



Unto Full Stature Ministries



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S4. Pressing On

S4.E5. Running the Race

[Episodes in this series, *Pressing On*, should be followed in sequence as the Episodes are built upon one another.]

Qualifying for the Race — The single qualification to enter this race is having spiritual life; a man without spiritual life, *zoe*, has no vitality and is unfit and unable to run this race. For the believer, it is written in 1 Jn. 5:12 *“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”* Therefore God has chosen us in Christ (Eph. 1.4), He is our sole qualification; and furthermore, it is written in Jud. 1.1 *“we are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ;”* which may more broadly be interpreted as, “being called we have received an invitation to enter that race, and have been consecrated or set apart by God to be a runner in it, and that He watches over us attentively as we run the race before us, able to preserve us to the finish.” Heb. 12.1-2 continues,

“let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.”

Heb. 12. 1-2 *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 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 has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

The apostle Paul frequently used the athletic event of a race as a metaphor, or figure of speech, to describe what ought to be the Christian walk in this life. Not just anyone may take part in this race, for it is an invitational race, a sporting event that is limited to a select group of participants who have been invited to take part. He boasts in Phil. 3.14 *“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* The New testament word for such a “calling” primarily refers to a divine calling or perhaps the word “invitation” may better explain the word “calling” as used here. It is God’s invitation to individuals to enter into a special relationship with Him through His Son Jesus Christ. This invitation includes both the initial call to salvation, and as used here, as well as an ongoing invitation to living a life worthy of that calling. It is a calling that affects the entirety of one’s life to live in a special relationship with God: the Father and Son.

Qualifying for the Race — The single qualification to enter this race is having spiritual life; a man without spiritual life, *zoe*, has no vitality and is unfit and unable to run this race. For the believer, it is written in 1 Jn. 5:12 *“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”* Therefore God has chosen us in Christ (Eph. 1.4), He is our sole qualification; and furthermore, it is written in Jud. 1.1 *“we are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ;”* which may more broadly be interpreted as, “being called we have received an invitation to enter that race, and have been consecrated or set apart by God to be a runner in it, and that He watches over us attentively as we run the race before us, able to preserve us to the finish.” Heb. 12.1-2 continues,

“let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.”

If we are to run this race well, we must run light, meaning we cannot run well if we are burdened down with “every weight” and “the sin that so easily ensnares us.” A trainer will tell an overweight athlete that he must immediately begin losing weight. The central idea is we must “run with endurance,” and with patience for it is not a quick sprint but an enduring long run; and the only way for a believer to run with endurance and patience is “laying aside every weight and sin,” and the only possible way to do that is not by trusting in your own fortitude of self-control and obedience to keeping commandments, but by “looking unto Jesus.” Let me explain further.

“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us” — Let’s first consider “the sin which so easily ensnares (or entangles) us.” All sin is ensnaring sin. It

includes all manner of transgression that continually encircles us, lying in wait to entangle and entrap us. As long as we are in these unredeemed bodies, we may well anticipate the ensnaring ways of sin to entice and try to sway us. No one is above this enticement. This *“laying aside”* sounds simple and easy, but it is not. While it does not require the power of positive thinking and personal fortitude, which is by the flesh, it does require a strong measure of faith, that is, *“looking unto Jesus”*— Eph. 3.20 *“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.”* O how this passage of scripture deserve being elaborated upon, but such is for another time; but for now, let’s just keep in mind that *“looking unto Jesus”* is equivalent to *“the power that works in us.”* That is, a power that does not just work “for” us, but a divine power that works “in” us.

And so there is before us *“every weight”* and *“every sin”* — two distinct offenses meant here to be distinguished—they are not the same. To run the race by putting away both *weight* and *sin* is equally needful. I believe we have a good understanding of *sin*, but not so much these *weights* that might entangle us. The *weights* are hindrances but not sins. If we truly run the race, we must put these old habits, these unproductive tendencies, aside as well. *Weights* are more subtle than *sins*, seemingly more innocent and not being harmful to others, even perhaps a help to others. Unlike *sin*, a *weight* may be a weight to me but not to you, it may be done in degrees, whereas sin is sin. *Weights* may be done in moderation or in excess. A weight may be a legitimate thing but turned into a consuming use.

