

Running the Race that is Set Before Us

Hebrews 12:1-4

August 25, 2024 Pastor Jeremy Cagle

Well, good morning. If you would please take your Bibles with you and open them up to the book of Hebrews, as we've just heard from during the Scripture reading hour. This is our text for this morning; we're in Hebrews chapter 12. I want to read it to you again, just so we have it on the recording, if anybody's going to watch this online, but let me read to you. Hebrews chapter 12. We'll start in verse one, says this. It says,

Therefore, since we also have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let's rid ourselves of every obstacle and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let's run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking only at Jesus, the originator and perfecter of the faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat 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.

You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin.

We'll stop the reading with that last expression there because as you read that, you can tell what the passage is about. It's not very hard to pick up on it. It's about a race. In light of the Olympics and all we just saw with the sporting events; it's very fitting. But he's telling you, the author is, that you're in a marathon and it's a hard one. If you look back in your Bibles, he mentions our encumbrances and entanglements in verse one. He talks about the cross and the endurance of it. He mentions the shame that Jesus experienced and the blood that He shed. He'll go on later on to describe the discipline that comes on us all as children of God. Because the author is making it very clear this is how he's describing the Christian life, as a hard athletic event.

I don't know if you've thought about this before, but when you read the Bible, one thing you notice is that there's a lot of ways the Christian life is described, a lot of metaphors that are used. For example, the Bible says we're soldiers, which means you don't serve Jesus in peacetime; you serve Him in war. You don't do it on a playground. You do it on a battleground where bullets are flying, and bombs are blowing up and all kinds of things are taking place. It also says we're sheep. We have a Good Shepherd who leads us beside green pastures, beside quiet waters, and He restores our soul. It says that we're a family. We're part of God's household. We're brothers and sisters in Christ. We're slaves of Christ. Jesus is our master. And on and on and on, but now he's saying that we're athletes.

Now, you may not feel like an athlete at times, but you are one. It may not seem like you're competitors in a big contest, but it's true. You're in a race with your heart pumping, your arms swinging, and your feet pounding hard against the track.

Now I mention that because this is my last sermon with you this morning, and it reminds me that we're not just in a race individually. I think you're in a race collectively as a church as well. The church is going somewhere. When the author of Hebrews says we're in a journey as Christians, I think we're in a journey as brothers and sisters in Christ in a local body. In fact, just to say a little bit about that here at Grace Fellowship, the race here at Grace started about nine years ago in the fall of 2015 when a small group decided they wanted to plant a church based on the teachings of Scripture and the basics of the Christian faith. It started in someone's basement of a home here in Chilliwack. And as they did that, they reached out to Grace Advance for some help, which is a ministry of a Grace Community Church in Los Angeles that specializes in church plants. And Grace Advance looked into it. Some of you were with us when we heard Carl Hargrove a couple of weeks ago, he was part of that search team, and they felt like it was a viable option for ministry. So, they started candidating for a pastor, and in the Fall of the next year, they called me to join them. My first Sunday with you was on January 22, 2017. I'll never forget all that because when I landed at the airport in Vancouver, went through customs, they lost my luggage. I flew from Indianapolis to Chicago to Vancouver, and somewhere on the way, my luggage disappeared. So when I landed, Stan Stewart picked me up at the airport, and the first thing I ever bought in Chilliwack was a toothbrush. I remember thinking, "Man, I'm going to take on Canada with a Bible and a toothbrush and the gospel." But we did, and since then, by God's grace, my luggage did show up, and the Lord has allowed us to do all kinds of things here. We've ordained our first elders as a church, installed our first deacons. We created a constitution, bylaws and membership covenant as well. The church adopted a vision statement, drafted distinctives, brought on the first members of GFC. Some of you remember that we've established ministries like the care group ministry, children's ministry, youth ministry, worship ministry, baptized people, disciples... we could just talk about this all day long. You've been busy. But now, after doing all of that, the church is ready to call a new pastor, which means it's grown to the place that it's time to start the next leg of the race. I've had the honour of bringing you this far in the journey. Now, God has provided a new shepherd in Jory Nunn, and you need to follow him.

