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Finish Your Race With Joy
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We are entering into a new year and have chosen to start with fasting, growing in our walk with the Lord Jesus and putting ourselves in the position to receive guidance and direction from Him. As we continue with the study of the word, we learn truth and Gods plan for each of our lives. We are in a fight with the enemy, but we also know that there is a goal for each of us to obtain, we see the finish line and look forward to what the new year will bring. Many times we have to be stirred up knowing what we should be doing, but not always wanting to do the right thing.

In the following scriptures Paul is telling Timothy about what he is seeing for his future, knowing that maybe his time on earth is about over, yet knowing that there may be something else that he needs to be doing. He has fought a good fight and has maintained his faith, however, he realizes that he should stay around to help Timothy and the other believers.

2 Tim 4:7 "I have fought the good (worthy, honorable, and noble) fight, I have finished the race, I have kept (firmly held) the faith." AMP

Phil 1:24-25 "But to remain in my body is more needful *and* essential for your sake. 25 Since I am convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and stay by you all, to promote your progress and joy in believing," AMP

The walk that we each have here on earth is not always an easy walk, it is a fight, the enemy is wanting to destroy us. We have to fight in order to finish and hang on to our faith. Paul always taught that without having joy it was impossible to have faith. If there is no joy in our lives, then we will be lacking in faith. The Christian walk that we have is progressive and unless we are continually seeking the things of God, we find ourselves falling short of what He has planned for us to do. God wants us to finish our race and not become discouraged. The fight comes if we allow ourselves to become discouraged or despondent and we have to fight to stay in joy.

Matt 13:19-21 "While anyone is hearing the Word of the kingdom and does not grasp *and* comprehend it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the roadside. 20 As for what was sown on thin (rocky) soil, this is he who hears the Word and at once welcomes *and* accepts it with joy; 21 Yet it has no real root in him, but is temporary (inconstant, lasts but a little while); and when affliction *or* trouble *or* persecution comes on account of the Word, at once he is caused to stumble [he is repelled and begins to distrust and desert Him Whom he ought to trust and obey] *and* he falls away." AMP

Mark 4:16-17 "And in the same way the ones sown upon stony ground are those who, when they hear the Word, at once receive *and* accept *and* welcome it with joy; 17 And they have no real root in themselves, and so they endure for a little while; then when trouble or persecution arises on account of the Word, they immediately are offended (become displeased, indignant, resentful) *and* they stumble *and* fall away." AMP

Jesus is talking to the people regarding what has been sown in their hearts and how that the enemy comes immediately to steal what they have received, faith arises on the inside and joy comes, but because of having no root on the inside, it is all lost. If we try to go to another level in our walk with the Lord, something will happen to steal what is going on. Trouble, persecution, affliction comes because of the Word that has been sown in us causing us to stumble and fall away. These people who have no determination on the inside of themselves to be finishers, find their problem is there is no root on the inside.

What is the root that causes people to be offended? People who have no determination or quest to have love in their lives are vulnerable to quit the race before it is finished. They become offended

not only at other people but at God also. Love becomes a protection for us and if we can develop in love than we can overcome some of the things that the enemy sends our way.

Eph 3:17 "May Christ through your faith [actually] dwell (settle down, abide, make His permanent home) in your hearts! May you be rooted deep in love and founded securely on love," AMP

In our hearts we determine whether we will be finishers or not, it is something that God put it there when we became born again, we are overcomers, however, when all the trials and temptations come, that is when something else can get into our hearts. Jesus knocks on the door of our heart, but we determine what to let in and what to keep out.

Pro 4:23 "Keep and guard your heart with all vigilance and above all that you guard, for out of it flow the springs of life." AMP

Pro 4:23 "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." KJV

What happens when trials and temptations come to us? It is not the things that happen to us that determine our failures or successes. It is the thoughts that we think about later, these thoughts will come to your mind and will begin to bombard your heart wanting to come in, thoughts of discouragement, rejection or self pity, it is the commentary of what the devil sends to you that makes a difference of what happens in your life, your reaction to a problem will determine whether it is a problem or not, the problem comes because we let in thoughts that are not governed by Gods word.

There are two guidelines that we can use to guide what goes into our heart, there is a list of love and a list of what we should be thinking about. Whatever we allow in our hearts or whatever we think about, is what we will become. We should be using the word of God as a "strainer" of what we are thinking about, guarding our hearts and minds, determining what to let in or to keep out. Paul has given us a ****"strainer"** to use, think on these things.

