

Well you've heard it said that life, especially the Christian life, is not so much a sprint, but it's a marathon.

And there's a story that illustrates that really well.

It's from way back in 1986.

It was the New York City Marathon.

There was 20,000 runners who participated.

And what makes that race special is not so much who won in two hours and some odd minutes, but who came in dead last out of almost 20,000 runners.

His name was Bob Whelan.

And he completed the New York City Marathon not in four hours, not in 40 hours, but four days, two hours, 47 minutes and 17 seconds.

And what made this so special?

Well, you can see the picture.

He ran on his arms.

using his arms to catapult himself for four days to complete the New York City Marathon.

Bob served his country in Vietnam 17 years before this and lost both his legs in battle.

But he was a testimony to the other runners in this race, a testimony of endurance and perseverance.

You see, a lot of people want to give up in life, right?

Life is hard.

It's difficult.

And so many people want to give up and they forget the fact that the human race is not for the fleet of foot.

It's for the faithful.

It's for the faithful.

It's for those who don't give up.

And that's the title of the message this morning is just don't give up.

I got a phone call a couple days ago from one of my best friends and he told us a story about his son's ex-wife.

and that she was going through some hard times and just wanted to give up, to give up.

And so it worried her ex-husband, my friend's son, to the point that he was at work and just got the impression, I need to call the deputy, the sheriff, and have them do a wellness check on my ex-wife.

And thank the Lord, they went to the house, got in somehow,

and they found out that she had closed the garage door, rolled down the windows to her vehicle, turned it on, and sat there and tried to commit suicide.

Unfortunately, they got there just in time, and she was unconscious and in the hospital for three days, but they saved her life.

Well, that's not unusual, unfortunately.

There's a lot of people who just want to give up.

They want to give up because

pain.

They want to give up because of family brokenness.

They want to give up because of an addiction.

They want to give up because they're just tired.

They want to give up because they can't see God doing anything in their lives.

God hasn't answered their prayers, they believe, and they want to give up.

So this morning we're looking at a very famous passage of scripture that you all know so well.

And it talks about running the race and not giving up.

So if you have your copy of God's Word this morning, turn to Hebrews chapter 12, and we're going to be looking at this famous passage together.

And I hope this is encouraging to you, because God wants to speak to you and me through this passage.

So Hebrews chapter 12,

The writer of Hebrews, whether it's Paul, whether it's Apollos, whether it's someone else, writes this, 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.

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.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

So if we look at this passage, the first thing it's asking us to do, my first point is this, remember those who have gone before you, verse 1.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, the key word is remember, and with the therefore, we go back one chapter, right?

Chapter 11, the Hall of Fame of Faith.

And there we see the writer list this great group of faithful people.

And the setting here is, it's like that we're looking up into a heavenly stadium, a coliseum.

And there's those who have run before us and they're looking down on us.

My wife and I, as we got back from a trip of a lifetime, for our big anniversary, right?

And we went on a cruise, but we also were in Rome, went to the Colosseum.

So we're inside the Colosseum on a tour and I'm looking up at the thousands and thousands and thousands of seats and looking up at where the emperor would have sat in his day.

And I'm picturing all these thousands of people.

And so kind of picture that in a heavenly framework that there's all of these saints who have gone before you and they're looking down and they're cheering you on.

They're telling you don't give up.

They're telling you keep running.

And that's the picture here.

And so we're taken back to chapter 11, this Hall of Fame of the faithful people.

And it's just a reminder that God has always had, and you look at the list, if you flip back to chapter 11, God's always had an Abel, someone who is willing to do the right thing, to make the right sacrifice for God.

God's always had an Enoch, someone willing just to walk with God every day, whether they feel like it or not, just to walk with God.

God's always had a Noah, someone who's willing to do the extraordinary, to do the out of the ordinary.

someone who's willing to endure some pushback, to take a stand for God like Noah did.

And you look up and you can see others.

You look up and you see Abraham there, the one who was called by God to get up, take his family, his possessions, everything, and go to a place that he didn't know of, but willing to just trust and obey.

And he's calling down and he's saying,

just trust God and you're not going to know exactly where he's going to take you.

Trust him.

There's others that are looking down there.

It's his wife Sarah, the one who was pure and being willing to use by God and follow.

There's Joseph, the one that might have been arguably kind of a spoiled kid in the beginning, but God transformed his life to be a great leader of leaders.

And he's calling down

And he's saying, don't give up and don't give up on yourself.

God's going to keep changing you if you let him like he changed me.

And so you see him up there.

It goes on and on.

