHT & ENTANGLING SIN

- Take a sheet of paper from the notepad and get a pen. We need to go to work a bit here.
- On the left side write EXTRA WEIGHT and on the right side write ENTANGLING SIN.
  - I want to take some time listing whatever the Spirit of God brings to mind. Don't deal with it right now. Just write it down.
  - I'm not sure that there's a difference between just sin and entangling sin but for some reason that descriptor is helpful for me.
  - Distractions, extra baggage, lies, old mindsets, old habits
  - Extra weight would be things that aren't inherently sinful in and of themselves but are hindering you from running freely.

- For me this might be reading Fox News and CNN.
  - Choosing the best over the good. Or at least choosing the better over the good. Or at least choosing the good over the mediocre.
  - Netflix may be a weight preventing you from running free.
- There's good training and there's better training.
- There's a decent nutrition plan and there's a better nutrition plan.
- Hebrews was written to a group of Jews who were running the race, following Jesus but were reverting back to old ways of relating to God that didn't work. When they realized that they continued to sin in life they got confused and went back to Temple worship to try to make themselves right with God instead of continuing to look to Jesus, the starter AND finisher of their faith. Temple worship, or Jewish religious activity, was an EXTRA WEIGHT that they needed throw off so they could run free. They needed to know that the blood of Christ covered their sins, past, present, AND future.
- Are there things you default to when the race gets difficult? Are there old lies that begin to hinder you? Old mindsets? Old habits? What extra weight and entangling sin do you need to throw off so you can run free?
- You may want to think more on this passage and training for this race this week. Let this analogy press you forward in your walk with Jesus. Perhaps the Spirit of God will share with you some insight I'm missing this morning and then you can share that with me and others.
- The author of Hebrews and Paul both thought deeply on the race analogy and it's worthy of our meditation too.
- So how will I prepare to run and then who will run with me?

## 2. Who will run with me?

- Notice that this is actually a team event. We're in this together.
- ...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**...
  - I need you to get rid of the weights that are holding you back and the sin that's entangling you so that we can run this race TOGETHER!
  - You need me to get rid of all that stuff too so we can run this race TOGETHER!
- This is what Tallgrass Church is for, to help us run our race the best we can. And to help others run their race as best they can.
- **Hebrews 10:24-25** <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
  - Barna Report—*One in Three Practicing Christians Has Stopped Attending Church During COVID-19*
  - So many unengaged people who say they believe in the Gospel.
- Because God first loved us, we exist to love God and love our neighbors.
- We want to spur one another on, no matter what your background or stage of life. We want to have families, married folks without kids, singles, students, retirees, infants, high school students, all of the above. We want to run alongside one another!

### 3. Who is cheering us on?

- Who is this cloud of witnesses and what are they doing? This cloud of witnesses are all who've gone before us, especially those listed in Hebrews 11, the Hall of Faith chapter.
- Cheering us on! All followers of Christ in the Scripture, throughout church history, and who you've known...are cheering us on right now. And Jesus Himself is part of that crowd!
- NBA games and their fake fans while we're all watching from home. We are cheering them on...even if they can't feel it as much as they'd like to. We are really cheering them on. They've put up fake fans around the basketball court to help the players feel like they are being cheered on. They really are being cheered on.
- I've been thinking about this cloud of witnesses that I've know that are now cheering me on.
  - Josh Yarrow and others who are dear to me who've passed from this life into the next.
  - Mentors over the years.
  - Family members.
  - Many I wish I'd gotten to know better and who I will get to know better at the finish line.
- Eugene Peterson, author of the paraphrase *The Message*—I'm reading his biography *The Pastor*.
- So many movie scenes where the son is scanning the crowd to see if he's father's there watching him. Terribly heartbreaking when he realizes that his dad is nowhere to be found.
  - That is never the case with us. Our heavenly Father is watching us and cheering us on!
- Awareness of the crowd cheering us on is helpful but our eyes are to be FIXED on Jesus—looking to Jesus, the starter and finisher of our faith...
- Where should you look when running?
  - Look ahead 10 to 20 feet. Don't stare at your feet, don't look a mile or even 100 yards down the road, don't look to your left or right. Look ahead 10 to 20 feet!
  - Where should Pepper and Alicia, who shared last week, look when running their race?
  - Where should you look when running your race?
  - I don't think we should assume that everyone we run into or comes around our church actually has a relationship with Jesus yet. He is the author and finisher of our faith.
  - Some here this morning and many in our neighborhoods don't yet know the point of the race of life because they don't yet know Jesus. Telling them is part of us running our race well.

### Dilan Oglesby

- I've asked Dilan to share some about his race because I've loved running alongside him these last few years and seeing how he's been running with endurance. He's fixing his eyes on Christ.

### Fourth and final question: How will we finish the race?

- If Jesus is on your team, then you win the race! We win the race. His victory is ours. We stand on the podium beside Christ.
- Fix our eyes on Jesus, the starter and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God...cheering us on!
  - According Ephesians 2:6 we are seated right there with Christ.
  - On the cross, Jesus' last words secured our crossing the finish line with Him when He said, "It is finished!"

## PRAY

### Pure & Holy Passion

#### Hebrews 12:1-4 in The Message—Discipline in a Long-Distance Race

Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on *Jesus*, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's *there*, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. *That* will shoot adrenaline into your souls!

### Benediction

#### 11:00—After Party