

Run to Win

- † Perseverance (vv.1-3)
- † Discipline (vv.4-10)
- † Strength (vv.11-13)

In the name of Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, dear fellow runners in God's school of grace:

Warning: This sermon may make you tired. It's all about running. Physically I haven't run like this for years except in my dreams. Spiritually, we're all in a race for life in time and eternity. Simply put, God says to each of us – men, women and children; young and old: **Run to Win.**

† Perseverance (vv.1-3)

First word, *“Therefore....”* What's it there for? Or I could ask, “What comes just before Hebrews 12?” Even the little kids would say, “Hebrews 11!” Yes, but what's Hebrews 11. Some of the older students could tell you, “Hebrews 11 is the Heroes of Faith Chapter.” They know this from Sunday School where skillful teachers have been drinking so deeply of the water of life in God's Word that they overflow with God's grace for our children. These priceless Bible lessons help us **Run to Win.**

Sometimes you feel like you're surrounded by a cloud of trouble. “Not so!” says the Holy Spirit. *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses,”* heroes of faith like Abraham in last Sunday's sermon, *“let us get rid of every burden and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and let us run with patient endurance the race that is laid out for us.”* (EHV¹) You would never try to run a race by stuffing heavy rocks in your pockets. That's what sin is like. All the dirty thoughts and nasty words, disrespect for your parents, teachers, husband; loveless selfishness against your friends, family or wife – these are heavy burdens we *“get rid of”* here together by confessing them. What a relief when Jesus tells again through the Pastor, “Your sins are forgiven.” Patiently you endure as you **Run to win.**

One of my favorite memories of PhyEd was when we ran cross country. It was so cool back in the coastal forest of giant Douglas Fir trees. Their canopy blocked the sun. Their needles were soft and spongy beneath your feet. You'd forget being tired because it was fun to run back there. But none of us students ran alone. We always followed our teacher who knew the way and any dangerous spots.

“Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is the author of our faith and the one who brings it to its goal. In view of the joy set before him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of God's throne. ³Carefully consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinful people, so that you do not grow weary and lose heart.”

That's why a home is so richly blessed “Where Jesus Christ is all in all!” Otherwise, you're in a dark forest without the teacher. Jesus authored your faith; He wrote the book on it – the Bible. Jesus will bring your faith to the goal of heaven. Jesus knows we can persevere with the finish line of heaven constantly in our hearts, eyes and ears. Can you think of a better reason to begin each day with family devotions? We could use just one Bible verse at that meal more families could enjoy together, where you break the fast of last night and start the day with great nutrition for body and soul. **Run to win!**

*Oh, blest the house where faith you find
And all within have set their mind
To trust their God and serve him still
And do in all his holy will. (CW 506:2)*

Parents, your children will **Run to win** when they see that you always look to Jesus for...

¹ EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2017. NPH: 800-662-6022; also Amazon-Kindle.

† Discipline (vv.4-10)

On a plane flight home from Oregon a few years ago, I asked some young businessmen if the name *Steve Prefontaine* meant anything to them. They looked at each other slyly and said, “Never heard of him.” Then one opened his dress shirt. His t-shirt read: *Prefontaine*. “It’s my favorite,” he said.

That name was constantly in the news in our hometown of Coos Bay, Oregon. “Pre” kept breaking distance records at the University of Oregon. Then, while training for the 1976 Olympics, Steve Prefontaine died in a car accident, May 30, 1975. A famous quote: “To give anything less than your best, is to sacrifice the gift.”² One movie showed recruiters knocking on his door in pouring rain. The champion didn’t stop. If they wanted to talk, they had to run with him. **Discipline** in the rain. His coach demanded he **Run to win**. Another scene showed his coach in the yard with his wife’s old waffle iron. “She couldn’t stand the smell,” he said as he melted more rubber. His patented light weight shoe was named for the Greek word *víκη*. “**We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.**” Super Nikes. Yes, Nike says, “Just do it!” God’s **Discipline** tells us when it’s better that you “Don’t.”

When we want to give up, the Lord says: “**You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood in your fight against sin.**”⁵ **Have you also forgotten the encouragement that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard the Lord’s discipline lightly, and do not become weary of his correction.**⁶ **For the Lord disciplines the one whom he loves, and he corrects every son he accepts.**” Equally loved with the full status of *sons*, remember the loving **Discipline** from God, His blessed purpose always.

He wants us first to learn **Discipline** from loving parents at home and teachers in school. “**Endure suffering as discipline. God is dealing with you as sons.**” Fathers who discipline in love teach respect. “**Should we not submit even more to the Father of the spirits and live?**”¹⁰ **...God disciplines us for our good, so that we may have a share in his holiness.**

Caring coaches and choir directors are hard to beat. Years ago a choir from the Ukrainian Lutheran Church toured the Midwest. As each concert began, the director’s arms went up – silence! Precisely coming down – full bore, one note, concert on! **Discipline** brought...

† Strength (vv.11-13)

One of the most painful things my coach told me was to run on my toes. He was no distance runner; I thought he was crazy. But he said so I did. My calves hurt for a week, but my times kept improving into record winning territory. What seemed like a foolish idea added **Strength** every stride.

No discipline seems pleasant when it is happening, but painful, yet later it yields a peaceful harvest of righteousness for those who have been trained by it.” Don’t expect your children or students to appreciate all your firm and loving commands. Don’t expect your friends to like it when you refuse to follow them in wrong because you want to follow Jesus in **Strength**. Expect gain for the pain. You may look back over your life someday and see hard times with only one set of tracks. Like the man in the story, “Footprints in the Sand,” you ask, “Jesus, where were you when I needed you?” The **Strength** of His love will answer, “Those footprints were mine. When you were too weak, I carried you.”

*Blest such a house; it prospers well. In peace and joy the parents dwell,
And in their children’s lives is shown How richly God can bless his own.* (CW 506:4)

“Therefore strengthen your weak hands and feeble knees,¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated but rather healed.”

One place on that deep woods PhyEd trail crossed a creek on a large log. You had to trust your whole weight on the wood and keep your balance with one foot in front of the other. Picture Jesus’ cross laid over that ravine, and the risen Lord Jesus taking you by the hand. “I’m here,” He says day and night. No need to fear. No reason to faint. **Run to win** in Christ’s **Perseverance, Discipline, Strength**. Amen.

² <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=steve+prefontaine+quotes&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>
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