

# Running the Race Successfully

by Erlo Stegen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of self-control and discipline in the Christian life to successfully run the race towards the imperishable crown.*

**Duration:** 1:20:11

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:14-16, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 17:1-8, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

**Topics:** "Goal"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares a story about a king who is frustrated with his son's behavior. The king gives his son a last chance to change, and orders his generals to take sharp swords. The preacher then discusses the power of temptation and how some people are easily drawn to sinful behaviors. However, the son in the story is able to resist temptation because his focus is on protecting a precious shell and its oil. The sermon concludes with the preacher emphasizing the importance of self-control and being a light in the world.

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## Transcript

Lord, please take this service, the last service of this weekend. Please be with us. Help us through your word.

That even as we go, we will go with having put on the armor. Amen. Now text is what we see up here on the wall, a city on a hill.

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Friends, we have spoken a lot about being on the hilltop, on the mountaintop.

We have said that every member of CFT must be on the mountaintop. In fact, every Christian, every child of God must be on the mountaintop. If you are not there on the mountaintop, you are not where God wants you to be.

Everyone must strive to climb that mountain, to be on the mountaintop and to stay there, not to get there and to come down again. Recently in Romania, I spoke about running the race. How one runs the race to win it, to win the prize, denying everything in order to attain that prize.

It is a high and uplifted place. I thought of that word concerning that race. 1 Corinthians 9 verse 24 Those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize.

Run in such a way that you may obtain it. Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. They do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

Therefore I run thus, not with uncertainty. Thus I fight, not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

So that we can run this race and that we can climb the mountain of the Lord, to dwell on His holy mountain, we need to be temperate in all things and exercise self-control. If you as a Christian do not exercise self-control in all things, you won't make it. Paul here illustrates it with an Olympic athlete who denies many things, lays off everything that could hinder him, and he runs towards a goal.

If you want to be successful in this race, you need to exercise self-control. You need to put everything you have into it. You train for many years, exercising your body, you punish it.

Because you don't even eat what you would like to eat. You deny yourself many things because you want to win the prize. You heard these days, to be on the mountaintop, you need to be in a high place, uplifted.

Your life can't be one in the valley or in a hole, in a depressed state. Your life needs to be an exalted one. One preacher said to another, listen brother, don't have such a high standard, you must lower your standards.

If you try to live up to those standards of yours, you'll lose everyone, you'll even lose your own children. We dare not, we cannot lower the standard. If we lower it, we'll be like salt that has lost its saltiness.

We'll be just worthless. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit said, a believer, one who is in the race, he who is striving to attain to that imperishable crown, he needs to exercise self-control in all things. This is extremely important.

This is a hard and fast rule to every Christian and for every Christian. Someone who is a true believer, really born again, genuine, not just someone who just claims to be, you will find such a person controlling himself in all things. What does that mean? What does God mean when he says we must exercise self-control in all things? It means that everything that could be a hindrance, that could be an obstacle in your running the race fully and receiving the prize, living on the mountaintop, any obstacle in achieving that goal, you need to exercise self-control in those things.

We could mention many things. We don't have time to go into detail, but there are big things and there are small things. But yet there is no big thing.

There is nothing worse than sin. There is no worse and no bigger obstacle in a Christian's life than sin. Sin, no matter what size or form it takes, no matter how big or small it may seem, will rob you of that crown.

That crown of victory. If you allow sin, you won't get that crown of victory that doesn't perish, you will just receive disgrace. That's the crown you'll get.

Jesus wants us on the mountaintop. That's where He'll reveal Himself to us, in the same way as He told His disciples, Go to that mountain, that's where I'll meet you. And that's where He revealed Himself to them.

So Jesus will reveal Himself to you if you're on the mountaintop. He won't do it if you're down in the hole, in the valley. Remember in Hebrews 12, Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, Jesus was prepared to suffer, He endured the cross because of the joy set before Him. The same way as Moses also, He turned His back on the pleasures of Egypt and all that Egypt had to offer Him. So we look unto Jesus.

Remember I shared with you about that Indian king who had one son, the heir, but he was a worthless fellow. And this king was very worried about his son, saying, how can he become king in my place if he lives the way he is? He was a drunkard, smoking and hanging around with girls and using drugs, just a worthless chap. His father tried every day to correct him, to help him, to end one ear out the other, sometimes it didn't even go in the one, he just didn't want help.

Then he said, but how can I help my son? And eventually he got to the point where he said, well maybe the royal line must just stop where we are now, I must be the last king. But then he called two of his generals. He said to his generals, I don't know what to do, I've got to an end with my son, I've tried to help him, it just doesn't help.

He said, I'm the king, I've got all that I have and look what I am, but my son lives like a dog. He said to his generals, I today am giving my son a last chance. I'd rather not have a son than have one that is like he is.

And he told his generals each to take a sword. These were very well prepared swords, they were sharp as a razor that cut both sides. And he said, I'm going to call in my son.

And he said to his generals, I want one of you to stand either side of him. He called his son and he put him in between them. And then he took a shell, an open shell, and then he filled it with oil.

He filled it right to the top. And he said to his generals, I want you now to go with my son. He must carry this shell and if one drop of oil spills out, the first one to see it must take out his sword and chop his head off.

And he said to his generals, I want you now to go with my son. He said to his son, my son, I want you to take this shell with this oil and you must walk down this route, along this route. And the route he chose was down the road where all the brothels were, where all the prostitutes lived, where he spent his time.

