

Let Us Run

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[0 : 00] All right, how many of you have enjoyed the service so far? Can you say amen with me? Amen. Isn't that awesome? It is great to see God moving in the young people of our church and our community, and that is kind of what we've been talking about in our series on new life, a fresh beginning with Jesus. Much of this came from resources put out by Craig Groeschel, pastor of Life Church in Oklahoma City, and we are a few weeks into this now, and so we are talking about God doing a new thing. We've seen evidence of that in the baptisms. We saw the video earlier in the service of last Sunday when two of our young people, one of our graduating seniors even, getting baptized and giving evidence of their faith in Christ. So God is doing a new thing. Can we see it?

Yes, absolutely we can. So we talked about that a few weeks ago, and then we talked about how we need to stop trying and start training. Let's say that together. Ready? Stop trying, start training. How many times in our lives have we tried and tried and tried and failed and failed and failed, and maybe God is trying to get our attention and saying, hey, stop trying so much in your own strength and start understanding that I'm training you to be who I say you are, which leads us to our identity, and that we do what we do because of what we think of who we are. And so instead of believing the old lie that we believed all throughout our lives of who we are, God is instead getting our attention saying, listen to me and believe that you are who I say you are, and then that determines your behavior.

So our behavior is born out of our identity. Well today we're going to be, I'm sorry, last week we started this kind of sub-series within this whole series about new life in Christ, and we talked about laying aside every weight, and we had a very visual illustration of how extra weight slows us down, didn't we? For those of you who weren't here, you're wondering why people are laughing. That's because I had a foot race down that aisle and that aisle against one of our fastest teenagers, and he smoked me, all right? During the service, okay, it happened. Y'all don't want to miss what's going on here in church because you never know what might happen during the service. Well then I loaded him up with I don't know how much weight with a weight vest and medicine ball and kettlebells and all this, and I barely beat him that second time through. Extra weight really makes a difference, and there might be something in our lives that we either need to lay aside because we've been holding on to it, maybe a bad habit, a self-destructive habit in our life, or there's something that's holding on to us from our past, from our past, and in Philippians we read that we are to forget what lies behind and press forward toward what lies ahead. So that brings us, that catches you up very briefly in our series text we've been looking through. It's in your bulletin, 2 Corinthians 5 17. If anyone is in

Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away and see the new has come. Man, we're celebrating new today with our graduating seniors. What an exciting thing as they embark on a new endeavor, a new journey, a new starting point in their life, and together as a church we can do the same thing. So today we're talking about let us run. Let's look at Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. Hebrews 12, 1 and 2. While you turn there, you'll put a finger in Hebrews 12 and then flip over to Philippians 3.

[3 : 43] Hebrews 12 and Philippians 3 will be bouncing back and forth between those two passages of scripture. And as you find your place in those two passages, I want to share a couple of thoughts with you about running. How many of you, maybe you follow me on Facebook and you saw that I've started training for a 5k. Anybody? There's a couple of you. The rest of you, I don't blame you. Facebook, you know, isn't always where I spend my time, but that's all right. I've recently started training for a 5k. It's the first one in my life. I know that's shocking to you. I look like somebody who runs 5ks all the time. But it's not.

This is the first time I'll be doing this. I'm not running one next week or next month. I'm thinking like maybe December. It's going to take a minute for me to train, all right? But I've started doing that, just doing some slow jogs around my neighborhood, just getting started. And I have some thoughts to share with you about running. I went for a run but came back after two minutes because I forgot something. I forgot I'm out of shape and can't run more than two minutes.

Truth is, I ran 22 minutes straight the other day without stopping. Now, when I say run, it's like, you know what I mean? But I didn't stop. So there you go. I don't run. And if you should ever see me run, you should start running too because something is probably chasing me. One of my kids' teachers told him that one day in school and I won't say who it is. That was fun. That is very true. And then this is probably my favorite here because I wear Nike shoes. That awkward moment when you're wearing Nike and you still just can't do it. For those of you who don't know, Nike had a commercial, just do it, all right? Just put it in context. Listen, running, training for anything is difficult, is it not? That's why these jokes are funny because we all know it's hard. It's difficult.

And this is a quote that I wanted to share with you. I don't know if I've ever used a quote from Oprah Winfrey before in a message, but this one was actually pretty applicable. Running is the greatest metaphor for life because you get out of it what you put into it. And that is so true.

Most of my life I have not run and I've gotten out of it the fruit of not running. And just the little bit of time that I've spent over the last couple of weeks beginning to run, beginning to train, I can actually see little fruits of that in the rest of my days.

