

Run the Race: No Reserve, No Retreat, No Regrets 2 Tim. 4:1-8

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Let's start this morning by talking about Facebook; massive waste of time? Check Facebook wall now? A tool for being in touch, though can be a time-waster.

Facebook chat with an old friend used to serve with in the college group. Would see him on Facebook at what would be very odd hours for him. Has been out of work for a long time. Life isn't turning out as he planned. But it was more than the thing of not being able to provide, no work ... It was about the reason God placed him here on Earth. Regret.

Facebook helped us put together 25th MoHi high school reunion.

About a year after HS, one of us from Yugoslavia died in a fiery car crash in Mexico. One friend commented to me as I emceed, "That's the way to go." A blaze of glory. Better to burn out than ... Really? Says who?

Recently you've heard sermons about being an ambassador for Christ, about running the race. Let's keep going and look at a passage from the end of Paul's life and parallel passages in Scripture to help us to take stock and hopefully make midcourse adjustments to better run the race He has set before us. And here's a nice Alpine view to cool you off in the background.

Read 2 Tim 4:1-8

1. Run the race well: v2-5

- Fueled by faith in God's Word:
 - Paul is writing to his young protégée, Timothy. Timothy was pastoring and Paul was encouraging him in his preaching and teaching. But it applies to us all.
 1. Teach the Word, no matter what. Not your opinion, not mine.
 - a. Sound doctrine, sound teaching. Taking the message of the apostles and communicating it in a culturally appropriate way today.
- Fiercely faithful to the Word: Live by the Word, no matter what. Keeping your head/endure hardship.
 - This week our daughter, Lili, has been part of day camp; thanks to those who served in that. Memory verse is a concise example of a life fiercely faithful to God's Word.: 1 John 5:3 *This is love for God, to obey his commands.*
 - Stay focused on the race, the fight. When Paul and other NT writers talk about the Christian life as a race, they talk about getting rid of unnecessary burdens, about self-control, about avoiding the sin that is so temptingly handy, not running aimlessly, not beating the air. Let's play around with the idea of the race for a little while and what might hinder a runner in his race.
 1. Joggers wear MP3 players, but seems boring? Why just music? Why not watch a video? Would be more fun! And the screen on that would be so small, why not have a nice, big flatscreen? He could really enjoy some great movies. Yeah, but it defeats the purpose.

2. Do marathon runners sightsee during the race? (hey, Empire State Building, never been in NY before) Do they shop? (hey, a sale on shoes) They are focused. There are good things, but they don't help them to win.
 - a. There are neutral things, even good things in our lives, that are in reality burdens, weights, hindrances to running the race. What's burdening you?
 - i. Information? Facebook? Seriously!
 - ii. Stuff? Take care of stuff.
 - iii. Busy, complicated life, various factors ... Many Christians have valued simplicity, a spiritual discipline
-I know people in this church who downsized to a smaller home, on purpose!
 - iv. Even when downsizing isn't your choice, it can be used by God. It happened to some other friends, and we wondered how they were doing. Got an email from her on May 6: *Amazing how God turned our lives upside down and saved us from what I call our "HGTV lifestyle" and is blessing us more than ever!* HGTV lifestyle. Not wrong, but might be a hindrance. Is your home your fortress of solitude, your museum of how great your life is, or a base, a tool you use for God's Kingdom?
 - v. Where are your priorities? Billy Graham: Give me five minutes with a person's checkbook, and I will tell you where their heart is. Or with their Daytimer.
 - b. Doesn't have to be something bad or evil. Just a burden, an obstacle to the ultimate goal. What is there, if you set it aside, that would let you could follow Christ more fully? You would be more free to listen to His voice and respond quickly?
 - c. Someone once said, you cannot do everything that you could possibly do, be part of every organization, and be a faithful Christian. Or, your young kids can't do it all, with you in tow, and really be able to effectively run the race.
 - d. What takes up your time, talents and finances? Good stuff? Likely. Things of ultimate, eternal significance?
 - e. CAVEAT: Fulfill your responsibilities. "Sorry bank, I am following God and won't be paying my mortgage anymore." If you have made a promise to a bank, fulfill it. If you have made a commitment to another person in marriage, that is for life. But what are other things that you might not see as flexible right now, but could be?
 - f. Go for it! Make tough choices about your life that in eternity you will not regret.
3. But it isn't only neutral burdens that might hinder your race.
 - a. What if runners in a marathon weren't only offered water? What if there were other cups, clearly marked, filled with drugs, poison? Muscles freeze up, slow down, can't think clearly. Would they grab them? Why do we? What are your handy sins?
 - i. Unforgiveness?