The word “weight” itself implies something that is attached or suspended by a hook; much like earrings which may be small and delicate or very large, gaudy and heavy stretching the ear lobe. The larger the weight the more cumbersome is the burden. True runners are careful not to encumber themselves with anything that is heavy. Hence, they wear light weight clothing and shoes, taking care not to overeat. Applied to believers it means to unburden themselves of all that would obstruct their spiritual growth and service to their Lord. Things like recreations, hobbies, added hours at work to increase one’s status, position, or income, computer games and surfing the internet, television watching, and all sorts of worldly busyness and distractions. Though all these things are permissible, not all are beneficial and all must be done in moderation. An over-weight runner goes on a fast, abstaining from the foods he loves. But for the believer, the fast is not necessarily physical, involving food, though it may be, but is abstinence from those weights that ensnare us.

I believe if one honestly and prayerfully passes themselves before the Lord, holding their lives before Him in open inspection, that their consciences will convict them in areas of needed “weight loss,” being unclothed with excessive activities of the old man. Paul addresses this in 1 Cor. 9.26-27 where he writes, *“²⁶Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. ²⁷But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”* Let us examine this thought a little further, as Paul again challenges the Corinthian church in 2 Cor. 13.5-6,

“⁵Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. ⁶But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.”

The central theme of so much of Paul’s teachings regards the mystery of “Christ in you” and its reality in our spiritual walk. Here he is challenging believers to “*test yourselves*” as to whether you are truly living and moving in that faith of “Christ in me.” This is a marvelous truth that must be pursued more fully, but for another time. If we go untested and continue in certain *weights* and *sins* that ensnare us, we may find ourselves being “*disqualified*.” The possibility of being *disqualified* is mentioned in both scriptures to the Corinthian church. What a horrible thought, being “*disqualified*.”

There is no allusion here to the sense which is sometimes given to the word “disqualified” as being a “reprobate,” or “cast off,” or “abandoned by God,” or “doomed by Him to an eternal punishment.” Then what does “disqualified” mean in terms of the whole salvation picture? This New Testament word is used to describe something or someone that has been tested and found lacking, unfit, or disqualified for future use. A cracked coffee mug must be discarded, sometimes even gold must be discarded if it is found so impure that the refinement process costs more than the worth of the precious metal. In these passages, disqualified is used to indicate a failure to meet God’s standards or to live according to His will—acts which are considered *unrighteousness*.

Perhaps another chilling word may be used in its place, and that is to be “set aside.” To be “sanctified” unto God is so glorious of thought, having anticipation being acceptable and useful to in this hour in which we live and also in a new way in the age to come. To one day stand before Him and hear Him say, “Well done my good and faithful servant.” But, instead, to be found wanting and to be “set aside,” to be declared unacceptable for use or any role in His Kingdom, negates all and is a heart-wrenching thought. Remember Adam’s two sons, Cain and Abel? Abel did what was right and acceptable in offering a lamb sacrifice to God, but Cain’s offering was unacceptable because it was the fruit of the ground, an offering suitable in Cain’s eyes but rejected by God; it was considered an unrighteous act. Gn. 4.3-6 reads,

“³And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. ⁴Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, ⁵but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. ⁶So the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? ⁷If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.”

Yes, for all his good intentions and desires to please God, Cain’s offering was unacceptable and rejected. This affected his relationship with God and with his brother Cain—unrighteous acts have a way of effecting relationships, both divine and natural. Sin was at his door when Cain rose up and killed Abel. In judgment God did not require Cain’s life, but instead something worse, his relationship with the earth in bringing forth good fruit and by severing

his relationship with God Himself. Who can deny that relationships and usefulness are what this present life is all about. Cain said to the LORD,

“My, punishment is greater than I can bear! ¹⁴Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me.”