You look up and you see Moses, the one who could have but chose not to take the easy way out, the one who went back to Egypt.

where he was a wanted man, the one who went back when he didn't like to speak in public, the one

who went back and became a leader and delivered God's people out of Egypt.

And he's shouting down, forget the excuses, accept God's job for you and follow him.

And he's shouting out, trust me, because God is going to take care of you.

He's going to work out the details.

So you look up there and then you hear a voice up in one of the sections and it's a woman named Rahab.

You remember her, right?

What?

A harlot, a prostitute?

And she's calling out, don't give up.

God has a second chapter for your life.

God is the God of do-overs.

God is the God of second chances.

Trust him, no matter your past, no matter your mistakes, follow him.

And so all these saints of old are looking down and they're encouraging us not to give up, but to run our race that's marked out for us.

And if you notice, do you hear something or see something about these saints that's so important here?

They're ordinary people.

They are sinners.

They made mistakes and yet God used them.

Normal people who had the one ingredient of faith.

They were young and old, male and female, and they didn't give up on God.

Who else are the witnesses in our lives?

How about those who have gone before you?

Like I think in my life, my godly father and mother, my grandma,

My boss, when I was a church planter in St.

Louis, a godly man, all those who have gone before me, they're in heaven, and yet I think they would encourage me to keep running my race.

How about for you?

What's the name of one of your witnesses, your saints that inspired you in your life, maybe led you to Christ or taught you or disciplined you or inspired you?

Just call out a name of someone who's run the race before you.

nobody?

All right, I'm going to start calling names.

I do know some names.

All right, thank you.

Okay.

Yeah.

I'm hearing these names.

these witnesses who have run before us.

And it's like they're calling down to don't give up, keep going.

But there's also witnesses that are with us now, right?

And here's the challenge.

Don't stop running.

There's a lot of people watching you.

Some of you have kids, grandkids.

Some of you have great grandkids.

They're watching you.

And the call from the stadium above is don't quit running.

Don't give up.

And by all means, don't let some indiscretion, some bit of anger, some bit of lack of forgiveness, some affair, some addiction.

get in the way and cause you to trip up and lose your witness.

People are watching.

And so in chapter 11 we get this list and we're minded to remember, just remember as we run our race.

But in verse 1 also we can see another point and that's just simply this, the writer is saying, remove, get rid of, lay down, take off, remove the weight of sin.

So that's the key word, remove.

Throw off in the Greek language is in a tense called erist.

That's not important, but it defines A definite act, like a point in time, like you just get tired of it.

It's like, no more.

I'm taking this off, this heavy coat of carrying or this backpack of sin or this garbage sack of sin, whatever.

I'm done with it.

I'm taking, I'm putting it down.

It's a definitive action in that tense in the Greek.

Throw off, put off, cast off, lay aside everything that hinders.

You know, the Greek athletes, they ran

pretty much nude, right?

They didn't want to be encumbered by their toga or anything else.

So they just had minimum little clothings on and they would run that way.

And that's what the call is, right?

Is to get off the excess weight that's holding you down, whatever that looks like in your life.

And this word in the language of the New Testament refers to a bulk or a mass or an encumbrance

or a weight.

Again, it's like you wouldn't see a marathon runner running in their full set of warm-ups.

They would take those off to be able to run.

So that begs the question in the application, yeah, what are you wearing in your life?

What are you carrying in your life?

What's the baggage that you're dragging around and God never intended for you to drag that around?

Is it guilt?

Is it worry?

Is it grief?

Is it anger?

Is it bitterness?

Is it fear?

Is it a bad relationship and God wants you to break that off and set some boundaries?

What is it that you're carrying around?

Is it your signature sin, your favorite sin?

Is it

And you haven't been willing to give it up yet.

And God is calling you to lay that aside.

And he says the sin that so easily entangles us, of course, that's a famous word, hamartia, right?

You know that?

It's the Greek word for sin that means to miss the mark, right?

That in our humanity, we can't hit the mark perfectly.

That's why we need Jesus.

Anybody here need Jesus?

I do.

Every day of my life.

And so it's to lay aside those sins, that harmatia that easily entangles us and trips us up, that comes around us.

The Greek word there references, it's 3 Greek words together, and it means standing well around.

In other words, those thoughts, those desires, those sins, those habits, those people maybe, that come around you and you know they're just trying to trip you up.

they will trip you up and to get rid of those.

Have you been entangled lately with something or someone and it's prevented you from running the way you know God wants you to run your race, something that's out of God's will?

Are you being tripped up?

You're not going to finish your race.

In fact, you'll be disqualified.