- ii. Lack of faith?
 - iii. Lust?
 - iv. Pride?
 - v. The refreshment of God's trustworthy Word that energizes your run, or the poison of Satan's deception that kills it?
 - b. Budget sin: do you sin less when you want God to do something, when you have some big thing coming up? I can sin a little now, but ...
 - c. Make choices, even radical ones to avoid the sin.
 - i. Yeah, but I've been struggling with this.
 - Ask God to help; talk to a trusted friend who can hold you accountable, make some radical choices. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount talked about making radical choices.
 - If you have to throw some books away, some DVDs. If you need to unplug from the Internet or get one of those filters. If you need to avoid certain places, certain things, do it.
- It's worth it! It's killing your race.
 - Focus on what's real, what's lasting. Keep your head. Don't believe the messages that pound us every day. Have true faith that lives by the Word.
- God's Word is counter-cultural, sometimes counter-intuitive. Will you believe God's Word or something else? Will you live by the Word or your feelings? Will you make choices in life based on the Word or based on the latest fads? Live by faith in God's Word and you will run the race well.

2. Run the race to win: v1, 8 – focused on the finish

-This is a race. This isn't jogging to get exercise, but racing to win.

What's my favorite movie? Look at my Facebook page: Chariots of Fire.

Eric Liddell was pushed down in the middle of a race, got up, crossed the finish lines, falling into the arms of his trainer. No reserve. Focused totally on the finish.

1. Live focused on the finish, looking forward to Christ's return / In light of the next life / coming judgment / Lived with the end in mind. Not just about death and the beginning of the next life. About purpose. About reward.
 - a. Verses 1&8 eclipse all of human history and achievement. All sports records. Every human accomplishment. Every civilization. Everything pales in comparison to the fact that there is a God, that this God will judge us, that He will return.
 - b. In sports, there is only one prize. Only Spain won the soccer world cup.
 - c. But this prize is not just for Paul, for super-Christians, and therefore the rest of us can be unconcerned with it. "Thanks, I'm fine just being saved." No, run to win! The prize is available to all. Not only one gold medal, one crown. Have that same intensity and focus in living the Christian life as if you were a world-class athlete.
 - d. Who are we? Who are we created to be?
 - We alone are created in God's image, created to do things He's been planning for us since before the world was created, full inheritors of the riches of the Kingdom, we will reign with Christ.

- CS Lewis said that if we could see what we will be like in glory now, we would fall on our faces and worship the creature we see.
 - No more “aw shucks” faith. Well, I’m just little me. I’m not a pastor, a missionary. I come to church, I give. You are so awesome, your purpose in life is so much more, and God’s plan for you is so much more.
 - We are eternal beings. Almost everything on this Earth is temporary, designed for obsolescence.
 1. After the church picnic on the 4th, I took Lili to a fireworks stand. We got home, and I brought out the ground bloom flowers. Ok Lili, you are going to love this. But how long did it last? 3 seconds?
 2. Wait, wait, watch this, it’s awesome. Whether it’s the history of the Roman empire, or your new car or anything on this Earth, it’s basically a ground bloom flower. Watch sports and they talk about how people will be remembered forever. Nope. Yeah, that is cool, really, cool ... and it’s gone. A vapor.
 3. Should I invest in what lasts, or what is here and gone? If I am created for eternity, how should I live now?
2. Did the crown thing catch your eye? *“Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day.”*
- a. This could be a whole sermon. A theology of reward.
 - b. When we serve the Lord, why do we do it?
 - Thankfulness for what He has done for you? Great.
 - To glorify God? Yes, the ultimate end of man.
 - To gain eternal rewards? We don’t talk about this theme, but it is clearly taught in Scripture.
 - Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-21:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on Earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.
 - Randy Alcorn says, *“You can’t take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.”*
 - This passage isn’t talking about the judgment that determines where each one will spend eternity, based on your faith in Christ.
 - This is the Bema seat, an ancient Greek term for the one “reffing” sporting events: making sure the rules are being kept, determining the winner. Each one will receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.
- Maximus in film Gladiator: *What we do in life echoes in eternity.*
 1. Sounds inspiring. Sounds great. Who wants an echo? What can you do with an echo?
 2. God’s reality isn’t echoes, isn’t wishful hoping but treasures in Heaven, ones that don’t go away. It’s crowns, the only ultimate

reward there is. 1 Peter 4:1 an imperishable inheritance. In Revelation Jesus says He is coming back to reward the faithful.