There seemed to be no repentance in Cain’s heart for the murder of his brother, or plea for mercy; he continued only to fret about himself and his own well-being. Cain’s heart was damaged. He continued to live elsewhere in the land of Nod, marrying, and raising a family. But he was henceforth “disqualified” and set aside from relationship and purpose to God.

To be set aside by God does not mean the loss of salvation to heaven and eternal life. Like the young Corinthian man found in gross sexual immorality with his step mother, Paul commanded, 1 Cor. 5.4 *“⁴In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁵deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, **that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.**”* To our Father a son is always a son, whether unto blessings or loss of blessing; God preferred to take his earthly life rather than allowing him to further desecrate himself as a temple of the Holy Spirit and further malign the Name of Jesus; but *“**his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.**”*

Quite the opposite prospect for the one qualified. There is a continuing thought here of what is accomplished and acceptable in my life would lead to a reward of sorts in the Day of the Lord; or, as in the case of being disqualified in some measure, the loss of reward, and indeed this is implied in 1 Cor. 3:11-15,

“¹¹For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

Obviously, the *gold, silver, and precious stones* speak to the measure of “*laying aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us;*” which is righteousness in the eyes of God. In similar manner the *wood, hay, and straw* is attempting to build upon the foundation of Christ while ensnared in weights and sin. The “*reward*” or loss thereof, indicates spiritual or eternal rewards. The term “*reward*” underscores the principle of receiving due recompense for one’s actions, whether good or bad, righteous or unrighteous. Verse 15, “*If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire,*” once again underscores the fact that our fundamental salvation into eternal life is not in jeopardy, alleviating the fear of eternal damnation, and loss of life, but it also means suffering the loss of higher rewards, perhaps in terms of relationships and service in the Kingdom in that enduring life.

“Looking unto Jesus. Verse 2 of our opening scripture reads, *“looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”* It is of utmost importance to understand that the believer is running the race not “for” salvation but “in” his or her salvation. The victor’s prize is therefore some added measure to our life in the age to come. We now run the race, not with an eye to what is behind, nor to what is presently beneath our feet, but with an eye fixed on the goal. This is exactly where we are right now in our spiritual lives, mid-race running towards the finish line.

To elaborate on our present condition, Col. 3.4 reads, *“³For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory”*—here is presented the past, present, and future of the race in which we run. Beginning with our past, *“³For you died,”* the moment our feet left the starting block, we died, leaving the past behind with all its regrets and guilts, and with acknowledging a death to the weights of this world and snares of sin—all things have become new. Our focus now remains on the goal.

“Your life is hidden with Christ in God.” In order to finish this race a need arises for strength and endurance for there is a rapid expenditure of energy. It is in mid-race we acknowledge in full conviction that our new spiritual life actually has its source in God and not in ourselves, and not just an intellectual acknowledgement of God being our source of energy and life but having a practical faith in its reality—faith being, *“the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”* Heb. 11.1 This life, this new spiritual walk (or run) is sustained by continual fellowship with Him in prayer, communion, and worship.

This new life is also *“hidden with Christ in God,”* this meaning that “in Christ” our Lord’s ascension into heaven is at once His glory and sitting and reigning at the right hand of the Father, but we must also acknowledge, in faith, that it is also our ascension with Him, spiritually, and that we are presently being seated with Him in the heavenly places. Eph. 2.6 This is the sole means of our present spiritual communion with the Father. Thus, according to Col. 3.1 *“¹If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.”* We thus fix our eyes not just on an image of Jesus, or thoughts of Him, but upon the reality that He is our enduring source of life in this race. I have no life in me apart from Christ.

It might make little sense to the natural man to find rest in mid-race, but when our strength becomes abated and we feel we have expended all we can of our ability to continue and finish the race victoriously, we must then find a new faith, from a place of rest in which we now run the race being seated with Christ in heavenly places. (See Eph. 2.6) Where did this energy come from, how can I endure when there is nothing left in me to press on, it is written,

Is. 40.28-31 *“²⁸Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of His understanding. ²⁹He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. ³⁰Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall*

utterly fall: 31But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Now, the following paragraphs are an important note on our faith, and proceeding forth, even in mid-race, from a position of rest...that the running be in spirit and by faith and not natural endurance.