Pro 23:7 "For as he *thinks in his heart, so is he. As one who reckons, he says to you, eat and drink, yet his heart is not with you [but is grudging the cost]." AMP

*thinks in the Hebrew means a gatekeeper or a janitor

Phil 4:7-8 "And God's peace [shall be yours, that tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and being content with its earthly lot of whatever sort that is, that peace] which transcends all understanding shall garrison and mount guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. 8 ****For the rest, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is worthy of reverence and is honorable and seemly, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely and lovable, whatever is kind and winsome and gracious, if there is any virtue and excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think on and weigh and take account of these things [*fix your minds on them*]." AMP**

When the enemy comes against us wanting to bring the bad thoughts, we should be reminding ourselves that Jesus is wanting to come in to fellowship and help us. Paul knew that we would be facing all the following problems listed in the scripture below and that the enemy would attempt to distract and destroy our walk causing us to lose sight of our goal, not finishing our race. Paul's secret to overcoming was that he had a "strainer" that he shares with us, reminding us to rejoice in the Lord always. There was a reason that he did not get discouraged.

2 Cor 4:8-9, 16-18 "We are hedged in (pressed) on every side [troubled and oppressed in every way], but not cramped or crushed; we suffer embarrassments and are perplexed and unable to find a way out, but not driven to despair; 9 We are pursued (persecuted and hard driven), but not deserted [to stand alone]; we are struck down to the ground, but never struck out and destroyed; 16 Therefore we do not become discouraged (utterly spiritless, exhausted, and wearied out through fear). Though our outer man is [progressively] decaying and wasting away,

yet our inner self is being [progressively] renewed day after day. 17 For our light, momentary affliction (this slight distress of the passing hour) is ever more and more abundantly preparing *and* producing *and* achieving for us an everlasting weight of glory [beyond all measure, excessively surpassing all comparisons and all calculations, a vast and transcendent glory and blessedness never to cease!], 18 Since we consider *and* look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are visible are temporal (brief and fleeting), but the things that are invisible are deathless *and* everlasting." AMP

The person who has not allowed the word to grow up in their lives because of having "rocky soil" (Matthew 13:20), the bible says they were temporary. Your circumstances can be temporary or your faith can be temporary, it depends on what you let into your heart and what you look at. Paul tells us that the circumstances he was faced with were temporary. People who get offended or allow thoughts in their hearts that they shouldn't be thinking, become temporary in their faith and faith fails, because their faith is temporary, the word never grows up in their life. The key is to finish and it is a fight. Paul teaches us to run in order to get the prize, we can all get the prize if we finish our race. Discipline is required to finish, finishing is great with God. We cannot do anything or think any thought that our flesh wants. It is a fight to do the right thing when we are challenged, holding onto faith.

1 Cor 9:24-27 "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but [only] one receives the prize? So run [your race] that you may lay hold [of the prize] *and* make it yours. 25 Now every athlete who goes into training conducts himself temperately *and* restricts himself in all things. They do it to win a wreath that will soon wither, but we [do it to receive a crown of eternal blessedness] that cannot wither. 26 Therefore I do not run uncertainly (without definite aim). I do not box like one beating the air *and* striking without an adversary. 27 But [like a boxer] I buffet my body [handle it roughly, discipline it by hardships] and subdue it, for fear that after proclaiming to others the Gospel *and* things pertaining to it, I myself should become unfit [not stand the test, be unapproved and rejected as a counterfeit]." AMP

Paul understood that we have to do something with our flesh or we shall become a castaway. People will get excited and have joy, but unless they bring their flesh under control, the devil will trip them up, some will fall away and quit serving the Lord. God is calling us to be winners, to be overcomers and become strong believers, part of the army of God.

Acts 24:16 "Therefore I always exercise *and* discipline myself [mortifying my body, deadening my carnal affections, bodily appetites, and worldly desires, endeavoring in all respects] to have a clear (unshaken, blameless) conscience, void of offense toward God and toward men." AMP

Paul was a great man and he teaches us what we must know, that discipline in every part of our lives is important in order for us to finish strong and have discipline especially in the area of our heart. Guard our hearts, fight the good fight, run the race and finish the course set before us.