3. What is a crown? A crown is a symbol of the Kingdom. Not merely something on your head, a decoration. Not something you can boast about. A crown is authority, glory.
 - a. Book of Revelation shows the elders casting down their crowns before the Lamb.
 - b. Yes, there are heavenly rewards. Yes, they are based on the choices, actions we make in this life. Everyone who has placed their faith in Christ is saved, but while some get varying rewards, others make it in by the skin of their teeth so to speak.
 - c. To paraphrase Maximus, What we do in this life brings reward or lack of reward in eternity.

1 Cor 3:10-15 ...the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

- Salvation is for everyone who believes. Rewards are for those who work, who wisely invest.
- Why would anyone want to half-heartedly run the race with their focus and energy on this life? Who wants to jog cautiously over the finish line with plenty of reserve left? Who would want to stand before the throne empty handed?
- To paraphrase William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, if we have been pulled out of the dark, angry sea of sin and death to safety on the rock, why wouldn't we do everything we could to rescue others, instead of merely living on the rock, mainly engaged in other temporal pursuits?
- I can guarantee you, if we had now the same perspective we will have in eternity, we would run the race with abandon. But now, that requires faith.

Paul's shorthand for all this is: *all who have longed for His appearing*. If someone is coming to visit, you love their approaching visit by getting ready, cooking.

This is not "who has read the most Left Behind novels," or studied prophecy, which is great. But in context, it is the person who lives by the Word. Who runs the race well. It's not, "Man, I wish Jesus would come back tomorrow," but actively pursuing the things Jesus is about today.

If you knew, like Paul, that you were about to die, or that Christ was coming back on a particular day, and if you could have even a portion of the perspective you will have in eternity, how would that change your priorities today and how you spent your time, your money, your energy?

In a normal race, the finish line is fixed. But you don't know where your finish line is.

When Paul says he has been poured out it's the image of being spent. No reserve. No holding back.

Yes, athletes need rest. Yes, athletes pace themselves and are disciplined, but it's so they can run the race better. Total commitment, running to win.

Run God's race for you: 5b, 7 ~ Find your forte

Facebook: When I asked my friend what he was doing in his local church (we had taught together in college group), he said nothing, so he could be free in case some job came up. Doesn't God know about that?

1. Run the race fulfilling the ministry God has given you.
 - a. Timothy was called to be a pastor. "discharge all the duties of your ministry." Timothy had his task, what about your ministry?
2. What did Eric Liddell say in Chariots, (no accent) "God made me for a purpose, for China. But he also made me fast and when I run I feel his pleasure."
 - a. Wouldn't it be cool to know that? Why God made you? To really enjoy life, knowing that even in tough times, you are doing what you were designed to. Maybe you are.
 - b. What's your forte? What did God make you to do? What are you gifted and talented at? Do you know? Would you like to? How will you invest your life?
3. As Paul wrote to Timothy, it was shortly before his death. Likely you aren't in his situation. But ...

... a popular idea nowadays seems to be bucket list. Before you die, before you kick the bucket, what do you want to have done? What do you dream about doing?

-13-year-old just climbed Everest, wants to climb peaks on all continents. A teen girl circumnavigating the globe alone on a boat. Big stuff! Or maybe, it's really small stuff. When we look back on this life from eternity, will people care who climbed Mount Everest? Who had the most friends on Facebook? Who hit the most home runs? They are fun and interesting water cooler talk, but these pale! Is your bucket list God's?

So, what do you do? Ok, I know that's the way you make your living, but why are you alive?

- Probably not one thing, but a series of things over a lifetime.
- God has plan for you! Believe it! Obey His Word and listen to His voice.

Like what? What does a kingdom-of-God bucket list include?

