

Finishing Well

Hebrews 12:1-2

When all is said and done and your life is over, what do you want people to say about you? Do you want people to say that you finished well? No matter what your life was like early on, isn't it everyone's desire in the end to do what is right? To be remembered for the right that we have done and not the wrong? Even if you have made some pretty bad mistakes, isn't it your desire to finish better than you started? Now you may be thinking, I'm not as old as you so why do I need to worry about it? If you don't think about how you are going to end right now, you probably won't get there anyway. Or you may be thinking I'm too old to do anything about it now.

So what does it take to finish well? What does that require us to do, and how do we do that? The writer of Hebrews gives us some insight into the "how". The question is "Will we pay attention to it?" Let's look at chapter 12 and the first 3 verses.

Before we start, we need to understand the analogy that the Writer uses here. He is talking about running in a race. A race with a start, a middle, and a finish line. Now we all understand about the starting and the finishing part, but many of us lose sight during the middle part. It is that part of any race that is the most difficult, and often keeps us from finishing altogether. That is where doubt, discouragement, distraction comes in and keeps us from finishing the race.

Theme: To finish well, we must follow God's plan

1. **Consider the evidence – vs. 1** – *It is possible!!* We are surrounded with many witnesses. Look back at chapter 11. It is often called the chapter of the faithful. Here is a listing of those who before us showed us that finishing well could be done. These men and women are called the "Hall of Fame" for those who finished well. We can look at the lives of these people and understand that they did not live perfect lives, but in the end "finished well". You have people around you today who are "witnesses" that are showing you that "finishing

well” is possible even today. And if you don’t think you have any around you, just look harder. They are there. I’ll tell you it is not the Lindsey Lohan’s or the Brittany’s Spears of this world. It isn’t even Jonas Brothers or the Donald Trump’s of the world. **It is the ones who are willing to invest in, and develop the character of some else. Tony Snow etc.**

2. **Lay aside every entanglement – vs. 1 – *There is a plan!!*** We all know the things that trip us up. We all know those things that get us into trouble, and we all know those things that we need and should stay away from. The problem is we enjoy those things far more that we fear the consequence. The pain isn’t great enough to get us to quit. I’ll say that again. We enjoy the sin more that the consequence. Plus the consequences come later and that is why we think we have gotten away with things. And you know you never do! The Bible says, “beware you sins will find you out”. So how do we lay aside the things that keep us from running our best race?

Two very simple thoughts!

- a. **Stay focused on Christ.** It is hard to sin when you are constantly thing about Christ. If you were constantly thinking and praying, would you go to certain places? Would you go certain things or say the things you do? Probably not.
- b. **Stay away from sinful areas.** Now this sounds like one of those obvious things. But we all need reminded of it. In fact, it really sounds easy, but we all know it isn’t. Temptation is all around us 24/7. TV, radio, movies, books, magazines, internet, friends, and even work. You can’t get away from it. All of that “stuff” seeks to derail you from being Holy and therefore finishing well. Let’s face it. Most sin falls into one of three categories. Money, power, and immorality. So how do we stay away from those things? How do we keep those things from derailing our lives into something we never dreamed it would be? STOP the behavior. If you are going to places you shouldn’t, STOP. If you are doing unholy things, STOP. Whatever it is that is causing you to stumble and fall, STOP.

But how? Ask the witnesses in your life. That is why God has put them there. To help you and encourage you that there is a way to get through the tough situation you are in today and to get past the hurt of yesterday and to see that God's plan for you is really one of hope and goodness and not of calamity as He promises in Jeremiah 29:11. Notice the command to recognize the great multitude of witness around you before He commands you to stay away from those things that entangle you. God knew that it would be hard, but He also knew it could be done.