And my advice, I'll repeat this in a minute, is to hit the ground running when he arrives. But the question is how do you do that? As you know it's not easy getting ready for a new pastor. That's difficult because new pastors do things differently. Even if they're trying not to change anything, there is still a change. It's a different guy. I hear he likes to hunt and shoot things. I like to watch documentaries about that. That's as far as I'll go. But it means you need to be ready for that. So let me give you some tips for how to do that. I just want to look at this text with you and draw these from this passage.

I want to give you five steps for running the race that is set before us in Hebrews 12. And I want to do this so we can think about what's about to happen and see this from God's perspective. But this is our

outline in Hebrews 12. Let me give you five steps for running the race. When changes like this happen, it helps to remember there is something bigger going on that you're a part of. That's what this is about.

Here's the first step, look at the witnesses. So the first step for running the race that is set before us is to look at the witnesses, which means, in order to run the race for Christ successfully, you have to look at those who have gone before and learn from them. And there's a lot you can learn from those who have gone before. That's what the first few words of the passage tell you.

If you look in chapter 12, verse one, it says, "Therefore since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us." And you might have heard this before, but anytime you see the word "therefore" in your Bibles, you have to ask, "what's it there for?" What's the purpose of that statement? And the purpose of the therefore is to refer to Hebrews 11, the previous passage, where it talks about the Hall of Faith and the saints who have gone before us in the Old Testament. It mentions all kinds of them in there. You can read about men like Abel and Enoch and Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who have run the race in the Hall of Faith. They've distinguished themselves as athletes because they've set off down the track at full speed and reached the finish line with the wind blowing through their hair, sun shining on their faces, and the idea is that after they've done that, they've sat down in the stands to be a witness for us. You could almost look at them as those people in the bleachers at the chief games with one of those cowbells you shake every time they score a goal. I love that sort of thing. I can't relate to hunting. I can relate to that because the passage says they're doing something like that, not to discourage us. They're not sitting down in the bleachers to judge. They're doing it to be a witness and tell us that "I did this, and you can too. I ran the race; I finished by the grace of God. Now you can do the same. "

We all need examples as we run the race. We need heroes to follow who have gone before us and paved the way. And the author says that's what you have in the Old Testament. In fact, you have a lot of these people because the verse, if you look back in the text, refers to them as a cloud of witnesses, which gives the idea of a group that's so big it looks like a mist. You can't really see their faces. You ever seen a big crowd of people? You can't really distinguish them. That's the idea. And it's not just a cloud. It's a great cloud. They're coming at you really, from every side. This is something that blesses any athlete, because it always helps to compete in front of a group of people. Now, I wouldn't know what that's like because I played tennis, and no one watches a tennis match. I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand, but I'm guessing none of you have ever seen a tennis match live in person. But I've had friends who've played college football, and they've told me that they've played in front of thousands. Nealon Stadium in Knoxville, Tennessee, where I grew up, holds over 100,000 seats in it, and they say, anytime you play in front of something like that, it's remarkable. It's so loud you can't hear yourself think, and there's so much noise coming at you that if you're tired, the crowd keeps you going. And if you want to quit, they give you hope. And if you get injured, it's almost like they can pick you up off your feet and set you back on them again. That's what this is referring to.

The Old Testament was given to provide this sort of experience as you run towards Christ. If you want to write this verse down, Romans 15:4 says, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." The Old Testament's a book of hope. We read it the wrong way. Sometimes we read the Old Testament and get discouraged. That's not what it's there for, but the Old Testament's there so if you're struggling with something like patience, you can read the story of Abraham and see how he struggled with it too. Or if you're battling with culture and the wickedness of it all, you can read about Noah and remember he dealt with the same problem, and he kept running. And the thought of it should make you want to go harder for the Lord. I promise you, anytime you read about Abraham and Noah, it's convicting. The man took years to build the ark. It was a big ordeal, but he just would not give up. That kind of thing should light a fire under you. When you read the pages of Scripture, you should realize I'm here, but I need to be there in the race. And I've gone to mile marker 20, but I need to be at mile marker 21, 22, 23. Let's pick up the pace here. Let's get a move on.