- Make disciples. Who are you helping to become more of a fully devoted follower of Christ? That is eternal. Whatever else you do, make sure it's really about making disciples.
- Paul here says do the work of an evangelist. Share your faith, and help them to grow.
- As a missionary, I'd say, go on a short-term mission trip at least once in your life! Talk to anyone who has come to Slovenia.
- What do you do Tuesday evenings? My dad goes out with the "share your faith" group, visiting people who have come to our church. Very cool, and super simple.
- Make disciples of the internationals around you; the world is here. Friday Sarah went to a Pizza place run by Afghanis.
 - Contact pastor Claude's office about the fun, strategic ministry of befriending international students at MJC and Stan State. We did that for 10 years and loved it!
- Make disciples at Monday Night church.
- Make disciples of kids; Kid Country. MNC kids ministry. Volunteer at a school.
- Help single moms

- Went to MoHi, but when I got to the location where the pastor's prayer was and saw lines of people getting groceries from this church, I was shocked into Modesto's realities. Poor side of town; (West Side), airport district.
- Make disciples by giving more. Who wants to be a millionaire? Really? Why?
- Move! Consider how you might move somewhere, whether to a needy neighborhood (the west side), or across the globe, even doing what you are doing now, and live in a place where there are simply less believers or greater, more obvious needs.
- Pray! Get serious about prayer, support missionaries, pastors and ministries in prayer. Prayer warrior. Get info and do it! Sign up to receive missionary newsletters and really pray.
- Learn! Read a biography or watch a video about a missionary, a hero of the faith; what choices did they make in their lives? Maybe do some research online; find out what God is doing around the world;

And as we spoke of before, simplify. What could make you more agile? Athletes want to be able to flex ... to react.

Tennis is about the only sport I'm ok at. What is one thing everyone does who plays tennis, from me to the Williams sisters? They keep their feet moving, ready to move.

Don't be so locked in to your schedule, your stuff, your life, that you can't react.

“Todd, that's great, but I'm not that kind of person.” Not talking about personality types but discipleship. People who God uses to affect the world around them come in all varieties.

- When I talked before about “aw shucks” Christians, I wasn't saying that everyone will do something that others will regard as amazing or flashy. What we might think of as big may be something rather modest in God's economy, and something we regard as small might be something huge in God's eyes.
- Biblical heroes or great Christians we hear about aren't extraordinary in any way, other than the impact of a life that is submitted to God. They have no advantages over you or me.
- 80/20 principle. Says who? Is that in the Bible? Why shouldn't this be a church of extraordinary people? So that extraordinary becomes ordinary? People who don't sit back and wait to follow, but they help others to advance God's Kingdom. Shouldn't the bride of Christ be having more impact of our world?

The world is dying. The majority of people you see are heading into eternity without Christ; I can certainly say that in Slovenia. My neighbors, my co-workers. Thousands of people groups with out even one Bible verse in their language. Hundreds of millions of people in thousands of people groups that couldn't hear the Gospel if they wanted to. The hidden and visible pain in Modesto and around the world is screaming out to us.

- **Today** is a day to think outside the box. Not “when my life circumstances change.”
Today is a day to take stock.
- Maybe to make some radical changes, maybe to make some minor corrections. Even a small change can greatly affect how a runner does in a race.
- “You know, I was doing well, and then this thing happened.” It's about finishing the race well. Get in the race, get back in the race.
- It only makes sense. It's a wise investment. It's living with eternity in mind.

- You know what would be great? If the church switchboard this week was full of calls of people wanting to meet with pastors to find out more of how they can serve in the church, of people to have ideas for doing something
- Remember, it was the church at Antioch that sent Paul and Barnabas out; maybe before you do something crazy for God, get godly counsel from mature Christians, the church leadership.

Want to see my Facebook page? There a place where you can put some of your favorite quotes. Here are three I've had up there since my first day on Facebook. See if they fit into today's passage and some of the ideas I've shared ...

Without the high hope of adventure, religion degenerates into a mere appendage of a comfortable life. -Alfred North Whitehead

We need a band of men and women who will do anything short of sin for the Kingdom of God. - Haddon Robinson

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. -Jim Elliot

I really hope today is encouraging, not a burden. God has an awesome plan for us collectively as His global church, for CrossPoint, and for each of us individually.

- By God's grace make changes to make an impact where you are right now, and allow yourself to dream as to how life might be different to make greater Kingdom impact.
- Make some change, this week, even a small one, that like a ship, will make a huge difference in the long run.

It's about taking faith from the head to the heart, from theory to practice. What do I do Tuesday based on what I heard Sunday morning, based on what I read in my Bible this morning?

