



Message **Transcript**

Faithful Finishers

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About 30 years ago, I laced up my shoes and headed to the starting line of what would be my first 5K race. The only problem was at the time, I didn't know what the letter K actually stood for. I was part of an organization and part of their kickoff for their business was to start their annual meeting with a race. And so I went there in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and there I was, and I didn't know what to expect. And when I got there, it was super exciting. There were all these skinny people in shorts that were running up and down. I'm like the race hasn't even started yet and they're like running. I thought that was interesting. Music was pumping, there was a festival atmosphere and I got kind of excited about it. And so with these 5,000 runners, I started making my way towards the back of the pack.

When I heard some of my friends in the front yell, this, "Schwarzzy get on up here, run with us." And I walked up to them. I'm like, "Hey, I don't even know what I'm doing. I don't even know what K stands for. What are we doing here?" They said, "It's 3.1 miles. You're not going to win this thing anyway, you may as well get a good start."

So I thought that sounded like a good idea. And as the countdown went from about 25 minutes down to 10 minutes down to five minutes, I could feel my adrenaline getting pretty pumped up. And I was right in the front of the race. And so everything was going fast and I'm looking over my shoulder. I'm like, this is pretty cool. And when it got to the 10 second countdown, I began to have this thought. I said, "Well, since I'm not going to win anyway, I may as well start the race in first place." And so when it came to 3, 2, 1, and the gun blew, I took off in a dead sprint, as fast as I could possibly go. And I could hear my friends laughing as they were running behind me and I

was gone. And for like five blocks, I'm looking to my side and I can't see anybody. So I turned around and I saw the heads of everybody bouncing. And one thought went through my head. I'm winning the race.

And I was for about another two blocks. And I remember taking a left turn. And so many people were coming by. I wish I would've had a shirt that said Jeff on the back, because for about the next mile, I thought my name was on your left. Because everybody kept going by me. And I remember I got to the first water station and all I wanted to do was quit. I was like, why'd I run this stupid race anyway. I'm like, nobody's going to care about this. I'm not going to make any records or anything. Why am I even doing this? But I kept on chugging along and I got to the second water station about the two mile mark and to add insult to injury, some little kid about this big came by as he saw my face and how tired I was, I was drinking water, and patted me on the backside and was like, "Come on, old man, you can do this.

Which wasn't encouraging. I remember thinking, Lord, if you just help me catch that kid. And all I wanted to do was quit because what difference did it make? And I remember that day in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, as I was running, that's all I continued to think about was wanting to quit. What about in your life, in your spiritual life, in your walk with Jesus? What do you do when you want to quit? The fact is if you live long enough, there will come a time in your life with Christ, where there'll be a season where you feel like giving up. Giving up on something that the Lord has for you giving up on your faith together, giving up because it just gets too hard. So what do you do

when it gets hard? What do you do when you get to a place where you feel like I just can't go on.

If you've ever been there, God has a word for you today. And if you haven't been there, I encourage you to listen. Because if you live long enough, you will be. And we're going to take a look at four behaviors that Christians do that will help you finish the race. How you finish strong. We want you to all be faithful, finishers, and that's what God wants you to be. And we're going to take a look at four ways you can be a faithful finisher.

So if you have God's word with you today, I invite you to open up to Hebrews chapter 12. We're going to be taking a look at the first three verses. I'll read them and then we'll unpack them together. Taking a look at those four behaviors that faithful finishers adhere to. He says, "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin, which so easily entangles us. And let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and Perfector of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him who has endured such hostility by sinners against himself so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

And there nestled in those three short verses are really the truth of God's word, of how to be a faithful finisher. And we're going to highlight four of those ways here this morning. And the first is this, that faithful finishers follow faithful examples. Faithful finishers, follow faithful examples. Notice that's what he says. "Therefore, since we

have so great, a cloud of witnesses surrounding us." The author's just finished talking in all of Hebrews chapter 11, about all the faithful men and women who faithed all the way through the finish line, who were faithful regardless of what happened to them, that they kept on going.

He's saying now, listen, you Jewish converts who are willing to turn your back on God and are thinking about quitting and thinking about going back, he's like, don't quit. Just keep on running. Follow the faithful examples that you have before you. Now he talks about this great cloud of witnesses. He's using it metaphorically. He's using it metaphorically. He's not talking about that when we die, we go to heaven and we look down upon everybody on earth. Sometimes when I'm officiating a funeral, inevitably somebody will be in the funeral and they'll say, "Oh, she's up in heaven or, oh, he's up in heaven looking down on us." Friends, heaven is far more glorious to be in the presence of Jesus than to look down on human beings. When you go to heaven and have the goal of your faith, realize you will not be looking down from heaven.

He's not saying that. What he's saying is we are surrounded by so many faithful people that have faith all the way through the finish line. Not only the ones we read about in Hebrews chapter 11, but you have them in your life too. In every generation, God has raised up faithful men and women who are walking with the Lord. And here's what he's saying. Would you please follow the examples of the faithful. When you follow the right people, you end up in the right place. When it comes spiritually, you should be following those people who are faithing in this generation, the way that you see God wanting them to live. That's what he's talking about. This great cloud of

witnesses. I mean, I realized I moved here in 2010 here to Denver. And I realized when I got here, I started learning about all sorts of people that had been in Denver years before I had.

Dr. Donald Wellman, who had the vision of building this church, who preached right here from this pulpit, had a vision in Denver to be a city where people would come and get disciplined and take the gospel all over the world. I feel like I'm getting this chance to stand on his shoulders, that he was preparing away for us. Or some of you be familiar with Rick Ferguson who pastored at Riverside Baptist up the road for several faithful years until God took him home earlier than we might have expected.

