

Finish Your Race

Taken from JumpStart Daily eDevo

finish
your
race -
part 1



"I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."
2 Timothy 4:7

Have you ever noticed that it's easier to start something than it is to finish it? Finishing is sometimes just flat hard to do. These words from the Apostle Paul serve as a great reminder that if we're ever going to finish our race, and fulfill God's plan for our lives, then we will need to do two things: Fight for it, and do it by faith!

In studying the life of Paul, I've noticed four principles that will help all of us to finish our races. Over the next four Fridays, we'll look at one of these principles each week; so here is the first:

1. Know Your Purpose

Why are we here and what are we supposed to do with our lives? The writer of Ecclesiastes tells us that God has placed within our hearts a *"divinely implanted sense of a purpose."* (Eccl. 3:11, AMP)

Paul understood his purpose, and he knew what guided his life. He described how it happened as he stood before King Agrippa, explaining his dramatic encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus:

"So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.'" (Acts 26:15-16, NKJV)

Paul was just doing his own thing, living for his own purpose, and then Jesus stepped in and interrupted his life. The first thing Jesus told him to do was to "stand up." We are never going to finish our race sitting down. It's going to take effort, and not just any kind of effort; it's going to take everything we've got. Then Jesus told him that he would be a minister and a witness. But notice next that Jesus told Paul that he would be a witness of some things that he had seen—as well as a bunch more that was yet to be revealed. In other words, as you and I start our races, there are a lot of things we aren't going to know, but we'll just have to step out and do it by faith.

So what's your purpose? Why do you exist? What's God's plan for you? Actually, the answer's really simple; and once you "know it," you'll find it's easy to live out.

Are you ready? Here it is...the answer to those questions is in two things: To know God and to serve God.

Your first purpose is to know God.

Let's take a look at what happened when Jesus selected the twelve apostles:

"And He (Jesus) went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons." (Mark 3: 13-15, NKJV)

The very first thing that Jesus wanted from His disciples was their time. He understood how important it would be for them to get to know Him personally. He knew that if they were ever going to fulfill their purpose and go out and preach with power that they needed to spend time with Him...just hanging out, getting to know His heart, allowing Him to influence their lives. So our very first purpose is to know God.

Your second purpose is to serve God.

Every one of us is unique. There are no two people on the planet who are the same. We each have different passions, desires and even different gifts and talents.

"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1 Peter 4: 10, NKJV)

Do you see that the gifts that God gives us are *not* for us, but for others? Then—on top of that—the gifts aren't even ours; we can't even claim them. He tells us that we're just stewards over them.

So are you using your gifts to serve others...or yourself? If it's all about you, then you're going to run a lonely race. But, if you're using your gifts to serve others, you'll run a race that's full of friends—full of life!—and you'll be empowered to finish your race with joy.

"Father, thank You for giving me a race to run. I really want to fulfill Your purpose for my life. I want to know You better every day, and I want to serve the people You have placed into my life. Thank You for the gifts that You have given me, and I commit myself to use those gifts to serve others today. In Jesus' Name. Amen."

Yours In Him,

Jeff Jones

finish your race - part 2



"I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."
2 Timothy 4:7

Last Friday, we began a series of lessons on four principles necessary for "finishing our race." Do you remember the first principle that we covered? Let me help you, it was the importance of **knowing your purpose in life**. Today we're going to look at the second principle and that is this: **Don't be moved by circumstances or people**.

1. Circumstances. *"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." (Acts 20:24)*

As Paul shared his life experiences with other church leaders, he was reminding them how important it is for us to not be *moved* by circumstances, whether they are good or bad. Now in Paul's case, he went through some things...some pretty *tough* things, actually. He faced circumstances that would have caused most of us to throw in the towel. But they didn't move him. He dealt with them and didn't allow those circumstances to get him off course.

Here are a few of the things he went through: *"From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep." (2 Corinthians 11:24-25)*

History tells us that they chose to only impose a sentence of 39 stripes because anything over that would typically kill the person. So five times Paul was beaten just inches from death. It was one of those beatings where it hurt so bad that death probably would have been desirable. He was beaten with rods three different times, and once he was stoned and left for dead. Then, three times he was shipwrecked. Wow...kind of makes the stuff we're going through today seem a little insignificant. Anybody out there feel a little bit like a pansy?

So if we're going to finish the race that God has for each one of us, we need to suck it up and fight

through negative circumstances.

2. People. Listen to what Jesus told Paul when He came face to face with him on the road to Damascus:

"I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you." (Acts 26: 17)

Did you see what Jesus just told him? He said, I will deliver you *from* the Jews and the Gentiles...which is pretty much everybody...for the purpose of *sending* you to them. It's interesting, isn't it, that the God of the universe, the Head of the Church, would tell the Apostle Paul and us, that he was delivering us from the very people that we would be called to reach. In other words, He was reminding us that people shouldn't MOVE us.

Jesus totally understood this. One day He came into Jerusalem and the people laid branches in the road and shouted "Hosanna," but later that week these same folks shouted "Crucify Him!" Have you ever had anyone you thought was in your corner turn on you? Ever trust someone you thought was a friend—only to find out that your friendship was conditional, and when those conditions changed they were gone? It's that weird "love you one minute" and "hate you the next" thing. Has it ever happened to you? Well, join the club...and learn not to be moved by circumstances or people; circumstances and people change, but the good news is that Jesus never changes. He's got your back. Hebrews 13:8 says, *"He is the same yesterday, and today, and forever."* So keep your focus on Him regardless of the circumstance you're facing or the people you're dealing with.