It brings you to another step for running the race that's set before us in Hebrews 12, and that is to look at yourself. We'll go through some of these quickly for time's sake. But the first one is to look at the witnesses, see what they did for the Lord. But secondly, you need to look at yourself, which means that to run the race successfully, examine your life and make changes.

As you read this next verse, you'll see that there's several changes the author wants you to make: there's two to be exact.

The first one is to lay aside every encumbrance. Verse one says, "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every encumbrance." That's what the witnesses cause you to do. They make you want to throw away anything that slows you down in the arena. The word encumbrance is a Greek word that means blowed or burden. Some of your translations might render it weight because that's what runners do in a race. They shed weight, and they try to do everything they can to get the pounds off so they can move quicker. This word was often used in the Greek world, the Roman world, to describe a person's clothing. Because the Romans took their races so seriously, they would take almost all their clothing off because if it hindered them in any way it had to go. And the way the author is using this, it's almost funny, because as you read it, you get the impression of a man walking up to the start of the race with a three-piece suit on and an overcoat and a briefcase in one hand, loaded down with office supplies and a bag of gold in the other. And the author's asking the question, what do you think of a man like that? Is he serious about the race? No. Does he want to win? Absolutely not. If he wanted to win, he would get rid of those things. It's that way in the spiritual realm, you can't love God and money, either. You'll hate the one and love the other, and so forth and so on.

And I might add, these encumbrances, they're not necessarily sinful. They can be, but they don't have to be. They could refer to anything. Some people have wondered, well, what's the author talking about here Pastor Jeremy? How many things do I need to lay aside to run the race for Christ? The answer is, how

fast do you want to run? That determines what needs to go. The issue is whether it distracts you from Christ. If it does, you put it away.

It's kind of hard to do because we own a lot of stuff today, don't we? I've told you this before, but I've read statistics that said that the average house in America has 300,000 items in it, and the average size of the American home has nearly tripled over the past 50 years, and it's still not big enough to put everything in it because a lot of Americans rent off site storage to put more in. And we can pick on America all we want to, but Canada, I mean, how much money do people spend on houses around here, and what's going to happen to that home one day? It's going to burn, or someone's going to tear it down and build another one. And yet, some of those things consume our lives as believers, and we spend every single moment thinking about them. And the author says you can't approach the race like that. You gotta be willing to get your priorities straight.

Another change we have to make in the verse is this: you also need to lay aside the sin which so easily entangles us. You see that word there? Now that's even stronger because your stuff is a neutral thing. You can take or leave your house, but the sin is different. It has to go. If you notice the text, it doesn't just say *a* sin, but *the* sin that entangles us. In other words, this is referring to a particular one that causes you trouble. He's encouraging you to look into your soul to find what your idols are, so you can kill them, whatever they may be, whether it be pride or lust or greed or materialism or anger, jealousy, rage lies, hypocrisy, legalism, a bitter spirit that doesn't forgive anyone, anger in your heart towards your brother or sister, whatever you're battling with, it's got to be slain at the foot of the cross. That's how you run.

This is like a runner's shoelaces would trip him up in the race. All those things can do that to your soul. Listen, we all know what it's like to be running the race for Christ, until an angry thought comes along, and it trips us up. Right? Anybody relate to that? We've all had the experience of chasing hard after Christ, going to church, loving the Lord, until an evil image pops into our head, and it makes us do this. The solution to that is to lay it aside. You don't need to think about it. You don't need to pray about it. You don't need to go to God and say, "God, what do you want me to do with the sin in my life? You know what to do with the sin in your life, kill it.