I mean, no matter what we're doing, we're standing on the shoulders of men and women who have graced us by being faithful to God. I mean, the reason that we gather here today is so many apostles and other faithful men and women throughout church history have given their lives so that we could gather here and proclaim the truth of God's word.

There's always faithful people in every single generation. We're surrounded by them. There's myriads of them, find them and follow their example. Now we know this because when Jesus has called his disciples, he said what? "Follow me and I'll make you fishers of men." Well, that's easy for Jesus to say, he's the son of God. He's perfect in every way. Follow me, follow me. But do you know the apostle Paul, who was a murderer who dragged people off to be persecuted for their faith also said to the Corinthian church in first Corinthians 11:1, follow me as I follow Christ. And he also

told the Philippian church in Philippians chapter four in verse nine, "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me practice these things and the God of peace will be with you."

You see friends, we've lost the authority of God's word in our lives. We've lost the authority of God's word in our culture so that when it's proclaimed with authority, it sounds foreign to us. God wants us to follow those who have been placed under the authority of God's word. People who read God's word and say, God, if that's who you are, then I want to realign my life and reorient my life with you.

Find faithful examples and faithful people because Christianity is not just a proclamation, religion. It's a demonstration one. We're to be examples of the Lord, Jesus Christ. People need to see a demonstration and not just a proclamation. I'll give you an example. I saw some woman on the news go off the other day about people who believe the authority of God's word. And it was in relation to some decisions that had been made in our country recently. And she was just going nuts and saying, put the Bible away. It has no business in our lives. Keep it in your church.

And you know why she says that? Because in her life she's never seen a walking, talking, living, breathing example of somebody that lives under the authority of God's word. And all she's heard is preaching. Let me make it a little more real for you. There is very little difference in our day and age today between how Christians and non-Christians live. And because there's very little difference when we proclaim the authority of God's word, non-Christians hear it and say, "I'm not going to believe that. There's no difference in what you do and what I do."

Let me make it hit a little closer to home. You don't live much different than your non-Christian friends today. And that's why when they hear the word, they're like "Yeah that's for somebody else out there, but I don't see you living it. So why are you preaching to me?"

I mean, we have Christian singles that live just as immorally as non-Christian singles. We have Christian marrieds that live just as immorally as non-Christian marrieds. We have Christian businessmen live just as immoral, as non-Christian businessmen. And then we say but I believe Jesus died and rose from the dead. Okay. That's great. But then what difference is it making in your life?

Jesus said, "Why do you call me Lord and do not do what I say." I mean, throughout church history, you can see this in generations. You can watch the pendulum swing. Sometimes we swing to the holiness of God so far in such a high standard without any grace and we don't give anybody a chance. We have sinners in the hands of an angry God. And God's mad at me all the time and there's nothing I can do.

And no matter what I try to do, I'm never good enough. And then the pendulum swings all the way back to the other side. And we say, this God's your friend. And he loves you no matter what you do, it doesn't matter how you live. He cares for you. And both are in error by themselves. But together what we have at the cross is a standard of God is completely holy, righteous and good. And he can't stand your sin. And yet at the same time, when you come to him, he extends grace and mercy, where you keep

coming up short and he wants to grow you from where you are to where you want to be. That's the gospel. And both are true.

See the world says, do what I say, not what I do. The gospel says, do what I say and what I do. Like just watch what I do and watch what I say and watch how I live. And if you'll watch me be the husband that I am, you'll be a good husband. You watch me be the wife I'm being, you'll be a godly wife. If you watch me in my singleness, honor the Lord. Do what I do. Say what I say. You'll be a good single for the Lord. I mean, watch what I am as a business person, watch what I am as a coach. This is what a walking, talking, breathing example of Jesus looks like. And that's where we get uncomfortable. See, we love to share the four spiritual laws. We just don't like to live them.

See, here's what Jesus says. If you're really born again, then you're his living example. You're the temple of the holy spirit and his spirit abides in you. So how you live and what you say and what you do all matters in your witness for the Lord, Jesus Christ. And we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses. People who have bore witness to the truth. Many who have been martyred, many who have lived faithfully all the way to the end and anyone that lives faithful all the way to the end a faithful finisher leaves a legacy for how to live. Find people like that and follow them. There are people all over Brave church that love the word of God. If you don't know the word of God, find some people they'd love to teach it to you. There are people all over Brave church that love to pray and know how to pray.

If you don't know how to pray, find some people at Brave say, teach me how to

pray. There are godly men in our church. If you don't know how to be a godly man, go find one and say, "Hey, teach me how to do what you do." There are godly women in our church. If you need to find one, go find one. They're all over, just pray and God will bring them to you. But let me tell you something else. I remember when I was in college and I was beginning to walk with the Lord and I was starting to walk with the Lord. I remember praying in this prayer, in my fraternity room. Like, Lord, please bring me a man who is evangelistically bold, who stands up for what's true. Who's right. Who knows the word? Who knows how to pray? That can teach me all these things.

And I heard God down in my spirit, say this, "Jeff, just be that guy." And I remember thinking, I don't want to be that guy. I just want to follow a guy that's doing that. And that's how many of us feel. That's the pastor's job? That's the staff's job. That's my dad's job. That's my friend's job. I don't want to be that. I just want to be around people that are doing that. And that's the problem. Follow Christian examples. Do what they do and say what they say. Start letting God reorient your life to what you need to do. You say, well, I don't know that I can do that. The Bible is replete with examples of broken, unlikely people that God can use. I mean, it goes kind of like this. Prior to 1954, it was said that no one, it was humanly impossible, to run a mile in under four minutes. Prior to 1954, nobody had ever been recorded running a mile in under four minutes.