[6 : 15] And as I try to transform my personal lifestyle, I know many of you are also trying to do the same thing, maybe in a different area of your life. You can see and agree that you get out of it what you put into it. So let's see what the Word of God has to say about this. Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 1. I know we've got quite a number in here. If you're able and willing, would you join us in standing as we just read these two verses together? Hebrews 12 and verse 1. Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. We talked about that last week. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us. And now flipping back over to Philippians chapter 3. And let's read verse 13.

One thing I do, forgetting what is behind, talked about that last week, and reaching forward to what is ahead. We're going to stop right there, and we'll pick it up there next Sunday. Actually, in two Sundays.

Sorry about that. Y'all, let's ask God to speak to us from His Word today. Lord, we ask for just that. We thank you for every member, every regular attender, every guest who's with us this morning. Thank you for every graduating senior. Thank you for those who couldn't be here and are joining us online. I want to welcome all of them, and I just am grateful for them joining us in worship today. I pray that none of this would be in vain, that you would speak to us individually, personally, to our hearts and our lives. Show us the next step we need to take with you. In Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. Number one in your bulletins, I want to challenge you, start moving. Start moving. Y'all, that is the secret to my running a 5K, is I have to start moving, right?

[8 : 15] If I never start moving, then I'm never going to run a 5K. What does that mean? If I never go out and take my first run, and I'm using this free app called the Nike Run Club, and it's free. That was the part that got me interested.

I'm not going to throw a bunch of money into it. But listen, I've got these guided runs, and there's this coach in my ear, and the whole thing of those first runs that I started out with a couple weeks ago is, if you're pushing too hard, you're going to quit.

So stop pushing so hard, and just start moving. Just get out and start moving. Y'all, sometimes that is the exact step we need to take in our walk with Jesus, is just start moving.

Take a step. The reality is, if some of us opened God's Word tomorrow morning, before we got our day started, and read one Bible verse, that would be one more verse than we did the day before.

If we prayed one sentence to God in prayer, that would be one more sentence than we had prayed the day before. So we're moving, right?

[9 : 24] We started. It's not that you go from zero all the way to where you want to be, or where you think you should be. It's that you start.

You begin. So, Hebrews 12 says, let us run. Philippians 3 says, pressing forward to those things which are ahead.

Reaching forward to what is ahead. Let us run. Sometimes you've just got to take the first step. Martin Luther King had a great quote, and when I was a junior high English teacher, one of my

problem students, I know teachers, you have never had a problem student before, right? Nobody, they're all perfect little angels. I'm sure you guys were all perfect angels. I had a problem student my first year teaching. I only taught for a couple years, but she was just bound and determined to give me grief every day.

And so I became bound and determined to win her over. And by the end of that first semester, she was giving me this on a little thing that sits in my office back there as a Christmas present. So we really made some strides together.

[10:39] But she found this and thought that I would want it. It had special meaning for me. And I thought it applies so well to what we're talking about today. Faith is taking that first step, even when you don't see the full staircase.

I don't know if I'm ever going to be able to run a 5K. I hope so. I hope I can run a 10K. I hope I can run a 15K. I don't know if I'll ever be a marathon guy. My brother, any of y'all remember my brother preached here several months ago?

He ran a marathon one time, and I heard what it did to his feet at the end of that. I don't know if I want to do that. But that's all right. I don't have to see the whole staircase of where this is going to end for me right now.

I just take the first step. And sometimes that's what faith looks like. We don't know where God is going to lead us. I guarantee you these seniors that are graduating high school don't know where their lives are going to be five years from now, but they don't have to.

They just take one step forward with Jesus, and then another one, and then another one. And as God keeps leading them, and as God keeps leading us, then we arrive where he wants us to go in his timing.

[11:47] It's walking together with him, but we've got to start moving. Philippians 3.13, straining forward, reaching forward, pressing forward to what lies ahead.

The problem is, we get impatient, don't we? We get impatient. We want it all to come at once. In today's world in which we live, we can get everything at the push of a button. Our phones are there. They're the wealth of all the information that we never had growing up, and all we've got to do is Google it now.

If we want to talk to somebody, we can talk to someone instantly. The world we live in is absolutely instant, but some things are never meant to come overnight. Some things are never meant to come instantly.

So we have to remember that God's timing is better than our timing. God's timing is perfect. Maybe there's a relationship that you wish would just be fixed overnight.

[12:52] In the young couples, married, adults, whatever you want to call that class, that the Tillers and Bryants are leading back there, we just started a marriage seminar today.

And man, it's fantastic, but it's realizing that not everything is going to get fixed overnight.

Sometimes you've got to put the work in, but it's taking the first step in understanding that God's timing is perfect.

So start moving. And then number two, keep going. Keep going. Real basic, real simple stuff here today, but sometimes it's the basic and simple things that trip us up, isn't it?

So we've got to start moving, and then we've got to keep going. Hebrews 12 run, Hebrews 12 one, going back to our main text here, run with endurance, the race set before us.

