

Christian Character Building Messages

Staying In The Race

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I. Introduction.

The title of my message is “Staying in the Race.” In this message today my desire is to impart to you some of the qualities that have enabled me to stay in the race for over 30 years.

1 Corinthians 9:24 (NKJV) *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one (one kind of person) receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.*

This is what I want to address today. What does it take in our lives to run in such a way that we will finish and win the race with our salvation intact?

Pastor Francis shared a few weeks ago the picture of his friends who started out with him in the Lord over 30 years ago. He shared that many of them had shipwrecked and not finished the race. How sad!

I would imagine we all have people in our lives that have gone astray and are no longer in the race. The apostle Paul also had friends who shipwrecked for one reason or another.

1 Timothy 1:18-20 (NKJV) *This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ having faith and a good conscience, which **some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck,** ²⁰ of whom **are Hymenaeus and Alexander,** whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.*

2 Timothy 4:10 (NKJV) *for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica; Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.*

As we run this race there are many blessings, joys and triumphs, but there are also many obstacles and hardships we must endure along the way. Therefore, it is imperative that we develop the necessary character traits in our lives that will enable us to endure to the end.

Matthew 10:22 (NKJV) *"And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. **But he who endures to the end will be saved.**"*

As I look at each one of you sitting here today, I wonder how many will still be serving the Lord 1 year from today, 5 years from today, 15 years from today, 20 years from today or 30 years. My hope and prayer is that every one of you will be serving Jesus 30 years from now just as strong as you are now.

- **Jesus said many will fall away and betray one another.**

Matthew 24:10-13 (NKJV) *"And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. ¹¹"Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. ¹²"And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³**"But he who endures to the end shall be saved.***

- **Paul spoke of a great falling away that must come.**

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 (NKJV) *Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not **come unless the falling away comes first**, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*

- **Our goal should be to finish as the apostle Paul did.**

2 Timothy 4:7 (NKJV) *I have fought the good fight, **I have finished the race**, I have kept the faith.*

II. Character Building Principles That Endure.

1. We Must Have a Love For the Word of God and Sound Doctrine.

2 Timothy 4:2-3 (NKJV) *Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;*

We must have a love for God's word that takes us beyond the circumstances that seem to be weighing us down.

- **The example of Job in the midst of his hardship.**

Job 23:11-12 (NKJV) *My foot has held fast to His steps; I have kept His way and not turned aside. 12 I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; **I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.***

The Word of God has to become the living reality of our lives to the degree that our lives and decisions are shaped by God's Word more than any other influence in our lives.

2. We Must Embrace The Guardrails of Life.

Before I tell you what these guardrails are – let me ask you a question. What two important things do guardrails do?

1. They keep you on the road even in the most treacherous and dangerous places.
2. They give you a sense of security and safety. You are able to keep moving forward with a sense of security and comfort. eg. Road to South Lake Tahoe.

These guardrails are found in the Book of Romans where Paul says, "Behold the **goodness** and the **severity** of God.

Romans 11:21-22 (NKJV) *For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. 22 **Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God:** on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.*

I think most of us understand the goodness of God and lean on that guardrail quite often. We have recently been inundated with it through the House of Prayer and other strata's of body life. If it weren't for the goodness of God, none of us would be here today. It was God's goodness that led us to repentance.

What I'm not so sure about is whether or not we understand the other important guardrail – the severity of God or the fear of God. I personally have a healthy dose of the fear of God in my life.

Hebrews 10:31 (NKJV) *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Matthew 10:28 (NKJV) *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Personally, I'm afraid of hell! It scares me terribly. I want to stay as far away from it as I possibly can. I'm thankful for the guardrail God has put in place to keep me from going over the edge. I have a lot of security in my life because I respect that guardrail. It keeps me in the race.

I'm afraid to backslide because once I begin down that slippery path I know I'm opening myself up to the deception of the enemy. Who knows where the backsliding will lead? I don't want to find out. Who knows if that deception could lead me to selling my birthright just as Esau did. I never want to find out.

The Bible warns us about the "Great Falling Away," which is apostia, not just backsliding. It's a total renunciation of Christ – a total disowning of Him.

2 Timothy 2:12 (NIV) *if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us;*

What's the opposite of enduring? Disowning Him! This is the place in Hebrews 6 that says there is no returning or coming back. This is why it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God.

Proverbs 14:26-27 (NKJV) *In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, And His children will have a place of refuge. 27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death.*

Proverbs 23:17-18 (NKJV) *Do not let your heart envy sinners, But be zealous for the fear of the LORD all the day; 18 For surely there is a hereafter, And your hope will not be cut off.*

3. Develop a Strategy of Humility in Your Life.

Proverbs 18:12 (NKJV) *Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, And before honor is humility.*

Proverbs 18:12 (NIV) *Before his downfall a man's heart is proud, but humility comes before honor.*

Proverbs 16:18 (NKJV) *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*

I believe one of the reason many people have a problem overcoming sin is their unwillingness to lose their identity that was developed under Satan's rule and domain. We must humble ourselves and lose ourselves in Christ's identity.

4. Allow the Fruit of the Spirit to Abound in Your Lives.

2 Peter 1:2-10 (NKJV) *Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, ³ as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, ⁴ by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. ⁵ But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶ to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷ to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. ⁸ For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, **for if you do these things you will never stumble;***