But do you know in 1954, a guy by the name of Roger Bannister ran it in three minutes, 59 seconds. I think 0.4 is what it was. And when he did, do you know what happened? Nobody had run this in 1,954 years. His record lasted for 46 days. And in

the next year and a half, about 43 other people ran it. Because what happened? People started saying, "Well, if Roger can do it, I can do it too." The purpose of seeing godly biblical examples is, well if they can make it all the way to the end. Then I can too. And we went through last week, all the brokenness of all the people that made it all the way to the finish line. Every one of us is broken. Nobody here has what it takes. And yet if we'll be faithful, God will bring us home.

Amen. That means he wants to do that in your life. So follow faithful examples. Get around people that are faithing and living the way God wants them to live. Because when you see somebody else do something, then you can do it too. I remember after I ran that 5K, it was a couple years later I learned that my cousin ran a marathon and I remember talking to him on the phone. I'm like, "You ran a marathon." And he's like "I ran one." I'm like, well think shoot, man, if you can run one, I can run one too.

So I ran a marathon, run's an exaggeration for a failure. I completed one. And what happened? I'm like, if well Sean can run it. I can run it. I mean, what makes him any different? I mean, that's the whole purpose. And if we're really honest, when we disciple people and we don't put on airs we have it all figured out and we'll just walk people through how God is using us and be willing and authentic to share our brokenness in areas that were not totally put together.

Then other people can say, well, if he can do it or if she can do it, then I can do it too. That's what disciple making and multiplying looks like. It looks like when God uses

imperfect people just like me and you to grow in his grace. And we see, I remember what he was like, I remember what she was like, they're not that way anymore. Teach me how you grew. That's what it looks like. Follow faithful examples, if you're going to be a faithful finisher. Second is this, eliminate all hindrances. If you're going to follow faithful examples then you also need to eliminate all hindrances, notice what he says. "Therefore, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us."

Two things, encumbrances or hindrances and sin. sin that entangles us. In the first century, when people ran, they used to prepare by wearing weights. They would come in a long flowing robe and then what they did, they literally would strip. They would take off the robe. They would have every encumbrance removed. They basically ran naked in the first century because they didn't want anything hindering their ability to run. That's what he's talking about here. He's using that metaphor here, telling us this, get rid of the things that are keeping your best from Jesus.

Let me tell you a question I hear in the church all the time. "Hey pastor, pastor, is it okay for me as a Christian too..." And then fill in the blank. It's a really bad question. "Pastor, is it okay for me as a Christian to drink alcohol. Pastor is it okay for me as a Christian to celebrate Halloween? Pastor, is it okay for me as a Christian to smoke? Is it okay for me as a Christian to date non-Christians? Is it okay for me? Is it okay for me?"

Because here's really what the underlying question is. "Will, God still love me if I do the minimal amount?" See here's a better question. Here's the better question. God,

will this help me be the best that I can be for Christ? See that's the question. The question is not can I get away with this? The question is not, is God okay with this? The question is, will this help me be my best for Christ? Have you ever asked that question. Will dating this person, help me be the best for Christ? Will engaging in this behavior help me be the best I can be for Christ? Will going to this place help me be the best I can be for Christ?

Will taking this job help me be the best that I can be for Christ? Will engaging in this behavior help me to be the best I can be for Christ? And by the way, when the Lord shows you don't set it on autopilot, keep coming back and asking him more and more. About two years ago, I could hear the Lord in my heart telling me to get rid of all cable access and television and all that. And I knew that wasn't the Lord, because he doesn't speak to people like that.

And I started making all this excuses like Lord, that's how I relax. I like sports. I like watching games. How am I ever going to do that? Do you know that the Lord doesn't change his mind? So about two years ago I began to tell the Lord, okay Lord, I will do what you want, but I pray that you give me a greater love for you in doing that. We got rid of it two years ago. I don't miss it at all. Now what does that mean? That doesn't mean you can't have cable. That doesn't mean you can't watch TV. That doesn't mean I can't come over to your house and watch TV and watch games. Invite me over, I'll come. That doesn't mean any of that.

What it means is in my life, the Lord knew that was a hindrance for me being the

best that I could be for Christ. See, and if we're really open to what God might want to do with us, then God will speak directly to us about what he wants to remove or change in us for the purpose of what he wants to do in that season, in our lives. And it doesn't matter what he's doing in somebody else's life. Well, how come somebody else doesn't, how come they don't have to, and why isn't she this and why isn't he that. Because God's speaking directly to you. See you want to eliminate all hindrances, ask this question. Are the people that you're hanging around helping you to be your best for Christ? I remember when I was living in a fraternity, I got asked that question. I was having a hard time living for Christ in my fraternity.

Can you believe that? Campus Crusade for Christ director had the audacity to ask me, "Well, how many people here in your fraternity are Christians? You got almost a hundred guys living here. How many are Christians?" I said "Three that I'm aware of." He's like, "How do you think that's helping you?" I'm like, "Well, I'm an evangelist." He's like, "How many of you shared your faith with and how many have come to Christ?" I'm like, don't get personal. I mean, I'm just trying. He said to me, "He goes, would you be willing to pray about God moving you out of your house?" I said I'll pray about it. But I don't want to live in some stinky apartment off campus and pay more money just to show God that I'm something, but I'll pray about it. So we prayed about it. Wouldn't you know about a week later, I'm at his buddy's house.

