

“Running the Race Together” Pt. 2&3

Hebrews 11:1, 32-12: 3

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Review of Pt. 1

1. We are “surrounded by such a great cloud of *witnesses*” (martyrs) 12:1, who risked their lives to fulfill the ***purposes*** of God (the race marked out for us). They vividly demonstrated what Jesus demanded of his followers in **Luke 9:23-24**: ***“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”***

2. ***Let us*** throw off...***let us*** run...***let us*** fix.....Running the race is to be a ***team*** effort. We are in this race ***together***.

3. We must ***fix our eyes on Jesus***, so we are going where he would want us to go, and doing what he would want us to. Only he can enable us to reach our appointed destination. This must be very ***intentional***, as there are so many distractions.

Today’s Focus:

vs 1 “Let us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely...”

ELLIOT. What hinders us from being fruitful and effective in our ministry? What destroys our kingdom potential? It may be sinful and may not be. Many ask the question ***“What will make our church grow?”*** The real issue is ***“What is hindering our church from growing, from being fruitful and effective?”*** A few of the greatest *hindrances* to developing kingdom potential are:

a. A misunderstanding of what the ***purpose*** of the church is. The goal of the race has been charted out for us, best summarized in the Great Commandments and the Great Commission (see Matt. 22:37-40 and Matt. 28:18-20). Wynn Arn did a survey of members of a thousand churches on what the purpose of the church is. Of the members, of the purpose of the church. Many churches operate more like a club, rather than the living breathing Body of Christ. Offerings are membership dues, and people demand the services they want, or go elsewhere. Often people do not want to be equipped to better impact the world for Jesus Christ through their lives.

Also, much of Christianity today is: ***“You can get where you want to go with the help of God,”*** rather than ***“First and foremost I am a disciple of Christ, privileged to serve him and reach others through my profession, interests and other relationships.”*** ***Many seek the kingdom, but few seek it first! Life on earth is first and foremost not about us, but about God and fulfilling his purposes. (See reverse).***

b. A pursuit of our ***comfort*** over our *calling*. (See Hebrews 11). Scripture knows ***nothing*** of the concept of a ***volunteer***. Often this concept denotes “I am giving of ***my*** time to this cause or

organization.” Scripture notes instead that *we are all called* to ministry (Ephesians 4:1); We have been bought with a price! Christ “*died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again.*” (II Cor. 5:15)

c. A non-biblical sense of entitlement. Biblically the only thing we are deserve is death because of our sin. (See Mark 10: 44-45; Philippians.2:1-11). Everything else we receive is because of God’s grace. In many congregations, those who have given more or had been members longer have felt they were owed preferential treatment, but everything is level at the foot of the Cross! Greatness comes only through service.

Spiritual maturity is based not merely on belief, but *behavior* (Christ-likeness). Spiritual maturity is demonstrated by a *willingness to give up one’s personal preferences for the sake of the kingdom*. Too often we elevate our preferences over God’s purposes. The resources God has placed in our hands are meant for ministry, not for manipulating a certain direction. As we become more Christ-like, our love for God grows deeper, our love for others in the church grows stronger, our passion for our neighbors and lost people grows more intense and we are willing to sacrifice more for the sake of the kingdom.

Erwin McManus in his book *The Unstoppable Force* noted:

“The more one focuses on one’s own living, the less one is concerned about giving life to others. The only way church buildings stay filled through generations is if the church lives and dies and is born again over and over.

To make the kind of impact in human history that God desires, we must find our fulfillment and the rightness of this life cycle. In the end it is not so much about prolonging or perpetuating our own life as about giving new life to others.

If a church waits too long to die to itself, it will die by itself.

2. *Our future is not to be found in our preservation but in our investment.” P. 18,19*

Churches that are trying to “save” themselves are actually accelerating their death, as Luke 9:23-24: applies not only to individuals, but churches: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”

d. A non-biblical sense of retirement. *The whole concept of retirement is largely a modern construction of the 19th and 20th centuries. We may “retire” from our ministry in the workplace, but biblically we never retire from ministry, until God retires us. It is called death. As you will hear me say often, as long as we have a pulse, God has a purpose.*

“All these people were still living by faith when they died.” (Hebrews 11:13a). Are we still living by faith? God *did not* design the Christian life to be a *spectator sport*. God is the one who will choose when we are entitled to become part of the *cheering* section. This comes at death.

God understands our health and life situation; He does not understand why we feel we no longer think it necessary to diligently ask him, “How best we can use the gifts and resources he has given

us to bear the most fruit for the kingdom.” Yes, there are times that God instructs us to take a sabbatical, but that is usually never permanent.

