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Running And Finishing The Race Pastor Charles Mendenhall

Running the course or finishing the race that the Lord has set before us can be challenging and as we read statistics regarding the amount of pastors, around 1700 each month leaving their ministries, it would indicate that they are not finishing the course set before them, not crossing the finish line, ignoring the call that God has placed on their lives. However, the amount of believers, around 3500 per day are leaving, people disillusioned with the churches, don't think that they are necessary, are coming to be entertained instead of trained. It has been determined that the greatest need in the churches today is that people be taught the word of God. Whether these statistics are correct or not, the truth is that many people are not finishing their course, regardless of the type of ministry that they have. Success in the Christians life is not measured on how they start but how they cross the finish line. In the Old Testament we see how many of the kings started great but most did not finish well, they departed from the Lord, there were some however who ended great. God wants each of us to run our course and finish strong the race that He has set before us regardless of where we are serving Him.

2 Tim 4:6-8 "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." KJV

There were three things that Paul did in his ministry, he fought a good fight, finished his course and kept the faith. He realized that his time on earth was almost done and he was ready to go to heaven, he knew that he would be receiving a crown of righteousness.

Sin is the greatest obstacle that is placed before us as we finish our course. In finishing our course or running the race, we must know what our purpose is or what we are called to do, what Gods plan is and how we are going to accomplish His plan. In finishing our course, there is a price to pay, not so much monetarily but in the area of discipline and commitment. Athletes will testify to the amount of discipline and commitment that are needed to become winners.

A story was shared regarding Eric Little, a runner in the Olympics in the 1920's. His best event was the 100 meter, but upon finding out that the qualifying event was to take place on Sunday, he withdrew because of his belief that Sunday was the Lords day. He had received a word from the Lord, (1 Samuel 2:30 -"for them that honour me I will honour".) He begin to train for the 400 meter event and qualified to run. When he went to the starting line, he was carrying the scripture on a piece of paper with him. He began on the outside lane running which kept him from knowing who was behind him, consequently upon finishing the race and winning, he found out that he had outrun all those behind him and that his time was great. He ran the first two laps at his top speed and then continued the final two laps the same way, not knowing what his time was. His commitment and discipline to training and honoring God made him the winner. In his later life he went to China and served there as a missionary.

Today in the church it is challenging to prioritize our time and keep God first place in our lives, we have become so busy, there are so many good things to do that require our time. If we are going to finish well, we will have to be disciplined and remember the phrase, "God honors those who honor Him".

Luke 14:28-30 "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? 29 Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, 30 Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish." KJV

Jesus is teaching and in three verses He uses the term finish, He is referring to man beginning to build, considering the cost and being able to finish what has been started. Prior to this, His teaching had been regarding the cost of being a disciple. A disciple is a disciplined learner, someone not just born again but a follower of Jesus.

In the various ministries we have today, we get excited to see those who are wanting to make changes in their lives but we also see many starting but not finishing, they fail to count the cost. They make a great beginning but because of the forces of darkness or sin pulling at them, they will return to what they were before. They finally realize that there is a cost or price to pay for freedom, some will be willing to pay the cost and finish their race, while others will not.

What is the churches responsibility in helping the people? The churches should be places for the sick and hurting spiritually, like the hospitals are for the sick and hurting physically. The church is not a place for perfect people, they are there for the hurting people who come to be made whole.

Teddy Roosevelt made a quote that follows: "It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done them better, the credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust, sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes short again and again, who knows great enthusiasm, the great devotions, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at the worst if he fails at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those timid souls, neither know victory nor defeat". There is much truth in this statement. Just a few wrong decisions will get us on the wrong path, but a few right decisions will get us on the right track.

In finishing our race it is challenging if we aren't on the right course, especially if we don't show up at the right place. Events are sometimes missed because of not showing up, lacking discipline in our lives. We must know the purpose that God has for us, not just for those in the ministry but for each of us, no one is excluded because God has plans for all our lives, we all have a course to run and if we don't discover that plan, we won't run our race well nor will we finish well.