They were both Campus Crusade for Christ guys. And we walked into this apartment, 17 high foot ceilings. It was an old school house. It was the coolest thing I'd ever seen. And the Campus Crusade for Christ guy said this. He goes, he said to his

friend in earshot of me, he goes, "Hey, pray for us." He goes, "We've got to be moving. We're moving from Champagne to Colorado Springs to be part of the national organization. I got to find somebody that will sublease this apartment." And I looked at this thing and I'm like, we'll take it. How much is it? And he showed us and I'm like done. It was a done deal in two seconds. And when I moved out of my fraternity and I started growing in Christ, I have more impact on those that I used to be around than when I was hanging out with them.

Here's the question. Are the people that you're hanging out with helping you to grow more with Christ? If the answer's no it's time to change some relationships. And by that I don't mean you call up some friends after church today and say, "Hey, we're done. Pastor Jeff told me we can't talk anymore." That's not what I mean. It means very slowly you begin distancing yourself and praying that God will bring people in your life who will help you grow more in your faith. And over time as they become a bigger part of your life, some of those others will drift by the wayside and you still love them and you still care for them and you're still available to them. But they're not your core friends anymore. Because it is impossible, it is impossible to grow in Christ without other Christians around you. Period.

That's why God created the church as a community of saints for the advancement of his gospel and his kingdom on this planet. Will this be the best for me that I can be for Christ? Talk about people. Talk about places that you go. Am I too tempted to go into sin when I go to places like this or is this really my best for Christ? How about money? Money? Sometimes I meet Christians, that have been Christians

for a long time, they've never, ever tithed to the Lord. They've never tithed. Other Christians have tithed. I started tithing 40 years ago. And they put it on autopilot, but they forget that every single thing they have belongs to the Lord. Removing hindrances means removing clutter. But by show of hands, how many have you been married in this room for at least 10 years?

Have you collected more junk since when you were first married or is it just me? I mean, isn't it interesting, you get married. We had nothing when we got married and now we're trying to find places to store the stuff that we don't even want anymore. The same things happen with us in our lives. So when it comes to resources, it's not just God I tithed and that's it. It's Lord everything I have, my home, my cars, my bank accounts, everything that you prospered, it's all yours. In this season what do you want me to do? How will this help me be my best for you? What's it look like for me to be more generous? What's it look like for me to be more content right now? See, when we constantly come back and are asking the Lord what he wants for us, I find that the Lord has a way of speaking deeply to us about personal things that he wants for us.

Friends, family's important. It's the most important unit of relationships in our culture. Satan's tried to destroy it from the beginning. It's super important. Being a godly husband, being a godly wife, being godly parents, super important. I'm not downplaying that. But sometimes we can even make family an idol. We can put family ahead of our relationship with God. We can put our kids ahead of our relationship with God. We can put comfort ahead of our relationship with God. We can put security ahead of our relationship with God. You need to remove all hindrances. Let me show

you three hindrances I think are most pervasive in the church. See if any of these apply, the first is narcissism.

Narcissism is a really fancy word. When the Trinity of your life is me, myself and I. It's when you wake up and you're focused on you and you alone first, it's pride. And here's what happens. You quench God's goodness when you live with narcissism and pride. Why? Because God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. When you live your life and you think every sermon is about what God needs to do for you. And you wake up every day with your life and your things and your stuff. And if there's any extra time, then God gets some. And maybe some other people. It's backwards.

The Bible says we're to love the Lord or God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and we're to love our neighbors as ourselves. Who are we not really to be concerned about? Us. Why? Because if we'll concern ourselves with God and others, he'll take care of us. It's a faith step to watch God do that. But when we're narcissistic or we're prideful, we quench God's goodness in our lives. And friends, I'm not just talking about non-Christians. I know those non-Christians out there. They're totally narcissistic. I can show you a lot of Christians that are really narcissistic. Really prideful. Think that it's all about them. Needs to be repented of. Second is this, I think it's one of the biggest in the church. It's unforgiveness. Unforgiveness.

If narcissism, quenches God's goodness unforgiveness hinders it. It hinders God's goodness. When you think about forgiveness, really what you're doing is you are releasing somebody of a debt that they owe to you because they treated you poorly.

That's when you say in your heart, "Well, they don't deserve my forgiveness." Yeah, exactly. That's why you forgive them. Because to hang on to unforgiveness is like drinking, poison and hoping the other person dies.

Forgiveness means to release. It literally means to untie. If you can't forgive a person, a situation, a place, a group of people, you stay anchored to them. And every single time you try to come forward, you become more like the person you're anchored to than actually where you're going. Forgive. Don't forgive when you feel like it, because you'll never feel like it. Forgiveness doesn't mean when you forgive, Oh, I'm so glad I forgave now everything feels really good. Now forgiveness is an act of the will. I forgive so that God can bring healing in my life so that I can move forward.

And friends, I find in the church that church people, even though the central tenant of the Christian faith is the forgiveness of God through the Lord, Jesus Christ who died so that we could be forgiven. And who rose from the grave to validate that he was the son of God. Forgiveness is the central tenant. And yet we, as Christians say, "Well, I can't forgive them." It's not what the Bible says. Bible says love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. You got to forgive others. And I hear some people talking about how you have to forgive yourself. I don't think you can forgive yourself. How am I going to forgive me? But I know what people mean when they say that. What they mean when they say that is I made some bad choices or I made a bad choice and I don't feel good about the choice I made.