Let us run, but let us run with endurance. Let us run with sustaining that pace. That coach who's in my ear when I start running, he says, if you're running at a pace that you can't sustain for the whole run, then slow down.

[14:07] Some of you are probably expert runners, and you're like, that's not good advice. Well, it is for me when I'm starting out, okay? Maybe someday I'll get to where you are. I'm looking around. Do we have any expert runners?

But listen. Wait, what just happened? Oh, yes, Wade. That was good, Wade. That was good.

He's a runner at heart, man. He is a biker. That's true. Listen, we run with endurance. The main thing is that you keep running, that you keep going.

And young people, I'll tell you, it is so much more important that you continue and are faithful in your walk with Jesus and, like, hit singles instead of home runs all the time.

You know what I mean? Sometimes the temptation is to try to achieve great, huge, big things all at once, but do you know how great, huge, big things are achieved?

[15:10] By little by little achieving the simple, basic things every day. When you get to the place where you're doing the things that you're supposed to do every day, day after day, night after night, when it's hard, when it's annoying, when you're tired, when you're emotional, when you don't want to, then all of a sudden you arrive at the day where you look back and say, oh, wow, how did I get here?

This is actually where I always wanted to go. But it's because I just kept moving. I just kept going. Philippians 3 says, I press on.

I keep going. Nothing's going to stop me. Nothing's going to hold me back. I recognize that I could stop myself. I recognize that the devil could stop me.

I recognize that others in my life could stop me or slow me down. But between me and Jesus, I'm going to rely on him to let me keep going and press on.

Progress demands persistence, not perfection. And man, I thank God for that, right? If progress with Jesus demanded perfection, we'd all be out of luck.

[16:25] None of us would get anywhere where we're trying to go. But progress just demands persistence. Jesus just says, walk with me. Let me lead you. Remember, you're not trying.

I'm training you on how to do this. So we're letting God train us and get us to where he wants us to go. There might be young people in this room that God wants to be a pastor.

God wants to be a missionary. God wants to be a school teacher. God wants to be a doctor. God wants to be a mechanic. God wants to work in retail, work at Sonic.

I don't know what your future is or where God has you and there's a circle of people waiting for you to bring Jesus into their life. But you're never going to get where God wants you to go unless you persist at the things he has for you right now.

So, let me ask you this. I've got to run down here and grab it. Here we go. Anybody know what the difference in this and this is?

[17:36] One's white, one's black. Glad we got that out of the way. Now, what do these mean? What is this? Starting out, beginner, right? Beginner level at some kind of martial arts.

Over here, what do we have? Expert. Expert, right? Professional. Top of the heap. What is the difference between these two belts? A white belt is a beginner.

A black belt is an expert. But the truth is, a black belt is a white belt who never stopped training. That's all it is. Now, that illustration's not original to me.

I heard it from others who probably heard it from others. But the truth is, that is absolutely true. That every one of you might be starting out as a white belt in something in your life.

Right now, these guys are a white belt at being an adult, at being on their own, at launching out into the world and paving their way. They're a white belt. But they could get to a black belt if they never stopped training.

[18:38] What does that mean in our walk with Jesus? You might have been a Christian or a church member or a tender or someone you would say is a Jesus follower for many, many, many years.

But the truth is, you're still a white belt. Because at some point along the way, you stopped training and you never got to where God wanted to take you.

Doesn't mean you don't know about God. Doesn't mean you can't answer a bunch of Bible trivia. But it means that God has not grasped your heart and grown your faith like he wanted to.

So you've got to back up and start training again and let God take you from here to here. There's nothing special about this person except they were here and they trained and trained and trained and trained and trained and trained and they got here.

The only difference between me right now and me when God willing I can run my first race is that I don't stop training. You know half the reason I'm telling y'all about this on Sundays is because I want y'all to hold me accountable so I don't stop training.

[19:58] because it's hard it's not fun. And I've tried to get in shape before but the difference this time is I'm not trying I'm training.

Training to be who God wants me to be. My question to you is are you training to be who God wants you to be? If you are you're either at a start moving phase or you're at a keep going phase. Either start moving or keep going. Galatians 6.9 says let us not grow weary of doing good because in due season at the right time we will reap if we don't what?

Give up. We will reap. Y'all I don't know what that looks like for you. Seniors down front and there's a couple in the crowd.

I don't know what it looks like for you to reap the harvest that God has for you. But I do know that you won't get there if you don't start moving and then keep going.

[21 : 09] So in your walk with Jesus maybe that means you open your Bible and spend a little more time than you have before. Maybe that means you bow your head in prayer and spend a little more time with God than you did before.

