

*Finish Well*I. Slide1 **Announce:**

- A. Slide2 Baby Dedication: *Tom & Suzie Lazerus*. Matthew Thomas 8yrs. Rachel Marie 2 1/2.
- B. Slide3 *The Drop Box*, an award-winning documentary. [tickets on sale today only] ICA Fundraiser.

I. Slide4 **Intro: Title: Finish Well**

- A. Last week: We move from God being the *disciplining* parent to the *demanding* track coach.
- B. Here the writer deals with *very practical everyday Christian living*.
 - 1. He knew that sometimes it is given to a man to mount up w/wings as an eagle; sometimes man is enabled to run & not be weary; but he also knew that of all things it is hardest to walk every day and not to faint.¹
- C. Outline: Finish Strong. Guard Against...

II. Slide5 **FINISH STRONG** (12-14)

- A. Here the writer runs back to his **running analogy**. (vs.1 let us run w/endurance the race set before us)
 - 1. Remember, the spiritual life is a *long distance run*.
- B. Slide6 **RUN TOUGH** (12)
- C. The call here is to *tough it out, suck it up, gut it out!*
- D. The picture is that of a runner nearing the finish line, completely exhausted, wanting to give up, blistered feet, cramping calves, dry mouth, & heavy legs.
 - 1. Read Story: Last page.
- E. Isaiah said, **Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, Be strong, do not fear!** Behold, your God will come...35:3,4.
- F. This is what we call *Muscular Christianity*.
 - 1. Slide7 **THE U.S. COAST GUARD CUTTER HEALY** is designed to break 4 ½ feet of ice continuously at 3 knots and can operate in temperatures as low as -50 degrees F. The ship slams against the wicked ice of the Northwest Passage. From inside the vessel's belly, the ice seems to be fighting back, roaring, screaming, pounding against the steel hull. The ship is stopped cold in the frozen tracks of the passage. It pauses, backs up in black water, then rams the great white frozen ridges again. The weakened ice finally bends and gives way. The Healy, the newest icebreaker in the

¹ William Barclay, Hebrews, pg.179

U.S. Coast Guard, moves slowly forward, as if putting a foot through the throat of the Arctic. But to either side of the ship, the ice is untouched, six feet thick, looking like a frozen extension of land. **Push on!**

a) No it's not a *do-it-yourself Christian Life...but* Christians must *will to tough it out* by **God's great grace.**

G. **Slide8 RUN TOUGH TOGETHER** (13)

H. **Straight paths** – *the track* made by the feet of the runners. Or it's speaking of *the running lane*.

I. (NIV) **Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. Help everyone finish the race! :)**

1. The idea is clear...*put the paths in better order so as to make the race easier for the Lame.* [As soon as **hurdlers** were finished, *get hurdles off track* for next race]
2. The image is of the **weak runners** helping the **weaker runners** at the end of the race. **And** it is the **strong runners** coming back after their race, to help those **struggling to finish.**
3. The call here is to **corporate toughness** in **helping each other** to run well.
 - a) What a great snapshot of Church life.

J. **Slide9 RUN AFTER PEACE AND HOLINESS** (14)

K. This kind of peace is to be **pursued**. It requires **effort**; **it is not** something that just *happens*. It is a product of mental & spiritual toil & sweat.

1. Matter of fact, **Peace is not made with friends. Peace is made with enemies.**²
[Israeli Prime Minister *Yitzhak Rabin*, quoted in Newsweek]

L. **Here we need the runners lean at the finish line...** because frankly, some people are just difficult to live peaceably with.

1. Rom.12:18 **If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.** (NIV)
2. **Peace with all people** is something we must **pursue**. It's a choice. It's intentional.

M. **Holiness** – the root meaning is always **difference & separation**.

1. **Yes**, we **live in** this world, **but** we are to be **different** from it & **separate** from it.

² (Sept. 13, 1993). Christianity Today, Vol. 37, no. 12.

a) In this epistle *holiness* has already been explained (10:14,22) as *a drawing near to God w/a cleansed conscience*.

2. Our aim is not to **stand well w/men**; but to **stand well w/God**.

3. **Sin will grow w/o sowing**, but **holiness needs cultivation**.

4. **Pursue** it, as a hunter pursues his prey. [**pursue**: to hunt, to follow after, to pursue]

N. **No one will see the Lord?** – *holiness* is referring to the *sanctifying process* that occurs in the life of the true believer. **He is not speaking of perfection already attained.**

1. **Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.** Mt.5:8

O. **Slide10 e.g.** When an **observatory** is about to be built, the **site** selected is always on some high mountain. The aim is to find a place where there is a clear, unobstructed view of the heavens. Similarly, **faith** requires for its heavenly vision the highlands of holiness and separation, the pure sky of a consecrated life.³ *A.B.Simpson*

III. **Slide11 GUARD AGAINST...** (15-17)

A. **Slide12 GRACELESSNESS** (15a)

B. **Looking carefully** - taking oversight. **Lest anyone** - care for your brother, *be your brothers keeper*. So they don't **fall short of the grace of God**.

C. **Who can & how do you fall short of the grace of God?**

1. **It's like the group** that left Egypt, **but came** up short of the promise land.

2. **It's the person today** who for a time makes an attempt at *trying the Christianity thing*, **yet** comes up short of experiencing the grace of God, never truly become possessed of it **or** by it. *Adapted, Andrew Murray, pg.50*

a) Now he names **2 things** by which one can **fall short of the grace of God**.