So I would say to you, don't forgive yourself. Here's what I would say to you, receive the Lord's forgiveness in your life for the bad decision that you made. You

never came to the cross because you were perfect. And God doesn't expect you to be perfect after you've come to the cross. But admit that you're a sinner and admit that was a bad choice and admit that you were wrong and repent of it and receive the grace of God. Forgiving yourself won't help you. Receiving God's forgiveness, over poor choices you made will free you. Jesus Christ died to forgive sinners. Is that not good news or what? That deserves more than a golf clap. Jesus Christ died to forgive sinners, is that... Thank you.

And then I've talked to people that say, "Well, I need to forgive God." Let me tell you something. You do not need to forgive God. How can you forgive God when he's perfect? He's all good. He's all perfect all the time. Now you can be angry about circumstances in your life. And when you are, the enemy can lie to you and say, "If God really loved you, he would've never taken your kid away. If God loved you, your spouse wouldn't have died. If God really loved you, your mom wouldn't have died of cancer. If God..." That's so wrong, God loved you so much that he gave you the time that you had with those people. That's why you enjoyed him so much. God is so good, he's still pouring out his mercy on you. His Mercy's fresh every single morning. You are not mad at God.

You're disappointed at how life went. And guess what? Join the club because there's nothing on this side of heaven that's perfect. You're not disappointed with God. You're disappointed with the circumstance and the more you press into God and see how good he is and how merciful he is and how compassionate he is the more you can experience his grace. Friends I just want to encourage you this morning to follow

faithful examples and to eliminate all hindrances. And then what else does he say? All those encumbrances that beset us and the sin, which so easily entangles. Friend sin is like a rope that gets tied around your leg. The enemy invites you into a sinful condition and he opens the door about that much to show you how good it's going to be. But he doesn't show you all the pain you're going to have. If you go that way.

Hey, it's okay with that gal at the office, you're just talking. You're not doing anything wrong. I mean you're married, but she's nicer than your wife is. Hey, I know you're just on Facebook. I mean nothing's ever going to come of this. I mean, he's a nice guy and you guys are just sharing your hearts together. Nothing's ever going to come of this. Hey, nobody's really ever going to find out at work that you're cheating. Hey, nobody's going to know at school that you plagiarized that paper. Hey you're okay. I got you. He shows us this much and doesn't show us when you go that way you choose to sin and there's consequences you can't control. You can go downtown. You can choose to jump off a building. Gravity will take over. I don't know the consequences, but they're not going to be good. If you choose to sin, you choose to endure consequences.

You don't get to choose what the consequences are. So we got to get rid of sin. That's why God shows us in his word what sin is. He wants us to know so that we stop living that way. Now when I was a kid, I remember growing up in school and fire department would come in and they would teach us three things to do if we ever caught fire. Remember that? Stop, drop and roll. Fortunately, I never caught fire, but I

think the same is true for us as Christians. If we're going to continue to eliminate these hindrance and sins is stop, stop living with unforgiveness, bitterness hurt, resentment, anger, sadness, fear, stop. Stop. Then what do you do? You drop the offense. Drop the offense. You know you've dropped the offense when you get to a place when people can bring it up and you don't have to talk about it anymore.

Some of us have dropped the offense. It's kind of like we bury the hatchet, but we leave the handle sticking out. So that if it ever comes up again yeah, "Oh, let me add to that. Let me tell you what they did. You don't even know the whole story. It was so bad." Drop it, drop the offense. By the way, let me just say this because I feel like it needs to be said in church because you don't hear this all the time. No church ever hurt you. Nobody's ever been hurt by the church.

There are people in the church that have hurt you from time to time. There are well-meaning people that have hurt you. And there are sinners who have hurt you. I believe that, but the church never hurt you. Don't blame the church for something that happened to you. Jesus Christ loves the church. He died for the church. He's coming back for the church. Speak highly of the church. Felt like I needed to say that this morning.

So stop living with bitterness and hurt. Drop the offense. Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecuted you. And then roll, roll your anxieties back on God. "Lord, if I forgive them, how's this going to work out?" Let God deal with all that. Let God be the one that makes it right. Roll it back on him. Cast all your anxieties upon him because he cares for you. You ever been to the airport before, seen those moving

sidewalks that they have? They're not as big of a deal to me as they were when I had a kid kids that were three and one years old. You've seen those parents carting through the airport. They got a stroller, they got a car seat. They got luggage, they got bags, they got everything, and they're cruising around and they see that moving sidewalk. And it's like, praise the Lord. Because what can you do?

You can stop, you can drop, and you can let that thing roll. And guess what happens when that conveyor belt is carrying all your luggage, you don't have to carry it anymore. You can let it go. In the same way you can let God carry all your garbage for you. You can let God take it where it needs... You don't have to carry that stuff anymore. And then you're free to continue to walk. And it's amazing, that baggage will catch up to you if you let it or you can just keep on walking. Friends of the most glorious thing is the cross of Jesus Christ. Because when Jesus died, he died for sinners. He died so that sinners could be forgiven. And so sinners could forgive. And when we forgive, we drop the offense. We stop complaining. We drop the offense. We roll all our anxieties upon him.

Because why? Because he cares for us. Amen. You're going to be a faithful finisher. You need to follow faithful examples, eliminate all hindrances and sin. And let me give you a third one. Faithful finishers don't ever quit. Faithful finishers don't ever quit. I'm going to encourage you. Don't ever quit. Don't ever quit. If you live long enough, there will be a time in your spiritual life you will want to quit. I promise you, but notice what he says, "And let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." Your version may say, let us run with steadfastness or let us run with perseverance the

race marked out before us. Each one of you has an your own lane to run in that God ordained for you and we're to run with perseverance. What does that mean? It means you're going to get knocked over. It means there's going to come a time in your life you're going to want to quit.