First Corinthians 9, 26 through 27, Paul says, therefore I don't run like a man running aimlessly.

I don't fight like a man beating the air.

No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Paul was a really godly man, wasn't he?

I mean, he sold everything.

He sold out for Christ.

Yet he knew that he could be disqualified from the prize.

if he didn't run his race well.

So the call is to throw off the weight of sin, but also that includes past mistakes.

Some people are living in the past and they beat themselves up and they're thinking, I can never serve in the church.

I can never be a good Christian because of my past.

Well, part of laying down this weight is laying down your past, all your regrets, your past mistakes.

Paul says this, and I think we have a slide for this.

He says, brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.

But one thing, I love this, one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and 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.

And if you would look up, if you get a lexicon or Greek dictionary.

You look up these words, it's a reference.

The forgetting is written in a tense where I keep on forgetting.

You know, I've got regrets in my life.

How about you?

I have to keep on forgetting those.

pop up from time to time.

How about you?

I've got to keep on, keep on, continue action, forgetting the junk from my past.

And I have to strain.

It's the image of a racehorse straining for the finish line.

That's what God wants us to do.

Keep straining.

It's not going to be easy.

Keep straining for that prize of the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul says in Romans 13, the night's nearly over.

The day is almost here.

In other words, it's time.

You don't know how many days you have left.

It's time.

So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

That's a good word.

And so in running our race, we remember those who have gone before us.

They're encouraging us, and we remember those who are witnesses around us.

We don't want to ruin our witness.

And then we remove this garbage, this excess weight, remove the sin.

And the third thing in this passage we see in verses 2 and 3 is we simply run to Jesus.

It's not that hard.

We run to Jesus.

And the key word is run.

Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

See, there's a race and it requires perseverance.

And that word in the language of the New Testament means to abide under, to hold up under.

It's like there's a heavy weight and yet you're not going to give up.

There's pressures on you.

There's temptations.

There's grief, there's problems, but you're gonna hold up.

It's standing up underneath the weight.

That's what that word means in the Bible, to persevere.

It can be rendered patient, to just keep on keeping on, to be patient with yourself, with God, with others.

And we know from James chapter 1, verse 3, that patience, only way you grow that is through trials, right?

It says, the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

And so we run our race under weight sometimes, in patience and perseverance, and it's a race that's marked out for us.

My race is not your race, your race is not my race.

You got your own race.

You have your own circumstances in your life, your own background, your family, your history, your abilities, your spiritual gifts.

your passions, your shape, your heart, your abilities, passions, your experiences, all of that God wants to use for you to run the race that He's marked out for you, not for me.

But we run.

We run in a way to get the prize, 1 Corinthians says.

And how do we do that?

Well, verse 2, as we're running Jesus, we fix our eyes on Jesus.

who's the beginner and the ender, the author and perfecter of our faith.

And look at the word picture that the writer gives us.

Jesus is at the finish line of this lifelong marathon, and he's cheering us on.

And when we stumble and fall, he's saying, get up.

I'm here.

Run toward me.

I'm going to help you run toward me.

He said, this race is worth winning.

It's worth running.

It's worth completing.

I promise you.

This way will work out better than your way.

So we run with our eyes focused on Jesus and we gaze at Him.

We focus on Him.

We fix our eyes on Him and we glance at our circumstances that come and go.

We don't give them as much credence as we do Jesus.

So we fix our eyes on Him, who's the author and perfecter of our faith.

And why is that?

Because he's running with us.

He's not just at the finish line, but through his Holy Spirit, he's running with us.

And he's experiencing what you're experiencing.

And he knows the potholes.

He knows the sharp curves.

He knows the cliffs, the ways that you get tripped up.

He knows the areas of darkness.

And he's running with you through the Holy Spirit.

And he's run them all before.

And guess what?

He ran his race perfectly without sin.

So I think we can trust him.

And when you don't feel his presence, you claim his promise.

I will never leave you nor forsake you.

So 3 training suggestions, if I may.

Three suggestions for your training for this marathon of life.

No matter if you're 5 today or 8 or 10 or 13 or 18 or 88 or 108.

It's all the same.

Here's the first one.

Run in the midst of opposition.

It's not going to be easy.

Jesus did.

Verse 3, Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

That comes from Psalm 44.

I just happened to be reading it the other day.

So we keep writing.

We keep running our race in spite of opposition.

And get this, you're going to experience the fiery darts of the evil one, right?

Ephesians 6.

But you're also going to experience pushback from family and friends who don't get it, who don't understand why you're selling out, why you're making a lifestyle change, why you're giving money back to the Lord, while you're going to church on Sunday, while you're serving, why you have to take time every day to pray and pray for others, why, they're not going to get it when you sell out.

