

Gateway Fellowship Church

Marathon Faith

Part One

August 26th, 2018

Teacher: John Van Pay, Lead Pastor

Have you ever been so desperately out of shape that you would try anything? Anybody? (Audience raises hands) Some of you are looking at me right now and you're all hangry and upset and you look mad at the world because someone convinced you that the solution was the Keto Diet. Right? You're just hungry right now. I think the most sacred and holy thing you could do is just leave right now and go down to our Café and eat a taco. Alright? On the house! Do us all a favor.

I remember once hearing that nothing will motivate you to get in shape than when you sign up for a race. There was a time where I was overweight, out of shape. So, I signed up for my first ever triathlon. I had two options. I could do the sprint distance, or I could do the Olympic distance. I thought the Sprint distance is for kids and non-athletes. I'm going to do the Olympic distance where you swim about a mile, then you bike 25k and then you run the 10k. I had three weeks to prepare for this race! I remember toeing the line with 150 of my competitors. I was ready to go. When that whistle blew I took off for a mad sprint and dove into the water and started swimming as fast as I could. I can't tell you how good I felt. I was like, Man, I'm a natural. I really thought I was going to win that race! You see all that adrenaline was masking my ability. As I was swimming I could feel the lactic acid just pouring into my body. Lack of oxygen just caused my body to seize up. I had cramps all over my body. Parts I didn't even know I had were cramping up and the only thing I knew to do—because I literally thought I was going to drown—was to flop over on my back, like a dead fish, and just started breathing. Taking in as much air as possible while people were just swimming over me. It was like a washing machine. Elbows, knees—just taking me down. I'm like Jesus Help Me I'm going to die out in the middle of this lake! Well I finished that dumb race, completely last—but I finished!

Did you know that your life is a race? And it's not how you start, but how you finish that matters. It's not how you start, but how you finish that counts. The bible mentions 3,237 different people and on average only one in three finished well. Only one in three. We are going to discover over the next few months the endurance runners of the bible who finished well. I'm so excited that you are here to start this brand-new series called Marathon Faith.

Will you turn with me in your bibles to Hebrews Chapter (12)? This letter was written primarily to encourage you not to quit. It was originally written to some Hebrew Jews who converted to Christianity. They were living underneath Roman oppression and persecution. Not only that, but a lot of their friends and family members were trying to pull them back into their former religion of Judaism. And so, the Holy Spirit is inspiring this author to write this letter of encouragement saying Don't Quit. Don't Give up. Saying I want you to focus on Jesus. And that's the word for us today. That we would lean in. That the Holy Spirit would give you a special revelation from the Word of God today. No matter where you're at. Because some of you are struggling. Some of you don't know if you can go on any more. You have failed too much. You have sinned too often. You have got a relationship that is dragging you down. But I want you to know there is hope today! Let's look at the Word of God starting in verse 1 Hebrews chapter 12. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses—You know the Greek word for witness here is martyr. A martyr is one who never renounces their faith. Never gives up, even under the possibility of death. So, this cloud of witnesses—imagine you're in a stadium and you're about to run a race and there is this cloud of witnesses—a stadium of people. What I have realized is that these clouds of witnesses are not there to cheer us on. It's not what they see in us that encourages us to keep going—rather, it's what we see in them.

And so, whenever you see the word Therefore—you have to ask yourself, what is there for? You can look back at Hebrews Chapter 11 and there are 20 specific names of those who finished strong. Those who are the endurance runners. I want to invite you back next week because we are going to discover something inside of each of them that will help us become strong in our Faith. So as the Word continues Let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely. When you're running a race, quite honestly, the way to go faster and more efficiently is if you drop the weight. Body weight—but any kind of weight. So, you can be more aerodynamic. So, I want to ask you, in your spiritual race, what is holding you back? What is weighing you down? It might be easy to observe the things in our lives that are really negative, right? Like spending too much time binge watching Netflix shows, Social Media, Pornography, an unhealthy relationship. But sometimes it's not necessarily the bad things, but the good things that we give too much time and attention to that can hold us back. Right? It could be a hobby, even a career. Or maybe the person that is holding you back is yourself. When you have an abundance, you can become so self-reliant that you're no longer dependent upon the Lord. You don't need a Savior any more. It's a very dangerous place. What are you putting your eyes on? What's holding you back? You could be putting your eyes on church, or a song, or an experience. If it's anything other than Jesus, then it's an idol. So, we have to check ourselves. And now is the time to go, alright, I need to take my eyes off of anything else or even myself and put them only on one person. The Word of God says "And let us run with —what?—endurance. Now you only need endurance if you're running a marathon. The reality is that your faith, your life is not a sprint, it's a marathon. It says "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to who? Come on, say His name like you know Him! Looking to who? JESUS! Right? Looking to Jesus.