"Father in Heaven, I thank you that I have a relationship with You because of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Today I choose to keep my focus on Jesus, and not on the circumstances that I'm facing. Circumstances change, but You never do...so by faith I decide not to be moved by circumstances or people—and to finish my race, running step by step with You. In Jesus' Name. Amen!"

Yours In Him,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff". The letters are cursive and stylized, with a long, sweeping underline for the "f".

Jeff Jones

finish your race - part 3



"I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."
2 Timothy 4:7

The last few Fridays we've been looking at principles that will help all of us to finish our races. The first principle is realizing that **God has a purpose** for every one of us, and the importance of identifying it and then committing ourselves to fulfilling it. The second principle is **not allowing circumstances or people to move us**. Today we're going to look at the third principle: **Staying within your grace**. That's right, we've all been given grace gifts from God and it's vital that we learn to stay within those graces.

"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1 Peter 4:10 NKJV)

This verse tells us three things. First, every one of us has received a gift; second, those gifts aren't for us; and third, we don't own the gifts—we're just stewards of them. Here's some good news: God doesn't love the person who is gifted to sing better than you any more than He loves you. He loves each of us the same. But, we're not gifted the same way and that's OK. You see, we're the same...but we're different. The key is to learn to celebrate our differences and stay within the grace that God has given us, letting our gifts bring glory to the manifold grace of God. When we do that, we'll finish our race and we'll do it with joy.

*"For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, **are not wise.**" (2 Corinthians 10:12 NKJV)*

Have you ever compared yourself to someone else? Let's be honest...we all have. Are you ready to hear a huge secret about life? Are you really sure? Are you sitting down? Here's the secret—there is always someone who does what you do better than you. I remember as a young man working out at the gym, I would get totally bummed when I'd hit a personal best on a lift only to have some old guy walk up to the bench and lift the same amount of weight with ease. And then to add insult to injury, he'd add a few more pounds on the bar and do it again. I had to learn then—as I've had to re-learn over the years—to be happy with who God made me to be. We have to learn to be happy in our own skin. God made each one of us unique, and has given us different grace gifts for a reason. Our job is simply to take whatever gifts God has given us and do our very best with them.

"Father, I want to thank You for the gifts that You have given me. Thank You for trusting me to use

*these gifts to serve others. I commit myself to You—to serve You and Your people—every day of my life, and I **will** finish my race. In Jesus' Name, Amen!"*

Yours In Him,



Jeff Jones

finish your race - part 4



*"I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."
2 Timothy 4:7*

Today, we're concluding a series of Friday devotionals—looking at four principles that will help all of us to finish our races. The first principle is realizing that **God has a purpose** for every one of us, and the importance of identifying that purpose and then committing ourselves to fulfilling it. The second principle is **not allowing circumstances or people to move us**. The third principle is **learning to stay within your grace**. The fourth principle may actually be the most important in terms of finishing our race. In fact, this one serves as the foundation for the other three, and it's this: **Love God and love people**.

One day a lawyer came to Jesus to find out which one of the commandments was the most important one to live by. This is how Jesus answered him, and the same thing remains just as true today:

"...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40, NKJV)

If we're going to stay on course and finish the race that is set before us, then it's hugely important that we keep our hearts hooked up with God and love Him with everything we've got. Jesus made it

abundantly clear when He said we're to love God with "all our heart, all our soul and all our mind." He is simply challenging us to make Him the center of our affection. Is that possible? Sure it is. Remember what it says in First John? *"We love Him, because He first loved us."* (1 John 4:19, NKJV)

That is such an awesome truth; Jesus loves us, and because He loves us we get to love Him back! Jesus is absolutely, totally in love with you and nothing you will ever do can change that. Romans 5:8 says, *"But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (NKJV)

Because of His love toward us, we definitely have the ability to love Him too—but how do we do that? How do we show God that we love Him with everything we've got? Well, it's actually pretty easy. Jesus said, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments."* (John 14:15, NKJV)

One of the ways that we show Jesus that we love Him is by being doers of His Word. Every time we chose to honor and obey His written Word, we demonstrate to Him that we love Him. *"But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him."* (1 John 2:5, NKJV)

Of course the other way we do that is by loving people. Remember what it says in Romans 5:5?

"Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who was given to us." (NKJV)

Did you know that God has placed inside of you the ability to love the unlovable? It's true; the same love that Jesus loves us with has been supernaturally placed within our hearts. When was the last time you tapped into that? It's the love that allows us to genuinely love our enemies, to love people regardless of whether or not we are loved back. Let's tap into this supernatural and powerful principle today, and love God and love people with everything we've got!

"Father, I thank You for loving me and for placing Your love inside of me for You and for others. I will love You with all my heart, with all my soul and with all my mind; and I will love my neighbor as myself. So, help me to tap into Your love for the people that You place in my life—because I declare by faith that I will fight the good fight, I will finish my race, and I will keep the faith. In Jesus' Name, Amen!"

Yours In Him,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jeff Jones