My heros:

My Mom; *even when she had alzheimers, she still wanted to continue her card ministry, Brothers and sisters, all retired, but all active in their churches, in their communities, and also in mission endeavors. They have seen their retirement from their day job as an opportunity to invest more in ministry endeavors.*

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I have to admit there have been moments where I have thought: I can't wait until I retire, so I can do all the things I have wanted to do, and the Spirit says, “So where does God fit into the picture? Are you still seeking the Kingdom first?” Is there any greater joy than serving Jesus in order to make an eternal impact?

We are in this together; every one of you are important to the Body of Christ, in fulfilling God's Purposes.

KEEP ME TRUE LORD JESUS.

e. A refusal to deal with *conflict* in a **God-glorifying** way. It is not *if* our nose is going to get bent out of shape, but *when*. (Then we are commanded to follow the guidelines Jesus gave us in Matt. 18:15-17).

Bill Hybels in an article “**Standing in the Crossfire,**” **Leadership Magazine**, Winter 1993 noted: “*The mark of community---true biblical unity---is not the absence of conflict. It's the presence of a reconciling spirit.*”

He further noted that it is not *if* our noses will get bent out of shape, but *when*, and then what will we do about it. Will we handle it in a God-glorifying way (Matt. 18:15-17)? Jesus knew there would be conflict in the church. Often God speaks in the midst of Conflict. Office of the deacon came into place out of a major conflict in the early church. :

If our noses get bent out of shape, to follow Jesus' instruction means *going directly to the person with whom we are having this conflict rather than as Bill Hybel's notes “building a guerrilla team to ambush this person later. We also teach a kind of reverse accountability. In staff meetings or in front of the congregation, we say, “If someone whose nose is bent out of joint comes to you for a ‘Won't you join my cause?’ conversation, you have a biblical responsibility to interrupt mid-sentence and say, ‘I think you're talking to the wrong person. Please go to the individual with whom you're having this conflict and seek to resolve it in a God-glorifying way.’* Revival will create conflict so we should never be afraid of conflict, but merely hold each other accountable for

how we deal with it. Related to this is *Gossip* which is a cancer that destroys the body as much as anything. *I don't stay up late at night thinking who I can tick off.*

f. An **unforgiving** spirit, or refusing to deal with unresolved **anger** and **bitterness**. Prolonged **anger** and **bitterness** is a **choice**.

Forgiveness is the key relational issue of scripture. Our forgiveness from God and our forgiveness extended to others. It is like drinking a cup of poison every day expecting the other person to die. We are all imperfect people; I'm an in. Forgiveness is the oil that enables relationships to grow and develop. We will look more intently at this later this spring.

g. Major trauma which wounds the heart of the church, can greatly effect congregations unless churches are able to give it a Christian Burial by making things right with the Lord of the Church, and reconciliation among members. This one is different than any of the others, in that we can't just recognize this and hope to avoid it later. Trauma might include: pastors who abuse congregations, congregations, Immorality or sexual abuse among leaders, sinful reactivity, etc. even from many years ago, if not confessed or handled in a godly way can indelibly affect the **corporate heart** of the church. (See Rev. 2&3). It is the responsibility of present leadership to address these issues, and corporately repent of any sins that have never been confessed, even if they (personally had nothing to do with the issue). **QUOTE FROM KENS BOOK. RACHELLE. ALCHOLIC FAMILY.**

h. Confusing **activity** with **productivity**. What we may be doing might not be sinful at all, but losing its effectiveness. Often, people say, all God expects is faithfulness. Biblically that is only partially true. God expects faithfulness in bearing the most fruit possible. Jesus noted ***"This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."*** John 15: 8. John 15:16 notes ***"You did not chose me, but I chose you to go and bear much fruit, fruit that will last."*** we must ***prayerfully*** ask on a regular basis, ***"What will enable us to most effectively use the resources God has given us to fulfill His purpose, bearing the most fruit for the kingdom..?"***

We know that the ***mission*** and ***message*** of the gospel ***will never change***, but the ***methods*** for impacting the world for Jesus have changed and will continue to change as we seek to reach different cultures and generations?!" Although one key factor across the centuries is building relationships: building our relationship with God, our relationship with one another, and building relationships with our neighbors and those who do not know Christ.

Howard Hendricks often said, ***"When your memories are more exciting than your dreams, you've begun to die."*** Churches must find their greatest joy in their dreams, not in their memories.

"Keep Me True Lord Jesus, Keep Me True"

God is ***"able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us"***...Ephesians 3:30