

# The Race We Are Running

## TEXT: I Corinthians 9:24-27

As a kid preacher, I visualized the race that represented the Christian life as a racer running alone in the race. I was seizing the phrase from the chorus we all sang at youth camp, "Though no one join me, still I will follow" (from I Have Decided to Follow Jesus). I could imagine coming to the end of my life as a single runner breaking the tape at the finish line. After serving the Lord my entire adult life, I realize now more than ever that others were making the same decision, i.e., to follow Jesus though no one follows. I think if we serve God long enough, one day we come to realize what God reminded Elijah of when he believed he was the lone servant of the Lord in I Kings 19:18, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." God intended us to do our part, but always to know the church is a team. To parallel the race concept once more, at my age now I see the race as a relay team. I received the baton from the previous generation and now as I have entered this final lap of service for my Lord, I see that I have come around the last bend and I see a runner in front of me from the next generation and I am sprinting with the baton in hand to reach that young person in front of me.

God has blessed me with this forty-year pastorate of the greatest people in the world. You have been so very kind with my schedule, praying for me as I have preached from coast to coast and around certain parts of the world. For our new members, as well as those who have been here for a decade or longer, I would like to discuss, Why do I preach? Why do I travel and preach? In other words, why do I run individually on my leg of the journey and collectively on our journey together?

### 1. WE RUN WITH THE NEXT GENERATION IN MIND.

II Timothy 2:1 (1-5): "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

Joshua 1:2: "Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel."

### 2. WE RUN UNINHIBITED.

Hebrews 12:1: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

I have never tried to be a CEO. I am a preacher. I am a pastor, not a psychologist.

Philippians 3:13,14: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Acts 20: 26-38. I have never trimmed the message. There have been occasions where I have been invited to preach at very large venues and I was not able to because I was asked to compromise my message, and I could not compromise. Once I was asked to consider a citywide revival campaign with many churches cooperating, but I was informed it would not happen if I preach once saved, always saved. I couldn't accept the invitation. Once a group of fifteen churches were coming together to form a youth camp and all the churches were going to send their kids. The preachers voted for me to come. There was only one stipulation; the requirement was I must agree not to preach against something that I believed in my heart was sin. I couldn't go. I have been asked by Christian colleges and conferences to come preach for them. I was welcome to come, if I did not preach for or with certain other preachers, churches or colleges. I have declined every invitation like that. I explained to one Christian leader that if I agreed to do so, I would be abdicating Lordship of my life to a man. Jesus alone is Lord. Galatians 1:10: "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."

Shoeless Joe Jackson explained how he acquired his famous nickname. It happened during a "mill game" while he was playing with the Spinners. One day he was wearing a pair of ill-fitting new baseball spikes. The spikes' fit was so poorly, they caused a serious case of blisters on his feet. The next day he was still hobbling around. He had a hard time putting on his painful spikes. The team was short on players, so his manager wanted Jackson in the lineup despite the blisters. He reluctantly agreed to play, but his feet still hurt so much that he had to take his shoes off before batting. And he successfully played shoeless. He did not want anything to hinder him while running the bases.

### 3. I RUN WITHIN MY LANE.

Acts 20:24: "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

II Timothy 4:7: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." Paul said he had a course. My course is not yours, neither is your course mine. We are not in competition. We are a team; we must remain in our lane and run our course.

### 4. WE RUN TO WIN.

I want to finish well. Romans 16:10: "Salute Apelles approved in Christ. Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household." The Greek word *dokimos* means tested and approved.

I Corinthians 8:9: "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak."

II Timothy 2:5: "And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully."

I Corinthians 9:27: "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a

castaway.” The word castaway is from the Greek word *adokimos*; as you can see it is the same word for approved in Greek except for one letter serving as a prefix, “a.” It means unapproved, rejected, disapproved.

Shoeless Joe Jackson is considered by many baseball enthusiasts as the greatest baseball player that ever lived. He still is considered by most baseball people to be one of the greatest outfielders of all time. Currently, his .356 lifetime batting average is third all-time. The Great Bambino himself (Babe Ruth) supposedly modeled his batting stance after Jackson's. Some of the greats in baseball history were playing for Charles Albert Comiskey. Comiskey underpaid the White Sox, which added to the belief that eight players earned a right to throw the World Series of 1919 against the Cincinnati Reds. It needs to be said, it is never right to cheat. Joe Jackson was the hero of little boys all over the country. "Say it ain't so, Joe," - a phrase attributed to *Chicago Daily News* reporter Charley Owens in reference to Jackson's admission that he cheated in the 1919 World Series.

After returning to South Carolina years after the scandal, it's been said that Ty Cobb stepped into Joe Jackson's store and Jackson failed to recognize the Hall of Famer. Cobb proceeded to ask Jackson if he knew who he was and Jackson turned around and said, "Sure, I know you, Ty, but I wasn't sure you wanted to know me. A lot of them don't."

The truth is, we'll probably never know if Jackson was the greatest baseball player of all time, because finished too soon. He did not finish well.

##### 5. I RUN TO PLEASE MY LORD.

II Timothy 2:4: "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."

John 8:29: "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him."

-Pastor Pope-