The author is telling you to do this because verse two says, "so you can run with endurance the race that is set before us." And this is why you're laying aside the encumbrances and sin, so you can run, but not just run. Do it with endurance. The race is a marathon. It's not a sprint. And the victory doesn't go to the one that gets there the fastest, it goes to the one that's the most resilient. Aren't you grateful for that? Anybody ever feel slow in the race? It's okay as long as you're still running every moment of every day you're going hard after Christ. You do it in your teens, 20s and 30s. Do it in your 40s, 50s and 60s. You run for Him when you're married and when you're single. You do it when you have kids and when you don't, when you're working, retired, rich or poor, good times, bad times. There's never a time when the race is over for you as a believer. It's over when you're dead.

The reason the author is making a big deal of this is because this is what the saints in the Old Testament did. If you remember the context here, Hebrews 11 says they ran under the worst circumstances imaginable. Verse 37 of chapter 11, right above this, says they were stoned and they kept running. You believe that? You ever been stoned? They were sawn in two and they kept running. They were tempted, put to death with the sword. They went about in sheepskins, goatskins, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, men of whom the world was not worthy, wandering in deserts, mountains, caves, holes in the ground. And how did they respond? They just kept going. When the pain came on, they didn't say, "Lord, why are You doing this to me? I quit. I'm done with this." They submitted to Him.

I do have to admit that of all the things I want to talk about this morning, this is the most personal for me, because I was saved when I was 17. I'm 43 years old now, which means I've spent more than half my life running this race, and I can't tell you how many people I've seen that have dropped out. I grew up in a youth group of about 50 kids, and to my knowledge, there's just a handful of them still walking with the Lord today. The rest of them came to a point when they told the Lord, "I didn't sign up for this. It's too hard. I quit." And the lesson here is you can't be like that as a believer. One of the Puritans said that the one thing you can't fake in the Christian life is perseverance. The real thing lasts. It doesn't fade over time.

It brings us to another step for running the race that is set before us. Some of these are longer than others, just due to the material here, but the next one is to look to Jesus. You need to look at the witnesses, look at yourself, but then quickly look to Christ. Take your thoughts one step higher and fix them on the Lord, which is what verse two refers to when it says to be fixing your eyes on Jesus.

The word "fixing," it's a Greek word that kind of gives the idea of looking from one thing to something else, so that you go from this to that. You can't look at Jesus if you're looking at your sin and your encumbrances and your money and a bag of gold. So the author is telling you to go the other way with your eyes. When you're an athlete, it's very crucial where you fix your eyes. They tell us in tennis all the time that if you're not playing well, sometimes it's because your eye's not on the ball, it's looking at all the stuff around you. It's no different in the Christian life. You want to win the Christian life, think about Jesus with a laser focus and a 2020 vision.

And if you're wondering why you should do that, the author goes on to say, because Jesus is the author of our faith, which means He's the starter and creator of our faith. He's the source and the fountain. He's the one who puts you in the race. Amen, you are running the race for Christ because of Christ. What'd you do? Nothing. What did you contribute? Not a thing. He also says here that we should fix our eyes on Jesus because He's the perfecter of it. That means, not only did He put you in the faith, but He also makes sure you finish perfectly with no blemishes whatsoever. It's quite a statement. So in order to show you how He does that, the author now mentions the cross. And the way this is worded, it's like you could

look at the race as having two lanes. There's your lane and there's Jesus' lane. There is some overlap between the two, but in order to help carry on, you should take your eyes off of your lane onto His.

It says, "for the joy set before Him." Christ endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Now there's a lot you can draw from a verse like that, but let's just focus on the word joy. This gives us Jesus' motivation for running, and that was because of the joy of what was to come after the race when He sat down at the throne of God. That's what made the suffering worth it so much so that it says He despised everything else.

One commentator said, "For the joy set before Him, Jesus looked at the shame of the cross, and said, 'I despise you, Shame. Do your worst. You can't stop Me from accomplishing My mission. You can kill me, curse me, crucify Me, arrest me, whatever. It doesn't matter. I have a treasure coming beyond all that. One day the Father will vindicate me.'"

Because if you were to put this together with what we said before, you could say when you fix your eyes on Jesus, you're fixing your eyes on someone who's finished the race. You don't have to wonder if you're going to win. You will win because of what He did for you. He did everything necessary to make you right with God at the cross. Jesus said, "It's finished." He said *tetelestai* in Greek, which means it's over, nothing more to pay. You don't have to go out and keep the law anymore to save yourself. You don't have to work for it. I've forgiven everything through this one event.