If you live long enough like I have, you will know there are certain things that God takes you through in your life that you would've never chosen that circumstance. That if you go back and hit, repeat you, would've done something different. And there's other times where you didn't even do anything. And a circumstance comes that you don't want. Where there's everything inside of you where you feel spiritually like, you just got the wind kicked out of your gut and you're so done. Because if God's so good, then why am I going through this? That's why you run with perseverance. Because God makes clear there will come a time in your life you're going to get knocked down. There will come a time in your life where you're embarrassed. There will come a time in your life it just doesn't feel good anymore.

There will come a time where it just doesn't seem like it's going to work out the way that I thought my life was going to work out. And just to give you a little clue, your life will never always work out the way you think it's going to work out. So run with perseverance. It means get back up. I mean all of you in here that are able to walk today, you couldn't walk perfect the first time you walked. Every single one of you fell down at some point in time. And yet I'm sure you were encouraged. I mean, I've never seen somebody watch a kid learn how to walk, who fell. And they're like, "Man, they're

never going to get it. You better crawl you fool."

I mean, nobody talks like that. But then when it comes spiritually about how to walk with God, which is a super difficult process and we don't know how to do it, that when we fall, sometimes we end up shooting our own wounded and telling people, "Well, how come you didn't get that?"

Because we're broken people that need the grace of God to continue forward. But when we continue forward, what I find is that God often uses those broken areas of our life to help other people grow in their faith. So that we don't feel alone. Because the Bible says no temptation has seized you except what is common to man. Which means whatever temptation you face or some of the sins that have befallen you, are pretty common right here in our church. Let alone all around the kingdom. And yet the enemy lies and said, "If you were really a Christian, you would've never sinned this sin."

So let me tell you something. Sin does not disqualify you. Unbelief does. I mean, we're fine, theologically saying sinners are welcome in church. We get back. God forgave us. Except for the biggies, like abortion and adultery and alcoholism and drugs and divorce and fornication and homosexuality and pride and narcissism.

Like those are hard to forgive. But if you're a gossip, God will totally forgive that. I mean, we make this list that's so high and I'm going to tell you, there's no sin that you've sinned that disqualifies you from where God is taking you. Not one. The enemy will lie to you and say, "Well, because of that blemish on your record, you can't move forward." Go back through Hebrews 11. We talked about it last week. The only perfect

person in the entire word of God is Jesus Christ. Everybody else is broken and has stains all over him. That's why we need the grace of God. Have you ever heard people say something like this, life is not a sprint. It's a marathon. Marathon runners. Don't say that. You ever seen a marathon winner. It's a sprint. They all run each of the 26.2 miles in under five minutes.

I've run marathons before, when I've run it. I've been about the halfway point, about the two hour mark. When I listen to the radio and say, "Oh, the race is over, but we're going to keep spinning tunes. Because there's a few people that are still out there." That's me. And we don't have to worry about winning this race because Jesus Christ already won it. But God just says, get up and keep running. Pick up your mat and go. Why are you wallowing in all your sin? Everybody's sinned and falling short of the glory of God. That's why I'm giving you my grace. And when I pour out my grace to you, then I can use you for goodness. I think sometimes people think like pastors, you don't feel like quitting or there's never been a hard time in your life. And that's why you're proclaiming so hard.

No, that's just not true. I mean I could sit up here and tell you story after story, after story of all the times that I've wanted to quit. I can tell you how, when I graduated from Dallas seminary, I was one of four people invited into a church planting residency in Little Rock, Arkansas felt totally honored. Knew God had called me to planted church all the way back in 2002, no doubt about it. Got to the residency program and nothing worked out. I was asking all sorts of questions that couldn't be answered. I was frustrated. I didn't know what was going on. I was the black sheep of the

residency so much so that the men in the room around the circle used to say stuff like this to me, "Maybe you're not even called to ministry. Why do you talk like that? Why are you challenging everything that we say? Maybe you need to go find a different kind of job."

To add insult to injury. I ended up breaking an engagement two months before I was supposed to be married. So I felt like a fool. I was embarrassed. I was shamed. And all that is how I ended up leaving Little Rock and told Lord, I'll do whatever you want. I'll coach football. I'll go back into business world. I'll do whatever. I just want to honor you and the Lord opened up doors for me to do itinerant ministry. And about eight years later, if you fast forward, I ended up meeting a guy and it was at that time that the Lord opened a door for me to plan a church. And it was the right system in the right way. And I knew God was calling me to Denver and I stepped through that. But God had showed me eight years earlier, I was going to do it.

He just needed to mature me and build my character in different ways. But I was embarrassed at the time. I felt shamed at the time. I mean, I had the equivalent of two master's degrees and I'm going to move home to live with my parents with my 16 year old brother who had more money in the bank than I did. I was embarrassed. I hated going out of the house. But God knew what he was doing because God brought me home. That's where I ended up meeting my wife and she saw me the first time fell in love with me right away. And the rest is history.

But friends, we got to be able to learn to laugh at ourselves too, because sometimes when life hits us hard and we're so embarrassed and shame by things that

have happened to us, we're afraid to talk about them in church, which is the place that they need to be talked about. Because that's where healing begins. I mean, there's nobody here that sin a sin that nobody else in this church has sinned. You're not that special.

And Satan's not all that creative. And that's what he does. We got to learn to laugh at ourselves. I remember back in 1993, when I was playing football at the University of Illinois before my senior year, I knew God was going to allow me to be the starting quarterback because I was now walking with the Lord and I was faithful. And so he owed me. And we were going to go to the Rose Bowl and win the national championship.