We may consider our faith like Jesus' who kept His eye fixed on the goal He was pursuing. Nothing would come between Him and finishing the race. A time came where it is written, Lk. 9.51 *"He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem,"* the place of His crucifixion. Nothing would deter Him. He allowed and endured the torment of His body to the point of death on the cross. And in Jn. 20.17, standing outside the tomb after His resurrection from the dead, He says to Mary Magdalene, *"go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"* Note, He said as if it were a present thing, *"I am ascending,"* not *"I will ascend."* Even though His actual ascension was forty days later (Acts 1.9,) He was living in the spirit in which time is eternal. Time, past, present, and future all collapse into eternity when in the Spirit.

So too we now, in spirit and in faith, must consider our spiritual place in heaven in Christ a present reality and not some future hope. We are, now, in this age, seated, in a place of rest, with Christ in heavenly places, and not some future hope in fullness in the age to come—though that too will become reality when we, in our newly resurrected bodies, sit with Christ on His heavenly throne. But for now, my faith assures me that I already, in the spirit, *"have come to Mt. Zion and to the city of the living God, ...and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant,"* Heb. 12.22-24; and that, even when I was, *"dead in trespasses, made me alive together with Christ (by grace I have been saved), and raised me up together, and made me sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."* Eph. 2.5-6

So do you see that here also, time, past, present, and future, all collapse into eternity when in the Spirit; so that the labor is not physical, but in spirit, by faith. Verse 2 of our opening passage clearly states, *"looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."* Around me in mid-race are all kinds of obstacles and weaknesses, and at times the race becomes difficult; but it is at times like this our faith reassures us *"Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."* That initial word in verse 2. *"Looking"* appears casual at first glance, but it is anything but that; by definition it means, *"To look away from all else at one object, to fix one's eyes upon."* As it is used here, it is used to describe the act of focusing your attention, or gaze, exclusively on Jesus Christ and implying a deliberate turning away from other distractions. This is not accomplished by positive thinking or self-determination but resting in faith and submission to Christ our Lord, who is *"the author and finisher of our faith."*

As we near that finish line, and we know when that time is, we stretch forth with all that is within us, straining and extending every muscle, to be victorious in our race, and to receive the victor's crown. In the natural there is a victor's crown of a wreath on the head, or a gold medal, or a promotion to a higher office or rank, or a diploma certifying your accomplishments

and entitlement to do certain things. But this award is altogether different. It is not anything physical, but is immaterially an acknowledgment, a blessing of the soul. The prize is scripturally referred to as “*the crown of righteousness*” (1 Cor. 9.24, 2 Tim. 4.8); the “*crown of life*,” (Rev. 2.10); and “*crown of glory that fades not away*.” (1 Pet. 5.4)

It was at the end of Paul’s race on this earth that he wrote to Timothy the following, 2 Tim. 4.6-8,

“6For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

This is the crown won in the cause of righteousness, of those deeds and accomplishments in this life that are deemed by God as being righteous, that fit into His own plan and purpose. This righteousness includes both our legal standings being declared righteous merely by being “In Christ,” and also by our ethical conduct that flows out from this new status, the service in our calling and obedience to our Lord. This righteousness is holy and is not achieved by our own effort but is a gift from God through our faith in Christ.

S4.E4. Questions for Discussion

1. Can you identify with the one found “standing” within the gates of Jerusalem in Ps. 122.1-2? If so, explain your circumstances.
2. To the best you can, distinguish between the spiritual concept of “life” and religion, even the Christian religion.
3. Explain how the power of God is released when our will is in union with God’s will. Explain it in context with Heb. 10.8-10.
4. Explain Paul’s dilemma with the religion of Judaism; and how he later felt about all his grand accomplishment in it.
5. Can one press towards God’s “high calling” through all the great institutions available today: Bible schools, seminaries, etc.? Explain.