Does that help you run faster? It should. Does that give you motivation to carry on? That should propel you down the track at full speed, like you've been shot out of a canon because you have full assurance of success. As a Christian, you're not running the race wondering what the outcome is. You know what the outcome is. There's victory because of Christ.

In the Olympics you got to see these people on TV. They get down on the track and they're nervous, aren't they? You can see in their eyes. They've been training for years for the next five seconds. They have no idea what the outcome is going to be. Maybe I'll win. Maybe I'll embarrass myself. Christians don't run like that. I know what the outcome is. Amen? It gives me hope.

Brings you to another step for running the race in Hebrews 12, and that is to look at Christ again. Don't you love that? The fourth step is to look at Christ again.

The author repeats this here because it's like you can't get enough of Jesus at this point in the chapter because as he thinks about the race, he realizes how difficult it's going to be. So he goes to our source of help, and that is Him.

But he mentions Christ in a different way because verse three tells you to "consider Him." What does that mean? Earlier, he says, "fix your eyes on Him." Now he says, "consider." What's the difference?

Well, the difference is a matter of intensity. When he tells you to consider Jesus, that means to look at Him in a reflective manner. Don't just glare at Him thoughtfully. Put some effort into this.

The Greek term is *analogizomai*, from which we get the word algorithms. It refers, in English, to a detailed mathematical equation that takes a long time to explain. Because the writer is saying you need to do this with Jesus Christ. Don't round off or shave the numbers with Him. Make sure you get everything right down to the last decimal point, like an accountant would do. We've all seen how accountants work during tax season and how they close themselves off in the office and hover over their calculator for days in order to make sure they get everything right.

And in a similar way, this is saying you have to approach Jesus that way if you want to run the race for Christ successfully. You can't have warm and fuzzy thoughts about Him, and that's it. You can't just see Him as a sweet little baby in a manger and nothing more. That won't cut it. That may cut it when you first get saved. That won't cut it 10 years in, you gotta go deeper and be familiar with his deity, humanity and incarnation. You have to think about His Trinity, Godhead and hypostatic union.

And to be more specific, this verse says, "Consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself." Which tells you, you also have to think about the hostility He faced because from the moment Jesus came into the world, people dogged His every step in the race. For example, Herod tried to kill Him as a child. Remember that? He gave the order to murder all the male children in Bethlehem that were two years old or younger, just to get at Him. I would say that's hostile. It's a bad experience. Then when the Lord began His ministry, the devil tempted Him and tried to get Him to sin in the wilderness, which is bad as well, hostile. You may have been tempted before, but chances are, you've probably never been tempted by the devil himself. Christ was. Then He went into the synagogue at Nazareth and read the prophecy of Isaiah and said, "Today, this has been filled in your hearing." And what did they do? They tried to throw Him off a cliff. Then the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes hounded Him and paid one of his closest disciples to betray Him. Then when He was captured, He went through six trials in one night, three before the Jews, three before the Romans. Then when He was put before the crowd, they said, "Crucify Him." And Jesus Christ kept running toward the cross. He didn't buckle. He didn't bend or waver. When He said it was finished, those were the words of a champion. And the principle here is that you need to consider that as you go through life,

Verse three says so you will not grow weary, which could translate into the phrase, so that you will not get sick with exhaustion. That's what running does to you. It wears you out, especially if you're in a marathon. It makes you so tired that your body wants to shut down. And this is what Christ is there to help you with. It also says so you will not lose heart or want to hyperventilate in the race, gasp for air. You ever been in a trial before, and you've started hyperventilating. You don't have to do that if you have Him.



And all of this brings us to one more step for running the race that is set before us in Hebrews 12. Before I give you that, let me just review these other ones. So far, the author has told us that the Christian life is like a race, and in order to help us with that, he says you need to look at the witnesses. Look at yourself. Look at Christ in order to remember what He's done for you. And look again. I think it was Robert Murray McShane who said, "For every sin in your life, take 10 looks at Christ." It's good mathematics, right? One sin, 10 glances at Him.