Eph 2:10 "For we are God's [own] handiwork (His workmanship), recreated in Christ Jesus, [born anew] that we may do those good works which God predestined (planned beforehand) for us [taking paths which He prepared ahead of time], that we should walk in them [living the good life which He prearranged and made ready for us to live]." AMP

We are Gods handiwork, his workmanship, He has planned out our course, the plan that God has laid out for us will give us a good life, Gods favor will be upon it. Many of us start but sometimes we become lazy having no discipline. There is a mountain in the Alps that a group people wanted to climb but about halfway up, they stop to rest and have refreshments, decide not to finish the

climb with the others, later as those who went on to the top return, those who didn't finish realize that they have lost out, not having the satisfaction of making the top, finishing the climb. They regretted their decision to stop and not finish what they had started earlier.

Phil 3:12-14 "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." KJV

Paul speaks of pursuing the plan that God had for him, realizing there was a plan for his life. God's plan was for him to minister and teach the Gentiles as well as the Jews, even though he lived a life that sometimes was threatened by outsiders. He chose to forget about the past, how he had persecuted the believers and how there were those who were now persecuting him, he continued to press forward for the prize that awaited him.

We can use this same excuse of being persecuted but it is not acceptable by God. If you are a people pleaser and don't want people upset with you, don't get into the ministry. If you are not disciplined don't make the commitment to do something for God because it won't work. You can't please everyone and you will become discouraged. We must forget those things that are behind, they will limit how far we can go, we must cut that rope that the enemy would like to keep us tied to, unforgiveness, bitterness, resentment, inferiority, that we can't do anything, Jesus is with us and we can do anything, He is the greatest enabler that we will ever have need of. Many times enablers are thought of in the negative, they don't help us but hinder, Jesus is the opposite of that, He helps us in everything and keeps us on course. When the eyes of our understanding are open and we begin to see ourselves doing something that we thought we couldn't do, our attitude will change and we will accomplish what it is that we desire, we can keep running the race and crossing the finish line. Keep pursuing God and He will reveal Himself to us.

Phil 3:13-18 "I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back. 15-16 So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you'll see it yet! Now that we're on the right track, let's stay on it. 17-19 Stick with me, friends. Keep track of those you see running this same course, headed for this same goal. There are many out there taking other paths, choosing other goals, and trying to get you to go along with them. I've warned you of them many times; sadly, I'm having to do it again. All they want is easy street. They hate Christ's Cross. But easy street is a dead-end street. Those who live there make their bellies their gods; belches are their praise; all they can think of is their appetites." MESSAGE

v. 13-14 eye on the goal, off and running, not turning back

v. 15-16 staying focused, total commitment, no blurred vision

v. 17-18 running the same course, headed for same goal, ignoring others trying to change your course

If we could look into the spirit realm, we would see Jesus standing next to the Father, encouraging us to continue the race, keeping our eye on the goal, telling us fear not, He is with us, enabling us and helping us. There will be times that our vision might become blurred, we may have to stop and clean our vision in order to be able to continue the race. With blurred vision spiritually, we may be unaware of the trap or snare that the enemy has laid for us, however Jesus will deliver us

from the snare of the fowler. Those who want everything that God has for them must keep focused in order to receive all that God has for them. God had a plan for them even before they were formed in their Mothers womb, from start to finish the wisdom of God, there can be many roadblocks along the way. The easiest part of serving God will probably be beyond our abilities and there will always be challenges along the way. We can get on the right track and stay on it, we need to be around people who will encourage us to stay on the right track and finish to the goal. There is a rest in Jesus by walking in faith and many people never enter into the rest because they don't know how to walk by faith. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world, the force in Jesus that enables us to overcome, greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world. We are truly blessed, Gods way is good.

Heb 4:2-3" For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. 3 For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world." KJV

Matt 11:28-29 "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." KJV

Jesus is our goal, keep running the race, He is the author and finisher of our faith. Keep our eyes on Jesus, study how He was able to finish the race and what the goal was that He was after, to be seated at the right hand of God. He said 17 times in the book of John that He came from the Father and that He was going back to the Father. He never lost sight of where or what He was doing, He could put up with anything and everything that was thrown at Him.

Heb 12:3 "For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." KJV

Heb 12:1-3 "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." KJV

Heb 12:2-3 "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!" MESSAGE

v. 3 eyes on Jesus, began and finished the race, study how he did it, never lost sight of where he was headed, put up with everything along the way

John 17:4 "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." KJV

If you become tired and ready to quit, remind yourself what Jesus did for you, Jesus never gave up and you can't either, don't lose sight of the goal, the finish line and what your reward will be.