Maybe it means as you go off to college you get involved in a ministry in a church or a collegiate ministry on your campus and you get a little bit involved more than you have before and you keep growing and keep going in your walk with Jesus.

Church it means the exact same thing for us. I don't know what it looks like for you. I'm accountable for me and for my family and as for me and my family we're going to keep going.

We're going to keep growing. James 4.8 Would you turn there with me very quickly? James chapter 4 and verse 8. It's one book over from Hebrews 12.

James 4 and verse 8. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Say man I've tried.

[22 : 15] I've tried to fix my marriage. I've tried to get closer to my kids. I've tried to prioritize God in my life and something just always gets in the way. Something distracts me. Listen.

If you draw near to God you will see him drawing near to you. It's just usually we stop training. Don't we?

At one point in time we were moving closer to Jesus and then at some point the cares of this life the distractions of this life pulled us away pulled us off the path.

But if we draw near to him there is a promise from God that he will draw near to you. And when God draws near in your life what a transformation that makes.

When God draws near to this church what a difference this church makes in the community in our individual lives. together as a body we start to see incredible things happening.

[23 : 08] We start to see those baptism waters busy. We start to see people coming that hadn't come in a long time. We start to see relationships getting healed and mended. We start to see God moving in ways that we never imagined he could move when God draws near.

But first we gotta take the first step. And then we gotta keep going. So practically how do we draw near to God? Number one we prioritize our quiet time with Jesus.

We've been talking about that. How much time do we actually spend in this book? And how much time do we actually spend speaking to the one who is always there always ready to listen?

Number two we prioritize others over ourselves. Boy that's a hard one isn't it? In American culture it's always number one isn't it? It's always me first.

But that doesn't bear the fruit that God wants for us in our lives. So we're training to spend more time with Jesus we're training to prioritize others over us just like Jesus did.

[24 : 13] We're learning from him. And then number three we're unashamed to speak his name.

That's how we draw near to God. When we go out and point someone else to Jesus then we are as close to God as we could ever be.

Paul said my brethren brothers and sisters my heart's desire my prayer to God for my people is that they would be saved. That they would know Jesus in their life.

And that is my prayer for my people and I hope that's your prayer for your people. That they would know Jesus. They're not going to know unless we're unashamed to speak his name.

So our takeaway this morning will be done. Is God help me not to quit. But to take that next step toward being who you are calling me to be.

I pray that for us as a church. God help our church not to quit. But to take the next step toward being the church that he's calling us to be. Graduates I pray that for you.

[25 : 15] That you would say God help me not to quit. Now that I'm finishing high school and I'm moving out on my own and there's nobody in my ear reminding me hey you should go to church.

Hey you should go to youth group.

Hey you should read your Bible. There's nobody in your ear. Some of you haven't had that anyway. But some of you have. And it's going to be a difference. It's going to be a distinction to get out there on your own where nobody is doing that. But God help me not to quit but to take the next step as I go to college.

To take the next step as I go to work. Take the next step as I move out on my own toward who you are calling me to be. Then we'll get to see the fruit.

Get to see the blessings. We'll get to reap the rewards together. So that's my prayer for you. Would you bow your heads with me and we'll pray right now. God I thank you so much for our time together this morning.

I thank you that you've spoken to us all throughout this service. The young people have performed to the best of their ability to honor and glorify you. The graduates have gotten up and we've gotten to see the fruit of their hard work over their years of high school.

[26 : 23] And God that's not to glorify them and to say oh wow what incredible people they are but it's to reflect the praise back to you as each one of these people professes to know you as their savior.

That they place their faith in you. And so all this accomplishment all these great things bring glory back to you God. I pray that that would be true of each of our lives.

That there wouldn't be any man woman or child in this room who would walk out of here today without having a personal relationship with Jesus. That's our prayer. That's our hope.

That's why we gather here each Sunday. And God I ask that you would show each of us what our next step is. Some of us might need to start beginning just like I had to do a couple weeks ago.

Some of us might need to just take the next step. Just keep moving toward what you've called us to be. God give us patience from you.

[27 : 25] Help us to understand that you're training us toward a wonderful fruit, a wonderful blessing that you have in store for us. It's in Jesus name we pray. Amen. Brother Greg's going to lead us in one verse of this song.

This is a time of prayer. Y'all can keep your seats. But could we enter into a time of prayer as a church as he sings over us? And if you'd like to sing quietly and join him, that's fine.

But let's keep our seats, heads bowed, you know, kind of an attitude of just focusing on the Lord right now, focusing on his voice. And just for a couple of minutes before we dismiss today and celebrate our graduates, let's just ask God, what is it you want to show us from church today, from your word today?

And I'll be right down front if you'd like to come down front and meet with me and pray with me. I'm happy to do that. But let's go into a time of prayer right now. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.