And I was going to be willing to give him about, I don't know, 10 seconds on the national media to say, I just want to thank my Lord and savior Jesus Christ. And I thought we had made a good deal only to find out in spring practice I wasn't going to be the starting quarterback. And they were going to demote me to the scout team and they were going to build for the future. And I was devastated and I was ashamed. But there was something inside of me that said, even though I wanted to quit. And even though I didn't like the way that I was treated, I don't want to be a quitter. I don't want that on my record. So I went back my fall to play football at the University of Illinois, wondering God, what in the world am I doing here? I'm embarrassed. I'm shamed. I'm down with the scout team, all these different things.

And you know what happened? During that six month season, I led more people

to the Lord than I had led to the Lord my entire college career. My roommate who was doing drugs, came to know the Lord and went into ministry. All these different things were happening and the Lord was so good to me that on October 16th, 1993 against the University of Iowa, at Kinnick stadium, he allowed me to get into a game for 10 plays friends. I played five years of division I college football. I've only played 10 more plays than y'all. Now the cool thing was on that drive, I had a quarterback sneak, got a first down to keep the drive going. And in the very last play of that drive, we got to the one inch line and I was looking over to the coaches, yelling, sneak, sneak, because I was going to call sneak anyway, even if they didn't send the play in because I was like, what's the worst thing they're going to do? Not play me.

So anyway, I mean I took the quarterback sneak, fell into the end zone. My sisters could have scored it. It was no big deal. I mean nothing to write home and brag about, but it was the Lord's goodness to me. And he showed me that. And by that time I realized that I wasn't at the university of Illinois to play football. I was at the University of Illinois to lead people to Christ. And I started to laugh at myself a little bit and I started to make fun of myself a little bit. Because you may not know this, but this is statistically accurate. In 1993, I led the entire NCAA on touchdowns per carry. Touched the ball twice, scored once. And in my career, NCAA career, every time I touched the ball in rush, I had a first downer, a touchdown. And who else can tell you that. You have a very special pastor.

What's the point? We got to be able to laugh at ourselves. Because I look back now 30 years ago and know that if God would've allowed me to be the starting

quarterback or I had been drafted or I had been a free agent or I would've been a football coach, I'd never be doing what I'm doing now. That God had a bigger plan for me than playing football. I mean I was at a men's ministry about a year ago and I had some guy lay his hands on me. It's a good friend of mine. And we're talking about this story and he prayed over me. And said, "Dear Lord, I just thank you that Jeff's college career was horrible. Thanks for allowing him to be my pastor." But we don't laugh at ourselves very well. We go through a painful divorce or breakup or we've done something we knew we shouldn't have done or we had an abortion or we did these things.

And then we live with all this shame in our heart. When God says, "No, no, just come to me. All of you who are weary and heavy laden, and I'll give you a rest. I'll forgive all that. You can cut the tie on that. You can move forward. That doesn't dictate your future. No sin in your past will keep you from the future."

Because first Thessalonians 5:24 says he who calls you is faithful. And he will surely do it. He who began a good work and you will carry it on to completion. It's the enemy that lies to you and says your past is not good enough for your future. God, doesn't say that. God wants you to keep on running. You run and do not quit. This is what the apostle Paul also told the Philippian church in Philippians chapter three. Here's what he says.

He goes, "Brethren I did not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet. But one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and straining for what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call in Christ Jesus." What was he saying?

He was saying no matter what my past is. And Paul had a lot of things in his past that were bad. I mean, he was a murderer. He persecuted the church and did all that. He had a lot of things in his past that were good. He proclaimed the gospel. He was willing to be in prison. He faced certain death. He had good and bad in his past. He said, but one thing I do, I'm not living in my past. I forget what's behind me. And I strain towards what is ahead. What does that mean?

It means, always look to where we're going. Because it's so much better than where you're at. This world, in this world you will have tribulation. In the world to come there will be none. No more tears. No more sadness. No more frustration. No more anger. No more I-25. It's gone. It's perfect world. And what does it mean? It means if you drive a car, you'll notice that your windshield's bigger than your rear view mirror. I have a daughter now, that has her learners permit. Everywhere we go, she drives me. And one thing I've known, she's a very good driver. She's doing a great job. But one thing I know is I'm more aware of what's going on all around while she's more focused on what's right in front of her. And there are times where I will whisper and sometimes louder than a whisper tell her about some things that she's not seeing.

And she gives the same response to me that I gave to my parents. "Dad, quit talking. I know what I'm doing. I know what I'm doing." We do the same thing with God. God's taking us to a place and he wants us to keep our eyes fixed forward. Not backwards, not looking at the good old days, wishing we could go back. And how good was it then? And I love Brave church when we met in that theater room and there were

only 19 people. That was the glory days. I loved it too, but I'm not going back there. Or we have things that have happened bad to us. And we think, well, because that happened here, I don't think I can move forward. That's a blemish on my record. Friends if you got blemish on your record, just come to the cross of Jesus and get it all washed, clean all again and start fresh and get up and keep on running.

Amen. That's what he wants you to do. All of us have blemishes on a record. All of us have sin that has kept us from being our best and God's willing to forgive it all. So don't you ever quit. Forget what lies behind and strain towards what lies ahead. That's what it looks like. And then finally is this. Focus on Jesus. Focus on Jesus. That may sound like the most simple, but it's the most profound. He says, "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and Perfector of our faith." Fixing our eyes upon Jesus means to gaze only at him. If you've ever seen people who get engaged or are young marrieds what I'm talking about. The way they look at each other and gaze at each other all the time. And they think everything they do is so special and cute, because they're seeing every nuance.

