



August 20, 2023  
“Running the Race”  
Acts 20:17-24  
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Six times in the New Testament living the Christian life is compared to “running a race.” The starting line is when we trust Christ as our personal Lord and Savior. The finish line is when we die and go to Heaven or when Christ returns to take us Home, whichever happens first. The time in between the start and the finish is the race we are to run as Believers in Jesus. In Acts 20, Paul teaches us—by his example—three important aspects of running the race: HUMILITY, ENDURANCE, and ABANDONMENT. Follow along as Pastor Gary shares about “running the race.”

1. **Acts 20:17-24** – *“From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them: ‘You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.’”*
2. Paul’s parting words to the elders at Ephesus
  - a. Paul was at the end of his third and final missionary journey
  - b. He compared living the Christian life to running a race
    - i. This comparison is made six times in the New Testament
    - ii. There is a starting line, a finish line, and a prize at the end of the race
      1. The starting line is when you trust Christ as your Lord and Savior
      2. The finish line is when you die and go to heaven, or Jesus returns to take us home, whichever happens first

- 3. The prize is spending eternity with the Lord
- iii. It is a race of endurance, and you are the only one on your track
- iv. What matters most is not how well you start but how you finish
- v. **2 Timothy 4:7-8** - *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."* (1984 NIV)

3. Paul teaches us three things by example

a. Run with humility

- i. **Acts 20:18b-19a** - *"You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility."*
- ii. Pride is one of the greatest obstacles to finishing well
- iii. John Calvin said, "Pride is the pregnant mother of all sins."
  - 1. Pride is at the root of all sins—believing "I know better than God"
- iv. Satan's fall from heaven was a direct result of pride
  - 1. Every time we operate in pride, we operate in the spirit of Satan
  - 2. Every time we operate in the spirit of humility, we operate in the spirit of Jesus
    - a. **Matthew 11:28-29** - *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."* (1984 NIV)
    - b. **Philippians 2:8** - *"And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"* (1984 NIV)
    - c. **James 4:6b** - *"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*
      - i. There are times when God may seem silent—it may be a place to ask the Lord if there is pride in your heart.
        - 1. Do I feel entitled?
        - 2. Do I judge others with greater scrutiny than I judge myself?
        - 3. Do I rarely say I'm sorry to the Lord and people I offended?
      - ii. **Matthew 23:12** - *"For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."* (1984 NIV)

- b. Run with endurance
  - i. **Acts 20:19b** - *"...with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews."*
  - ii. **Hebrews 12:1-2** - *"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*
  - iii. Remember those who have gone before you in the faith
  - iv. The race is not a sprint; it is a marathon and we are not exempt from hardships.
  - v. As Believers in Jesus, we have a Helper who will hold our hand and help us through every adversity, never leaving or forsaking us
    - 1. **Psalm 42:6** - *"O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore I will remember You from the land of the Jordan, and from the heights of Hermon, from the Hill Mizar."*
    - 2. Mt Hermon is the highest elevation in Israel and Mizar is one of the smallest hills in Israel—the psalmist was declaring, "Whether I am in the deepest valleys or the on highest mountain peak, I will remember that the Lord is with me"
- c. Run with abandonment
  - i. **Acts 20:22-24** - *"And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."*
  - ii. Paul didn't consider his life of greater worth than doing the will of the Lord
  - iii. We must love God more than anything and anyone, including life itself
  - iv. Scripture offers examples of people who started the race well but did not finish well
    - 1. **2 Timothy 4:10** - *"for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world..."*
    - 2. Judas loved money more than he loved Jesus
    - 3. **Galatians 5:7** - *"You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?"* (1984 NIV)
  - v. **1 Corinthians 9:24-25** - *"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training."*

*They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.” (1984 NIV)*

### Discussion Questions

1. Read [Acts 20:17-24](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Read [2 Timothy 4:7-8](#). Why does Scripture compare the Christian life to a race? How have you seen this concept at work in your life? (See #2 above)
3. Read [Matthew 11:28-29](#) and [Philippians 2:8](#). Why is it important to “run with humility”? (See #3a above)
4. Read [James 4:6b](#) and [Matthew 23:12](#). How can we address pride in our own hearts? (See #3a-iv-2-c above)
5. Read [Hebrews 12:1-2](#). How do we “run with endurance”? (See #3b above)
6. Read [Psalm 42:6](#). Where can we find strength when we are weary? (See #3b-v)
7. What does it mean to “run with abandonment”? (See #3c-iii above)
8. Read [Galatians 5:7](#). What in your life poses the greatest threat to finishing well? (See #3c-iv above)
9. Read [1 Corinthians 9:24-25](#). Discuss the importance of “running your race” well. (See #3-c-v above)
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)