3. **Run with endurance – vs. 1** – *It's not easy!!* Many of us who have been around a while, have seen over and over again people starting out strong in life, only to fall by the wayside. Their endurance ran out and they gave up and quit. They say "it is too hard" or find a way to blame others. Here are four things to help keep you going.
 - a. **Don't Quit** – Now that really seems simple and we all know how much harder that is that it sounds. The great running shoe company Nike has made millions of dollars using three words; Just Do It!! That is the idea here. Just stay in the race, don't quit and don't give up. Staying power. Of course the question then comes, where do I get that kind of power? The Holy Spirit promises you that power. It is through His power we can stay in the race and run with the endurance that Hebrews is talking about. If you are saved, you have the Holy Spirit in you already and you have that power in you. If we then will lay aside the things that trap us, all those things that will weigh us down and cause us to stumble and fall, we will make it to the finish line.
 - b. **Bearing the load that God has given us.** – Paul says that we are to share in the "Suffering of Christ". This is not to punish us or to see us miserable. God never promised us a pain free life. All the drugs, money and fame can't do that either. Because sin entered the world, there will always be pain. We will experience heartache and disappointment. But we must bear it. God will bring us through. In two ways. **First** He says to "*bear one another's burdens*". We need each other and we

need those witnesses around us to help us during the tough times. **Second,** Christ said, *"take my yoke upon you for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* God always give you a way to succeed in whatever He asks you to do. Some people never get the endurance they need because they don't prepare for it.

- c. **God's work done God's way will not kill you** – This is a personal favorite one for me. Sometimes we think that we just can't do what God has called us to do, or that we can't STOP doing what we enjoy doing. We say things like, *"if I can't do that I'll just die!"* Or *"I would just die if I could have that or go there"*. God gives us the strength and the desire to be Holy and also give us His promise that He will never leave us or forsake us. What more do we really need? If we really want to "Finish well", we have to do what God says, God's way. It not enough to just cheat death for 60, 70, or 80 years. **It is not enough just to stay out of jail, or doing enough to just "get by"**. God calls us to run hard a race that is full of ups and downs. A mixture of pleasures and disappointments. And the only way to do that is His way. If we look back over the lives of the Heroes of the Faith listed in Hebrews 11, doing God's work God's way, they all got through it. I admit, sometimes it may seem like it will "kill" us, but at that point we just need to "kill" our pride instead and go on.
- d. **Doing things our way is just stupid.** Now I say that with apologies to Gregory. We have taught him that stupid is a word he shouldn't use. But, it really applies here. It is stupid to think we know more than God. Time and time again we can look at our lives and say, **"That was just plain stupid"**. **"I can't believe I did that or said that"**. That was just dumb! How many times do we leave a situation and say to ourselves, **"Why did I do that? or Why did I say that?"** We can be incredibly stupid at times. If we look at every leader Israel had, we would see that every one was successful when they did things God's way, but they were failures when they did things their way.

4. **The finish line is set by God – vs. 1 - There is a finish line!!** There is a light at the end of the tunnel. So often we want to set our own goals and our own finish line. Sometimes, things get so crazy we wonder if there is a finish line. Well, God sets the finish line for us. He knows what is best and it is His will and plan for us that we need to run toward. After all, He knows best, right? And in the end, it is His prize that we win. His prize will be the crowns and stars that await us in heaven. How much greater than anything on this earth will that be?

5. **Fix our eyes on Jesus – vs. 2 – There is only one way to finish well!!** There is nothing else in this world that will help you more than this. **Just fix your eyes on Jesus.** It will keep you out of trouble, it will keep you from doing things you ought not to do, or saying those things you shouldn't. It will keep your attitude where it should be, and it will give you joy that you never knew before. It will give you the wisdom you need and the grace others need from you. It will create in you a spirit of forgiveness and understanding you may have never known before. It will give you a renewed sense of purpose and vision in life. Jesus is the only one who can do all that and so much more. **We must not look to anyone else or anything else to give us direction and fulfillment in our lives. Jesus only!!**

How about you? Is there something in your life you need to get rid of today? Do you need to get Jesus back where He needs to be in your life? **Do you need to make some adjustment in order to "Finish Well"?** What is it that God is speaking to you right now about? Will you do it? Remember the witnesses in your lives. They are there to help you through whatever you are going through.

Maybe you think "I'm too old for it to make a difference or I've messed up too badly." God never let age or the past stand in the way if someone does His will. Two great examples of this are King David and Abraham and Sarah. Both tried to fix things their way but God used them for His good. Jeremiah 29:11 still is true today. Won't you make it a part of your life today? Join with Joshua and say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."