

LET US RUN
Hebrews 12:1
Pastor Steve York
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Let us Run!

I'd like to begin this morning by sharing a motivational poster that I almost purchased for all of our graduates.

Dreams. Dreams are like rainbows. Only idiots chase them.

A few days ago I went to the Merced College graduation ceremony to watch a few friends graduate. It was a happy time of celebration. But I was also a bit saddened. It was depressing to listen to speeches about accomplishments and dreams that seemed so empty.

We live in a world that defines success quite differently than God defines it. As an example: one of the speakers highlighted the fact that the average graduate from Merced College will make \$600,000 more in a lifetime than he or she would have made without graduating. Now, sure... being able to get a better job and earn more money is not a bad thing, but is that what life is all about?

What is success, anyway?

How many of you have heard this before?

- 1) God made you
- 2) God loves you
- 3) God has a wonderful plan for your life

Do we really believe this? Do we really believe that our loving creator knows what is best for us? Do we really trust Him that he knows what life is all about? Or are we going to believe the lies that life is all about enjoying the pleasures of this world?

What is success?

In Hebrews 12:1, we read: *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*

Now of course, we have been trained well; when we see a 'therefore', we ask:

(Wherefore the therefore?)

The therefore is there because it refers to chapter 11! In chapter 11, the author of Hebrews gave us a wonderful list of saints who lived by faith.

What is success? It is living a life of faith.

And now here is the big question: How do we do it? How do we live lives of faith? As we look at Hebrews 12:1 this morning, we'll see that there are three things that we can do to live by faith.

The first thing we can do is this: **Remember the example of others.**

We read: *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...*

Remember the example of others. Read Hebrews 11 and think about all of the men and women of the Old Testament who lived lives of faith. Ponder the reality that these were regular people, just like you and me. They could live lives of faith; so can we. There is hope!

And there are also great men and women of faith throughout the history of the church who can inspire us with their lives of devotion to Jesus.

I don't know who I'd be today if it weren't for the books, sermons and music of others that have challenged me to live my life for Jesus.

Some of you might recognize a few of these folks:

This is St. Francis. He gave up a life of wealth and worldly pleasures to obey Jesus' command to "sell your possessions, give to the poor and you will have treasures in heaven." God used him to start a revival, and the Franciscan Order, which was a much-needed challenge to the worldly living that was prevalent in the Catholic Church in the 1100's. God has used Francis' life to challenge me to live simply, reminding me that riches in this world do not provide happiness.

Keith Green's music and biography were extremely important in my early years as a believer; God used him to show me that my passion for Jesus and for evangelism has room for lots of growth! When I think of people that I want to be like, Keith Green is near the top of the list!

Do you know who this is?

Eric Liddell (rhymes with fiddle)! Many of us know him from the movie "Chariots of Fire"? Eric Liddell had the opportunity to live the life of a well-respected celebrity. But instead of enjoying all of the pleasures that this world has to offer, he gave it all up to be a missionary in China. He is a great example of one who put God first!

And another missionary:

This is David Livingstone. He is the great missionary pioneer of Africa. I am currently reading Livingstone's biography. He grew up really, really poor. As a twelve year old, David was working 14 hours a day, six days a week at a cotton mill for a measly 12 lbs a year. He was so committed to being a missionary that he saved up for three years enough money to go to school for a single semester. After finally finishing his studies, the College offered him a teaching job for 150 lbs a year! He turned down the small fortune because he had his heart set on sharing the gospel with those who had never heard it. As I read about David Livingstone, God is challenging me to recommit my life to sharing the gospel with others. David Livingstone made huge sacrifices to share his faith, why can't I?

And here is another man who has helped me know God:

This is John Piper. God has used John Piper to convince me that God really does love me... and that God really does want me to have abundant life... a life of amazing pleasure... and that true pleasure is only found in a relationship with Jesus. Piper writes: God is most glorified in us when we find the most pleasure in Him.”

So now you have seen a few of the saints who have so influenced my walk with Jesus. I cannot tell you who I'd be today if it weren't for these men and their commitment to living for Jesus.

These men lived lives of faith, and so can I. They inspire me.

Who inspires you? How do you 'remember' the examples of others? Let me encourage you...

Read your Bibles and remember how God's people have lived.

And do we realize that our Christianity is so influenced by the world around us? Christianity in the year 2009 in Merced, CA is quite different from the Christianity experienced by David Livingstone in Africa in the Mid-1800's... and it is quite different from the Christianity experience by St. Francis in the 1100's.

