

**NBC Devotional**  
**January 6, 2021**  
**“Run the Race”**  
**Hebrews 12:1-3**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. <sup>2</sup> Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

The analogy of running the race is used in many places throughout the New Testament. The people of that day understood the analogy. Races were conducted on days of national festivity. The emperor was in regal attire sitting within his purple curtained booth. There was row upon row reaching upward of a vast multitude of spectators. Every eye was fixed on the runners who were straining their muscles. The aim of athletes was nothing short of winning. To win the race demanded stamina, perseverance, dedication, and discipline.

The runners were willing to give up everything to win the gold. Champions received the adulation and unlimited benefits from his city.

The Christian life is not a short sprint, but rather like a marathon for a runner. It is hard work. The word for race in the Greek is "agon." It is the root word that we get our word "agony." The race is an agonizing, tough marathon. . .26 miles, 385 yards.

The author of Hebrews tells us to run with perseverance the course marked out for us. It is your own unique course planned out in advance by God for you. It is wonderfully reassuring that we only have to run our course. We do not have to run someone else's race, only our own.

Paul writes:

\*\* For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

\*\* Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind & straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14).

**Philippians 3:14**

<sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Race car driving champion Bill Vukovich won the infamous Indianapolis 500 race two times, a record of success few others have achieved. When asked about the secret of his success in the race, Vukovich simply replied, "There's no secret. You just press the accelerator to the floor and steer left."

Sometimes we have a tendency to complicate things when it comes to serving the Lord. But like race car driving, there's really no secret, just move forward and finish the race! The only thing I would change about Bill's advice is steer RIGHT!!

Are you struggling with confusion, discouragement or anxiety about things of the Lord? God is not a God of confusion, discouragement or anxiety! Let's get back to the basics today. God created us, loves us unconditionally and wants to free us from all our entanglements that we may be holy as He is holy, that we may be able to love Him with all our heart, soul, strength and mind and love our neighbor as ourselves! We're in this together, for the win!

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As Christians, we are reminded that the ultimate goal is to finish the race that God has put before us. It's not how fast we move, it's that we move toward the finish line God has called us to. We don't compete against anyone else, and Satan has a thousand obstacles in our way to discourage us. But we "press on toward the goal Christ has put before us."

As you probably know, the mile run is four laps around the track. I have run it many times. The first lap is no problem. You're fresh and energetic and ready to run. The second lap is not as fun, but you still have the energy to tolerate it. But then the lap I dread the most...the infamous third lap. The problem with the third lap is that you're getting tired but you know you still have another lap to go. I've seen it a thousand miles as a coach. A player slows down many times, but no matter what he does, he still has that other lap ahead of him. He begins to doubt. It can get discouraging and if your gonna quit, the third lap is where it will happen. Why not the fourth lap? After all, this is when you will be the most exhausted. The answer? Because on the fourth lap, you can see the finish line. In fact, it's not unusual to run stronger the closer you get to the finish. You find something you didn't know you had. Somehow you know you can make it if you can see the end.

As we run our spiritual race, there will be trials and tribulations. There will be times when we tire and maybe want to quit and give up. But if we keep our eyes on Christ, if we focus on Him, we will finish the race.

To be sure, Satan will try to distract us. He knows if we take our eyes off Jesus, we will falter. But be assured that Christ will not let us down if we stay the course. He will give us the strength to run the race...He will be with us along the way...He will be waiting at the finish. My prayer for you and I is that one day we will, like Paul, be able to say with joy, "I have finished the race!" Thanks be to God!

Any good driver will tell you that you can not drive a car while looking in the rear-view mirror. Focusing on what you just past is not going to help you arrive alive at your destination which still lies ahead on the journey. A good runner will tell you that the number one rule of running is to stay focused on the finish line and to not look back at the starting line. While you are in competition with other runners it is not a good idea to be looking over your shoulder to who is behind you but rather to look ahead to where the goal line is. Football players will tell you it is not a good idea to be looking at the defenders when trying to catch a pass from the quarterback. If they do not stay focused on receiving the pass, they are sure to drop it.

So it is with our walk with the Lord. As we travel on this road to glory, there will be many trials and tribulations we will encounter. There will be opposition to our trip. Road blocks will arise and detours will be erected in order to slow our progress toward our destination. Many have traveled this road before us, taking the journey from earth to heaven. With such a large crowd of people who have given their lives in the pursuit of heaven's glory, let us keep focused on the REWARDS of the future and not the REGRETS of the past. Looking back at past hurts and past mistakes is like driving a car while looking in the rear-view mirror. Even focusing on past

accomplishments could heed your forward progress as well. Many like to live in the glory moments of the past, forgetting that their journey is not completed, the trip is not over, and there are many more adventures awaiting up ahead.

Past successes as well as past failures are just that - PAST. They are rear-view mirror objects, reflections of what was, not on what IS. Therefore, let us strive to enter the NEW Millennium with our eyes focused straight ahead, not looking to the left or the right nor behind us as we run the race with patience.

**SET:** The 2005-06 Miami Dolphins were a team in transition. First-year head coach Nick Saban had never had a losing season as a head coach on the collegiate level, and he was determined to be a winner on the professional level. However, it appeared that Coach Saban was set to experience his first losing season as the Dolphins were shut out by the Cleveland Browns in week 10, which left them with a 3-7 record. Later that week, during a routine press conference, Saban became frustrated with some of the questions he was being asked. After the barrage of questions, Saban began to scold the media telling them that he did not care about the outcome of games and that he wanted his team to focus on the process of becoming a great team in the future. Bottom line: Saban wanted his team to focus on the preparation that would lead them to eventual victory. This is a lot like what God asks us to do every day. So often we focus on the results of our choices before the choices are even made. God wants us to focus on every detail of the entire process. Amazingly, after coach Saban's lengthy rant, the Miami Dolphins began focusing on the process of becoming a winning team. Miami finished strong by winning their final six games. They ended the season with a 9-7 record. God wants us to live in the moment and make the decisions that will lead to victories in life. If we choose to focus on the process of doing things God's way, the result we are looking for will be waiting for us.

**GO:** 1. Are you focused on the process of eternal glory, or are you looking only at the finish line? 2. Where are you in your process with Christ?

**WORKOUT:** Thomas E. Way, II is an aspiring football coach from Miami, Fla., and has served as WR/DB coach for pop warner football teams in New Orleans. He also privately trains professional and collegiate athletes.

Dr. Harold Graves, Jr., 15 years as the President of Nazarene Bible College and 28 years as part of the NBC Board of Trustees