That's what God's calling us to do with Jesus. Because there's such a beauty and a majesty and a holiness and a righteousness and a mercy and a grace and all sorts of character qualities that if you really plunge the depths of who Jesus is, you'll never get enough of him. So fix your eyes upon him and focus on him and give all your attention to him. Seek first, the kingdom of God in his righteousness and all these things will be added on you. Why? Because he's the author and the Perfector of our faith. He's the one that gave you life, Psalm 1:39 says that you're fearfully and

wonderfully made. He knit you together in your mother's womb. He's the one who gave you life. He's the author of your faith. He's the one taking you down the path and he's the Perfector of your faith.

Jesus Christ is the one that's going to bring you home. You keep focusing on him and you'll end up there. Notice what he says in Jude 24 and 25, "Now to him who was able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory, blameless with great joy to the only God or savior through Jesus Christ, our Lord be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now, and forevermore, amen."

Friends when you enter heaven, you are going to be magically transformed into the image that you were created to be. You are going to be presented faultless before the father with exceedingly great joy by the son. And you're going to hear these words well done good and faithful servant. Enter my rest. Friends it's going to happen for all of us who know the Lord. It's a fact. Jesus, when we focus on him is the one who's going to bring us home.

He's the author and Perfector of our faith. And what did he do? Who for the joy set before him endured the cross? There's that word again? Endured, persevered. Steadfast at the cross, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. What does it mean that he endured the cross. He went through that, which he didn't want to go through. He endured it. He endured the shame. And the next verse says, consider him who endured such opposition from sinful people so that you will not grow weary and loose heart. Jesus endured the cross, scorning and shame.

What was more shameful than to be stripped naked, beaten, and hung on a post for people to watch you die while all the time they're mocking you. He endured all that so that we have a great high priest that can sympathize with everything we go through.

I mean, here's the good news, no matter what you're going through and no matter how hard it is, and many of you are going through some very difficulties in this season, ask Jesus this question. "Hey, Jesus, it's really hard for me right now. Have you ever gone through anything harder than this?" See what he says. Because there's nothing that you'll go through in this life that's any more difficult than what Jesus endured on your behalf, who for the joy set before him knowing he'd be sitting at the right hand of the throne of God, ruling in power and inviting all people to himself, went through all the pain for you. So he says, if I can make it, I can bring you home too. And I'm going to bring you home too. And what a great day that will be with this cloud of witnesses to see Jesus sitting in all authority, welcoming us home.

So we will not grow weary and lose heart. I mean, think about Jesus. He was verbally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually abused his entire ministry. But especially at the end of his life. And yet on the cross, he said, "Father, forgive them. They do not know what they're doing." He stopped holding onto any offense. He dropped it at his father's feet and he endured the cross all the way to the end. It's the same thing the apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 6 in verse nine, "Let us not lose heart in doing good for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary." You know what growing weary means. You know what it means to be weary. If you have four kids

under the age of six, you know exactly what I'm talking about. If you have teenagers or college students that have moved back in your house you know exactly what I'm talking about.

You don't sleep anymore. But I'm talking about a spiritual weariness that feels like that. Like I've been doing the same thing. I'm honoring the Lord and I'm going after him. And my life's really, really, really hard. Here's what he says. Don't quit. Don't give up, focus on Jesus. He made it all the way, he won the race. You're not going to win it. You're just going to follow in his footsteps. And won't that be a delightful day when all that cloud of witnesses and every faithful person we know that's standing around the throne is able to welcome us all the way down to Jesus and hear him say, well done, good and faithful servant. Friends the world to come is way better and way longer than the world that we live in. So keep on going and be a faithful finisher. Amen. It's what he's telling us.

Heard the lyrics of a song recently. We've sung it here in our church, but it's called Hymn of Heaven. It was written by Phil Wickham and a few other different people. And I just wanted to read the three of the stanzas to the song, because it's what I long for. It's what I look forward to. It's what I want to see. How I long to breathe the air of heaven, where pain is gone and mercy fills the streets. To look upon the one who bled to save me and walk with him for all eternity.

And every prayer we prayed in desperation, the songs of faith we sang through doubt and fear in the end, we'll see it was all worth it. When he returns to wipe away our tears. And on that day, we'll join the resurrection and stand beside the heroes of

the faith. And with one voice, 1,000 generations saying worthy is the lamb that was slain. Friends, I'm not a great runner, but I want to run this race to win. And winning is not me comparing myself to anybody else. And it's not you comparing yourself to anybody else. It's you being the best with what God's entrusted you to and running so that you can present to him all your best.

Now I'm not a great runner and I haven't run a lot of races, but I've finished every single one. And there's something about finishing that when you cross the line, all of the things that you were thinking before you got there, magically disappear and all you think about is celebrating with friends. And then you have stories to tell about how hard it was and how you'll never do that again. Friends, that's exactly what heaven's going to be like. You've all had different wounds and different pains and different aches. And one day they're all going to be soothed by the Lord Jesus Christ with his healing balm all our life saying, "Hey, welcome home. I've been waiting for you." And he's going to let us be rulers with him and his millennial reign for 1,000 years and then the eternal state forever and ever, and ever, and ever.

So, no matter what you're going through, here's the call. Endure to the end. Be a faithful finisher of the Lord, Jesus Christ and give him all the glory and praise that's due his name. Amen. Amen. Could we give God some praise this morning? Would you stand with me as we pray. Father in heaven, as we sing this song, Lord may be the cry of our heart this morning that we yearn for what heaven's going to be like. And that we give you all the glory, honor and praise. Be pleased with the way that we worship you. In Jesus name, amen.