And this leads you to one more step for running the race. So far this has been very encouraging. This one won't be as encouraging as it is convicting, but here's the final one. Look at the fact that you haven't shed blood yet. A fifth step for running the race in Hebrews 12 is to look at the fact that you have not shed blood in your striving against sin. Means before you're too down in the mouth and talk about how hard the race is. Remember this, it has not cost you your life yet, so you have to keep running for that reason. Verse three says,

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin.

Now that's a powerful expression in the light of the book of Hebrews because when he says shedding blood, that's a reference to death, but specifically the death of the sacrifices under the Old Covenant. That's what the book of Hebrews is about. Hebrews 9:22 says, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins," which refers to the fact that without a sacrifice, we would die and go to hell. Our sins would not be paid for, but that's what Jesus did. And now the author uses this expression to say no matter how hard your struggles in life, keep this in perspective, they're nothing in comparison to His. No matter how many sacrifices you've made on the track, they don't hold a candle to Him. They're not about to nail you to a cross right now. They're not going to make you bear the sins of the world, sweat drops of blood. People today talk about sweating drops of blood. That's a figure of speech. It was not a figure of speech for Him. When you think about Calvary, you would have to say, you've never had a bad day. Have you? You might have thought you had, but you haven't. What's the hardest thing you have to do for God today? Go to church? Really, is the sermon that bad? I mean, what's the most painful sacrifice you've had to make? Witness to your family members? Come on, that's nothing compared to this.

So what the author is saying now is, "What's the problem?" He said, "I've said this to you the nice way, and I've done it with gloves on. Let's take the gloves off." Now he's telling you to stop being a baby, and saying, "This is hard." When you do that, it's like it makes him wonder, "Where's the blood? I don't see any. Where's your skin lying on the track? It's not. How many bones have you broken? How many muscles have you torn? What have you given up for Christ. You need to run harder."

In fact, when you read this verse in its entirety, verse four says, “You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin.” And the word “striving” here it is partly due an image of a race. You're striving against another runner, but some commentators tie this into the battlefield, and your striving against another army. The passage says you haven't done that. You've struggled, you've fought, and I commend you, but it hasn't gone far enough.

By the time you get to this point of the text, it's like the author is coming up to mile marker 20, or mile marker 21 of the marathon, and he's slapping you on the back and saying, “Come on, let's go.” You guys see that in the Olympics. They ride the bike up to the runner and they give him a push on the shoulder and say, “Toughen up. Move those legs, pump those arms, kick the feet.” You're running a race. It's not a picnic. You're in a battle. You're going to fall from time to time. There are going to be moments when you skin your knees and break a bone. This is war. That happens in war, but you can't quit. It's just not an option.

In my studies this week, I came across a story of a man named Hiroo Onada. I want to share it with you because I think it illustrates what this is talking about. He was a soldier who fought in the jungles of the Philippines for the Japanese army during World War Two. The reason he stands out is because when the war was over, nobody told him. And he kept fighting for another 29 years in the jungle, hit and run tactics, guerrilla warfare, that sort of thing. And when someone finally came across the story, they tracked him down and said, “You can stop.” And he said, “No, I can't. I have not been relieved of my duty yet.” Friends, I tell you that to remind you you're like that. If you're a Christian in this room, you have not been relieved of your duty yet. The Lord has not sent you home. You do not have permission to step off the track. You're commanded to stay right where you are and run.