A couple of months ago I was invited to a Spurs game by some friends that came in from out of town. While we were there, they weren't Spurs fans, so I was trying to educate them in the way of the Spurs. I was really passionate and during the course of this game, Manu Ginobili made this circus shot and it

went in and I stood up to my feet and I was like “Maaaaannnnuuuuuu!” “Maaaaannnnuuuu!” and my friends said hey I don’t think that’s Manu. I was like what are you talking about? I know a man on grandpa juice when I see him. That’s Manu Ginobili I have his jersey, I know my man. And literally my friend handed me his glasses. I was like, I don’t wear glasses. He was like, just put these glasses on. I put his glasses on and I looked down and realized the guy was Tony Parker. And I could see the name on the back of the jersey and I could see the names of everybody. I looked around the stadium and I could read the signs and the banners, and I could see everything! It was like I could see for the first time in my life. It was like moving from a 13 inch, 1983, television screen to a 60-inch plasma HD. That’s what it felt like for me. I could see again. What had happened was, now that I am in my mid 40’s I had developed a condition called presbyopia—it’s a real condition—it comes from the word presby meaning older and opia—eyes. It’s a condition of the aging of the eyes where you are no longer able to focus on one thing. I want to ask you, how are your eyes? Your spiritual eyes? Do you have spiritual presbyopia?

For some of you, there was a time maybe many years ago where you were close to the Lord. You spent time with Him with your devotional life. You served Him. You had a personal relationship with Him. You knew Him. You had close fellowship with Him. But years have gone by and you have allowed sin, or relationships, or the things of this world to get your attention and you have taken your gaze off Jesus and you have fixed your eyes on other things and Jesus is no longer clearly seen any more. So, the author is saying Look to Jesus. Another translation is Fix your eyes on Jesus. The founder and perfecter of our faith. Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Notice—this is like, why did Jesus endure the Cross? It says that there was joy there. What was joy? It was to bring glory to His Father and to save you. Save Me. That’s what enabled the Lord to continue on in His race when things got hard and when He suffered more pain and persecution and the Cross. More pain than any of us would ever dream about. And this is the Gospel. He did this for you. The reality is the truth is that because of your sin you deserved a consequence which is eternal death. And if you don’t do anything else, know this, your day is coming where the wrath of God is going to come on you and there will be judgement. That’s the reality. And your works can’t save you. The faith of your parents can’t save you. You’re going to stand before God and God is going to say, “What did you do with my Son?” I gave you opportunity after opportunity. And the gospel is this—that God so loved the world—he so loved you, that He sent His Only Son Jesus. John 1:14 that the word became flesh. He came down. He lived the life. A sinless life. He showed us the way to the Father. He said No Man can come to the Father. I am The Way, The Truth and The Life. There is no salvation in any other. And because Jesus died on the Cross and because His blood was spilled, and His body was broken He substituted himself. A price had to be paid. God is a just God. And Jesus paid the price for you and me and that is the Gospel. He did His part. He bridged the gap. He reconciled the relationship.

Now what is your part? Bible says to confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that Jesus is alive and that He is The Son of God. That you would confess your sins and receive forgiveness. That you would repent of your sins simply means to turn from sin and turn to God. There is a change in your actions. There is a change in your behavior. There is a change in your words. You were once selfish and now you are generous. A life change happens where you are reborn into a new person. And that is the

Gospel and that is the reason why the Lord went through all of this for you. So, what does this have to do with you? Reality is, some of you are here, and you've been invited. Or you're new and you're struggling. You have got some hurt in your life. Maybe there is a sin or an addiction or a stronghold that is holding you back and you know exactly what it is. If there was a spotlight on it, You know what that is. And it's holding you back. And it's keeping you from continuing on. For some of you, you have bitterness, and hurt and unforgiveness. What is it that is holding you back?

The reason why we are doing this series, the reason why I felt like God had called me to write this book Marathon Faith is because I have seen so many of our friends that are struggling with depression that are tempted to give up. Anxiety is so high. Suicides are ranking so high amongst our military. In fact, just two weeks before my book was released, a friend of mine passed away. He took his own life. I had just had lunch with him. Right down the road at Yum Thai. I listened to him and I knew he was struggling with discouragement, but I had no idea it was that bad. I remember sitting down with his wife here at the church planning his funeral service and I remember just confessing to her how mad I was at Bill because he never said goodbye. And then two days later, I received an envelope in the mail. In it was our Gateway Volunteer lanyard that he had and a letter and a key to his truck. He didn't like that my primary mode of transportation was a motorcycle, so he was giving me his truck. I'll be honest—when the book came out I was sad. I was really struggling because he didn't finish strong. Every time I drove his truck I was thinking about Bill. About what could've been. What could've been if he didn't give up. There was still so much more. Over the last six months as I have been driving that truck, I have been thinking about you and praying for you and anyone that is here or is in our community or in our church that is struggling. Struggling to go on. Struggling to put one foot in front of the other. There is so much hurt. So much loss. So much separation.

Father, as we humble ourselves and we close our eyes, we are in your presence. You said where two or three are gathered together I am in the midst. Holy Spirit I know that you have been drawing, and as we lift up your name and lift up the Word of God, I pray that you would just begin to minister. That you would begin to draw friends to yourself. That you would convict them of things in their life that they have fixed their eyes on other than you. Would you bring conviction that would lead to repentance? What is it in your life that you need to let go of?

I am reminded of an old song you may have heard it before. The words are simple. It says Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will go strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace. Some of you have heard it before and some of you it may be new to. Let it be a prayer, a confession as the Lord brings you back into focus of who He is.

Congregation is lead in singing of the hymn.

KDD

8/30/18