You're going to get pushback.

There's going to be opposition when you run your race, fixing your eyes on Jesus.

So run in the midst of opposition.

Be willing to do that.

Second training point is this, run with others.

Don't run alone.

That's why we have groups.

And I'm really proud of this church that the majority of the attendees of this church are in some kind of group.

Did you know that?

Children's Sunday school, maybe Sunday morning a core group, a spiritual formation group,

I'm meeting with, we are meeting this Tuesday at 9 A.m., right?

With the adult discipleship directors, Dave and Heidi, and we're going to be planning out some things for next fall and how to make some new groups and all of that.

I'm really proud that the majority attendance-wise are in a group.

And that's the way to become a disciple.

That's the way to walk with people where somebody knows your name and you're praying for each other.

Don't run alone.

Get involved in a group.

Get involved in rolling up your sleeves in serving.

Lizzie, yes, there's still time to serve in VBS.

She got both hands up, right?

To do something.

Don't run alone.

That's when the devil attacks.

And the third bit of training here, advice, is this.

run remembering your reward.

Because here's what Paul says about it, 2 Corinthians 5.10, For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

So he's describing something that my wife and I have seen.

We've seen a Bema seat in Greece before.

It's up on a hillside, and there was the place for the judge, and people would come.

and they would present their cases and he would give his verdict.

And it's a picture of this Bema seat, the throne of Christ, where when we die, we'll stand before him.

And that's where we want to hear the words, well done, good and faithful servant.

That's where our deeds will be evaluated as to

lasting or not lasting.

And you remember that passage of scripture, those things that we made out of straw, hay, rubble, or the things that we made out of precious stones, the gold, the silver, the jewels.

And it's all going to be revealed.

And I want to hear that good, well done, good and faithful servant when I stand before the beam of seat.

But we remember there's rewards.

And the thing about it is if you're truly saved, you know you cannot lose your salvation.

If the Holy Spirit has sealed you, you're sealed.

Nothing you can do about it.

Nobody can steal it from you.

You can't give it back, right?

When you're saved, really saved, you are saved.

You can't lose that, but you can lose your rewards.

And listen to what you could lose, because Paul lists them.

the imperishable crown, the crown of joy, the crown of righteousness, the crown of life, the crown of glory.

Man, I don't want to lose those.

I want those.

So we're called to run knowing that we will have a reward.

So we run toward Jesus.

Well, there's so many illustrations of this, but this is one of my favorite illustrations.

And again, it goes back to the Olympics.

And back even further in the 19, anybody remember old enough to remember the 1968 Olympics?

Something really happened there that was amazing.

That's when the world record was set for the long jump by Bob Beam and it lasted for decades and decades, you know.

But there was something else that even overshadowed that in some ways.

There was a runner named John Aquari and he was from Tanzania.

He was a marathon runner.

And he started the marathon race, that went around Mexico City.

And in that race, he was bumped, he tripped, he fell, and he greatly injured his leg, his right leg and knee.

And he had to stop.

And they had to bandage him up to stop the blood.

They were worried that his leg was broken.

And

They got him fixed up and they assumed that he would get off, just stay off the course and get in a vehicle and be taken to a doctor or whatever.

And he said, no, I want to run.

And so he got back on the street, on the course, and he limped, but he ran.

And he kept running and he kept running.

And so you can picture these 10s of thousands of fans in Olympic Stadium

And they had already welcomed all the runners into the stadium, 26 plus miles.

And most of the crowd had left, but there were still 7,000 people left.

And it was getting dark at night.

It was around 7 P.m.

So hours and hours after the race started,

and he comes into the stadium limping.

And those 7,000 people stood up and they cheered for him that he would have the perseverance, the endurance to finish his race.

And so reporters, they flocked around him afterward and they said, why did you do what you did?

You had a severe injury.

Why?

You could have injured yourself even more and never been able to run again.

Why did you continue this race?

And here's his words.

I'm going to read them to you.

My country didn't send me 5,000 miles to start the marathon but to finish.

That's what God's calling us to do.

He's calling us to remember all those folks who went before us.

They're cheering you on.

He's calling us to remove the junk that's enticed us.

The bad people, the bad situations, the bad TV programs, the bad movies, whatever it is, just jerking your chain.

Whatever it is, it's enticing.

Get rid of that so you don't disqualify yourself.

And then most importantly, just to run, to run towards Jesus and don't give up.

Will you do that?

I challenge you, don't give up.

I challenge Knoll Avenue Baptist Church, don't give up and I'll do the same.