Going from well-intentioned sprints to serious long-haul running. Hard work. Perseverance. Making choices that others maybe haven't, making choices that fly in the face of our culture. Choices that enable us to truly run the race, that fulfill God's purposes for us.

Paul had come to the end of his race with nothing held back, about to fall into the arms of His Savior and receive His reward. A life well lived. Well done, my good and faithful servant.

If you go to the American cemetery in Cairo, you will find the grave of William Whiting Borden, Yale grad, heir to the Borden fortune; in today's dollars worth billions. He decided to become a missionary to the [Muslims of China](#), but died of spinal meningitis in Egypt during his training there at the age of 25. After his death, Borden's Bible was found and given to his parents.

In it they found some interesting phrases. One dated shortly after he renounced his fortune in favor of missions read, "No Reserve."

Later, his father again offered him a job and William had again said, no, but thank you. That day he wrote, "No Retreat."

Shortly before he died when in Egypt, he added the phrase "No Regrets."

No reserve, no retreat, no regrets.

How can we live like that? How can we look back on our lives from eternity like that?

Make disciples of all nations
Store up for yourselves treasure in Heaven.
Fight the good fight
Finish the race
Run as to win. To win the crown.

Big words. Big thoughts. If you would like to know what it means to know God, to have ultimate meaning in life, come to the door to your right and people will be there to talk with you.
For the rest, sit back and take a second now to think, to pray, to evaluate, to write something down.

(Song: "He is no fool")

He is no Fool – by Twila Paris

There once was a man born of high circumstance
Heir to advantage, He had every chance to succeed
But light from the cross made his dreams appear small
And to their surprise he went far--from it all
For the love of his Savior, for one priceless jewel
They could not understand so they called him a fool

He is no fool if he would choose
To give the thing he cannot keep
To buy what he can never lose
To see a treasure in one soul
That far outshines the brightest gold
He is no fool, He is no fool
He is no fool, He is no fool

There once was a boy who could run like the wind
Given to lead, every man was his friend at the line
But light from the cross made his race appear small
And to their amazement, he followed the call
For the love of his Savior, for one priceless jewel
They could not understand so they called him a fool

Show me the fool who abandons his life
To walk in the steps of our Lord Jesus Christ

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS:

The story about the sea and the rock from the founder of the Salvation Army vividly told.

http://lastdaysministries.com/Articles/1000008646/Last_Days_Ministries/LDM/Discipleship_Teachings/Who_Cares.aspx

A song by Steve Taylor that always inspired me; about two people one who started the race and didn't finish well, one who ran all the way to the end.

<http://www.lyricstime.com/steve-taylor-the-finish-line-lyrics.html>

Once upon an average morn an average boy was born for the second time
Prone upon the altar there he whispered up the prayer he'd kept hid inside

The vision came
He saw the odds
A hundred little gods on a gilded wheel
"These will vie to take your place, but Father,
by your grace I will never kneel"

And I saw you, upright and proud
And I saw you wave to the crowd
And I saw you laughing out loud at the Philistines
And I saw you brush away rocks
And I saw you pull up your socks
And I saw you out of the blocks
For the finish line

Darkness falls
The devil stirs
And as your vision blurs you start stumbling
The heart is weak
The will is gone
And every strong conviction comes tumbling down

Malice rains
The acid guile is sucking at your shoes while the mud is fresh
It floods the trail
It bleeds you dry
As every little god buys its pound of flesh

And I saw you licking your wounds
And I saw you weave your cocoons
And I saw you changing your tunes for the party line
And I saw you welsh on old debts
I saw you and your comrades bum cigarettes

And you hemmed and you hawed
And you hedged all your bets
Waiting for a sign

Let's wash our hands as we throw little fits
Let's all wash our hands as we curse hypocrites
We're locked in the washroom turning old tricks
Deaf
And joyless
And full of it

The vision came
He saw the odds
A hundred little gods on a gilded wheel
"These have tried to take your place, but Father,
by your grace I will never kneel
I will never kneel ..."

Off in the distance
Bloodied but wise
As you squint with the light of the truth in your eyes

And I saw you
Both hands were raised
And I saw your lips move in praise
And I saw you steady your gaze
For the finish line

Every idol like dust
A word scattered them all
And I rose to my feet when you scaled the last wall
And I gasped
When I saw you fall
In his arms
At the finish line

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIZuyW2fSGQ>