Let me encourage you: read biographies – especially of Christians from another era. This will help us by showing us our faults that we'd otherwise not see.

So how do we live by faith? First, remember the examples of others.

And the second thing that we can do to live lives of faith is this: **Untangle yourself!**

We read: *let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely*

The author of Hebrews is telling us is to get rid of everything that hinders us from running the race.

Question: what is hindering you from living fully for God these days? What is keeping you from obeying Him? What is preventing you from growing in your faith?

Untangle yourself!

The picture is of someone who is so committed to running (and winning) a race, that he gets rid of all of the extra baggage.

Some of you love to run. I bet when you get ready for a race, you empty your pockets? Out come your bulky keys... your big fat wallet... your PDA...

You certainly don't fill your backpack with books and take it with you for a reading break!

But how many of us live the Christian life like this? We are not really that committed to living for Jesus. If we were, we'd just get rid of all of the junk that prevents us from growing closer to Him!

I love this movie clip. How is this for commitment?

(Fireproof Clip)

Do you see his determination? His computer is getting in the way of his relationship with his wife and his relationship with God. So what does he do? He smashes it. Some may think he is weird. I think he is wise!

What is getting in the way of your relationship with God? What would it mean for you to untangle yourself?

How committed are you to getting rid of it?

It is amazing how empowering it is to make a decision to obey God. I became a Christian the summer before going to college at UCSB. During my summer breaks, I would go home to the East Bay Area and hang out with my old high school friends.

The problem was, I was changing! My friends still wanted to do the same old things, and they expected me to do the same old things right along with them. Well, we went to an "R" movie that was NOT glorifying to God. As I am sitting there watching an "R" movie with my old high school friends, I am experiencing some major conviction.

I start having a conversation with the Holy Spirit:

"Steve, imagine Jesus next to you watching this movie? Would he do it? Would Jesus watch this junk?"

"No, he wouldn't. But what am I supposed to do?"

"Steve... Jesus would walk out!"

"But that would be so embarrassing!"

"Steve..."

Well... guess what I did. After about five or ten minutes, I couldn't stand the conviction. I knew the Holy Spirit was right! I walked out.

Sin will destroy us. Do we believe it?

Smash it. Run away. Whatever it takes. It is worth it.

Untangle yourself.

And the third thing that Hebrews 12:1 tells us to do in order to live by faith is this: **Note the necessary commitment.**

We read: *and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*

Notice the word “endurance.”

The greek word is also translated as “patience,” “fortitude,” “steadfastness.”

The idea is this: the race is difficult. It is hard. It is a struggle. Run the race with the ability to carry on when it gets tough.

And notice what we are supposed to run: *“the race that is set before us.”*

God has a plan for you and for me. And his plan could get really, really difficult.

Are we committed to obeying him and living for him no matter how hard it gets?

Being a Christian is not supposed to be easy. Jesus never promised us that. In fact, Jesus did promise us that it would be difficult. And we must not forget that he also promised us that the rewards are great – it is worth it!

It is a good thing for us to stop once in a while and deal with a few questions... honestly answering them to ourselves and to God:

Am I really serious about living for Jesus?

Am I committed to being Holy, set apart for God?

Am I ready to pay any price?

As a friend of mine once said,

“Desire, it all comes down to desire. How much do you want it. What are you willing to give up to get it?”

It has been said that the height of stupidity is to do the same thing the same way and expect a different result.

Are you ready for change? Do you want to be spiritually renewed? Are we ready to recommit ourselves to being a holy people, set apart for Jesus?

Do we realize what an impact we can have on other people when we are fully devoted to Jesus?

I would like to close by sharing about one person in particular who made the hard choice to obey God no matter what the cost. He suffered immensely so others could know their creator. He is perhaps that best known missionary ever. He gave up more than any of us could ever imagine out of love for others and out of love for his Father in heaven.

Do you recognize this man?

He gave his all for us. Let’s give our all back to him. He loves us.

It may not be easy, but it is certainly worth it!

Remember the examples of others.
Untangle yourself.
And note the necessary commitment.

Let us run the race. Let us run!

Let us pray...

Lord Jesus, thank you for loving us. Thank you for the abundant life that you have for us. We want to live it. We want to run the race. We want to know you and make you known. Help us to remember the examples of others. Help us to untangle ourselves from the junk that kills us spiritually. And help us to be committed to you no matter what the cost. Help us RUN! Amen.