In fact, I began this sermon by talking about all the wonderful things God has done in our time together here at Grace. But the reason I did that is because it reminded me of the fact that this is the place that God has called you to. If you've joined the church, you're a member committed to it, you're here to run the race for Christ. Grace Fellowship Church in Chilliwack, British Columbia. This is your local body of Christ, and it's a church that has history. It started nine years ago in someone's basement in the fall of 2015 and by the winter of that year, they reached out to Grace Advance and called me to come, and we've done all these wonderful things together. I just listed them out for you, which means that the people started going along the track together, and as that happened, the congregation started running hard after Christ, and now all of you have joined them. As I look around the room, it's obvious. Many of you weren't here in the beginning. Some of you were, but a lot weren't, which means you've stepped into a race that was in motion, kind of like it was doing this, and you dropped into the flow of things. And now you get to be part of the next phase of it as the church brings on a new shepherd to lead you, which is a wonderful thing. It's an exciting time to be here. In fact, since I accepted the call to pastor at Meridian First Baptist. I've had people ask me, “Are you excited about that opportunity?” And I've told them I am absolutely. It's a wonderful group of people down there. They like guns an awful lot. Makes me a little bit nervous down there in Idaho, but they're a wonderful group of people. But I've told them

I'm also excited for what the Lord's going to do here at Grace Fellowship because this is a wonderful group of people here. Some of you guys like guns a little too much too I would say. I think any man would be blessed to lead you.

But as you prepare for Jory's arrival, I think it would be helpful to see it through the lens of the passage that we just looked at and realize that you're involved in something bigger in all of this. This race that you're running, it's not about you It's not about me. There's other factors involved here. There's the Old Testament saints. There's the New Testament saints. I didn't get into all that, but you could think about them. There's the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. So you have to keep that in mind as we keep saying this morning. And see that whether you decide to serve Christ here or there, whether you do it in in Canada or Idaho or wherever it may be, it doesn't matter. You want to lay it all on the line for Christ's feet. You don't ever get in the habit of saying, "Now that the new pastor is here, I can sit back and relax. And now that Pastor Jeremy is gone, finally, I can take it easy. The tyrant is out of here." You want to carry on the work that we've started, and I believe that you will.

I can say, in the eight years that we've been together, I've seen you do that. You've done so much for the Lord that I'll never forget you. I was going to cry at lunch over my pie. We love you guys. I know we'll have time to say goodbye in a moment, so I want to do that then. But other than to say, we look forward to hearing how the Lord's going to knit your hearts together with this new man and shoot you down the track, because He will. I believe He's going to propel this church out of a canon in the days ahead. And in the meantime, if you're ever in Idaho, look us up because we're going to be shooting down the track there, and look forward to seeing you.

Listen friends, it's not important where you run. As I've already said, it's important that you keep running. That's how you know that you're winning. You stay in the race. The race is not to the swiftest; it's to the most stalwart of runners. That's what we want to be. And as we think about that, I think it'd be fitting to close in a word of prayer and ask for the Lord's help for you as you persevere in the race, and as Christ is glorified in it. You can't do this on your own. This is something that comes from the supernatural help of God. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank You for these words in Hebrews 12 because they do put moments like this in perspective. When we're in this world, it's hard sometimes to know what's going on and why certain things happen the way they do, but when we think of these things in the sense of our eternal race, they make perfect sense.

So Lord I pray for Grace Fellowship Church in the days ahead and Lord I rejoice at all the wonderful things You've done. It's just so exciting just to talk about them and think about them, and how You have started with a small group, and You've brought all these lives into this congregation. Lord, I pray that You would continue this work, and You would pour Your Spirit's blessing upon it.

I pray for Pastor Jory as he comes in to shepherd these people. Lord, I know it will be a change because it always is. That's the way it goes. But Lord, I ask for unity for this church. I ask for direction and encouragement, Father, just that they would see that this thing is in motion, and people's lives have been impacted for the gospel. Baptisms have happened. Folks have gotten saved. They've been disciplined. Marriages have been restored. Homes have been put back together again because of this ministry. And Lord, I just pray that it would continue for Christ and for eternity.

Lord, we thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ, as we consider Him here in a moment at the Lord's Supper. Lord, it's because of Him that we run. We can't run on our own. We don't have the ability. There's no way. We didn't enter the race on our own. We're not going to finish the race on our own. It's all because of what He's done for us at the cross, Father, I pray that we would remember that this morning, Christ would be glorified in all things. We thank You for Him, and we lift this up and commit this for His glory. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.