D. **Slide13 BITTERNESS** (15b)

E. This is taken from Deut.29:18 **that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood.** Or^(NIV) **make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison.**

1. **Gall** was the bitterest substance, from a plant, in biblical times. Thus why it is often used in the same context. **Amos 6:12 you have turned justice into gall, And the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.**

a) Gall was some bitter poisonous plant, probably the poppy. [*took the edge off at crucifixions*]

2. **Is there any root of bitterness planted in your hearts soil?**

³ A. B. Simpson in A Larger Christian Life. Christianity Today, Vol. 41, no. 8.

- a) We all know how the **roots of weeds** spread rapidly, they go undetected & deprive **crop-producing plants** vital nutrients & the result yields *a reduced harvest*.
3. Every **plant** can only bring forth what its **root** supplies...
- a) If you have **gossip roots**, be guaranteed you'll grow a **poisonous plant**.
- b) If you have **envy & jealousy roots**, be guaranteed you'll grow a **toxic tree**.
- F. **And many become defiled** - This is a warning against the **infection** from the world.
1. **Defile** conveys the idea of *giving something color by painting or staining it*.
- G. **Slide14a GODLESSNESS** (16,17)
- H. **Fornicator** – pornos. **Profane** – godless, irreligious.
- I. **Esau** (means *hairy*, but also called *Big Red*, from the *red lentil stew* he sold his birthright for)
1. (msg) *Watch out for the Esau syndrome: trading away God's lifelong gift in order to satisfy a short-term appetite. You well know how Esau later regretted that impulsive act & wanted God's blessing - but by then it was too late, tears or no tears.*
2. **Esau** was completely **earthbound**. All his thoughts were on what he could touch, taste, feel. **Instant gratification sums up his life**. He was void of spiritual values. He was godless.
- a) **Kent Hughes summed him up best**. Esau was a *pornos* subject to the whims of his *Tomcat nature*. He was the archetype of the *20th century testosterone man*. He was focused on food, fun & females. **A sensual man who put the needs of his body 1st**.
- Slide14b** Esau was like *a living beer commercial*. [The Most Interesting man, Dos Equis Commercial]
3. He describes the man whose mind recognizes **nothing higher than earth**, for whom there is **nothing sacred**, who has **no reverence** for the unseen.
- a) This profane/godless/irreligious/unhallowed life is a life w/o any **awareness of, or interest in, God**.
- J. **Slide15** There is a **choice** placed before all of us of *which world* we'll choose: *earth/heavenbound*
1. **This world down here**, includes a life of living a profane/godless/irreligious/unhallowed life, w/o any **awareness of, or interest in, God**. Or...
2. **The world to come**, includes relationship with God, things sacred, holy, beautiful, godly, and a life **full of forgiveness & Grace**.
- a) Everyone is cast into eternity...into a place of perfect union w/God, or a place of ultimate pain, apart from Him.

K. **Communion**:

By now, the rigors of having run nearly 20 miles are beginning to tell. My stride has shortened. My legs are tight. My breathing is shallow and fast. My joints are becoming raw & worn. My neck aches from all the jolts that have ricocheted up my spine. Half-dollar-size blisters sting the soles of my feet. I'm beginning to feel queasy and light-headed. I want to stop running I have "hit the wall."

Now the real battle begins. Up the first of many long inclines I start to climb, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, right-left, right-left, right-left. I keep watching my feet move, one after the other, hypnotized by the rhythm, the passage of the asphalt below...shoulder cramps, leaden legs, searing blisters, dry throat, empty stomach, Stop – Keep moving – must finish...

A radio-listening spectator reports that the race is over. 6 miles away, Bill Rogers has won again. His ordeal is done; the most intense of my own is about to begin.

"Heartbreak Hill" - the last, the longest & the steepest, a half-mile struggle against gravity designed to finish off the faint and faltering. Hundreds of people standing along the hill, watching...[urging] the walkers to jog, the joggers to run, the runners to speed on to Boston.... Slowly, ever so slowly, the grade begins to level out...

The last 4 miles are seemingly endless. Some runners, their eyes riveted catatonically to the ground, trudge alone in their bare feet, holding in their hands the shoes that have blistered & bloodied their feet. **Others** team up to help each other, limping along, arm-in-arm, like maimed and battle-weary soldiers returning from the front.

Finally, the distinctive profile of the Prudential Building looms on the horizon. I begin to step up my pace. Faster, faster...smoother, smoother. Suppress the pain. Finish up strong. Careful – not too fast. Don't cramp...

I can see the yellow stripe 50 yards ahead. I run faster, pumping my arms, pushing off my toes, defying clutching leg cramps to mount a glorious, last-gasp kick...40 yards, 30 yards, 20 yards... Cheers and clapping...10 yards...finish line... an explosion of euphoria... I am clocked in at 2 hours, 50 minutes and 49 seconds. My place: 1,176. I find the figures difficult to believe, but if they're accurate, then I have run the best marathon in my life.

While times and places are important, and breaking a personal record is thrilling (especially as you grow older), the real joy of the Boston Marathon is just *finishing*...doing what you have set out to do.⁴

⁴ Art Carey, Beating Agony and the Marathon, Philadelphia Inquirer, April 12, 1978. From Kent Hughes, Hebrews Vol.2 pg177,178.