He didn't even sleep at home anymore, he'd spend his time there. But he had to go right down the same street with this shell. And then he said, turn down the name of the brothel.

And the next street, and that was the street where all his worthless pals were hanging out, the ones that used drugs. I wonder if there were some Nigerians there as well, because they're very much into drugs. And everyone knows that they can get drugs from them, even the whites go to them.

White girls, decent girls, go to a Nigerian to get drugs. One isn't surprised that the whites are being, so to say, eliminated here in Africa, because many of them are just worthless. Can God bless them if they live such a life? So the father chose that route that took him past all these places that he usually used to spend his time at.

Past all these friends of his, and that route would take him right through those places and back to the palace. And off they went. Eventually they got back, and the father asked the generals, didn't a drop of oil fall out? And the generals said, not a drop was spilled.

He said, but how could you be back so quickly? They said, well we stuck to the route, we didn't leave the route anywhere. And the king said to his son, but my son, how did you get past the prostitute's house? Wasn't it difficult? Wasn't it difficult for you? The son said, no. And he said, my son, but when you walked past the bar, how did you get past there? Wasn't it tough? He said, no, but how did you get past the bar? Their feet turn automatically and they go inside.

He said, but didn't you go into the bar when you went past it yourself? And he said, what about your friends? When you got to them, those people that you always chat together with, they talk about sex and they smoke, they're drugs. Weren't you tempted? He said, no, I wasn't. How? He said, but my son, how is it possible? You always tell me the temptation is just too great.

You can't help yourself. What happened today? What was different? What happened today? What was different? And the son said to the king, I didn't notice all those things. My eyes were glued to the shell and the oil that was in the shell.

Because I wasn't, I didn't dare one drop to be spilt because I knew that would have been my end. He said, even the devil with all his demons, I wasn't even aware of all those things because I was so focused on the shell and the oil. Now we are told, lay aside everything that will hold you up and that can hinder you.

Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith. That's what we are supposed to do. But how can you, you young girl, you say, oh, it's the boys that are such a temptation, or the boy says it's the girls.

In the name, in the name of our Lord, I guarantee you that if anybody here focuses totally and sets his eyes totally on Jesus and strives toward that goal, you will be successful. You will make it if you do that. If you go away from here, wherever you go, be at home or wherever you are, if you keep your eyes on the goal, on that mountain top, knowing that that's where God wants me to be in every aspect of my life, in what I say, in what I think, in what I want, in every aspect, to be on the mountain top.

If you have that goal and are focused 100% on that goal, your life won't be worthless and you won't be a dropout. And remember, by living on the mountain top, that doesn't mean that the devil will forget about you. He will worry very much about you and he'll do everything he can to get you off there.

He'll turn people against you, they'll talk lies about you, but then you can rejoice if it's because of God's sake. So anything that could be an obstacle, a hindrance to you, you need to exercise self-control. Our brother Peter Hammond spoke yesterday morning about the Muslims, saying it's the biggest mission field today.

It's true. One day I spoke to a Muslim. I was trying to win this Muslim for the Lord.

But I was doing it in such a way that he didn't notice where I was actually heading to. But as I was speaking, I got to a certain point and he suddenly jumped up and said, Wait a minute, are you trying to convert me? I said, who said so? He said, I see now where you're heading to. And he said, Mr. Stegen, let me just ask you.

He said, do you want our women to dress like your women do? He said, do you want our daughters, our girls to dress the way the Christian girls dress? He said, do you want them to wear those tight-fitting dresses showing off the figure? Do you really want us to become like them? He said, do you want them to wear these low-cut dresses that you can see the udder of the cow? He's decent and dignified. He's interpreting like an Englishman. Now allow me to tell you the naked truth, TNT.

And you want them to wear these short dresses with the slits right up? Is that what you want from us? He says, well, we don't want it. That's an abomination to us. We abhor it.

It's a curse to us. And you Christian women walk around like that? Is that living on top of the mountain? Don't tell me, leave us alone. We can do what we like.

I know that's the modern trend, the modern Christians. We're not under the law. We are free.

Free. Not under the law. And then they cancel the Ten Commandments.

That's not for us. And then they cancel the Ten Commandments. That's not for us.

And this applies to everyone, whether you're black or white, no matter what nationality you are, we all need to be on the mountaintop, that will be an example even to the Muslims and show them what it's like to live on the mountaintop. If we're on the mountaintop we need to be a light to all the nations, as Jesus said. I spoke to a Hindu woman, I told her how our young people live, how they get married, how they get engaged and married, and she said, well I take my hat off to you.

If you don't live up to it you won't be able to win anyone who's got some sense in his head. Maybe you'll just be able to convince someone who doesn't have much sense. Sin, even the smallest sin, is more dangerous than the worst cancer.

There is no disease, not even AIDS, there is absolutely no disease as dangerous as sin, the disease of sin. And yet when you have cancer, and even if it's breast cancer or prostate cancer, you are prepared to go to a doctor, even to a surgeon to cut it out, but sin is far worse than that. And after the surgery you're even prepared to go for radio or chemotherapy, and you're prepared that they even destroy, even which wasn't so bad, and wasn't bad at all, you're prepared to go through all that.

In Hebrews we read how you must lay aside everything that will be a hindrance to us, every sin. And it's that sin that entangles you, it grows around you and gets you into knots and makes you totally immobile, that you cannot run anymore. It takes so, it taps you of your strength.

You don't have the freedom to run anymore. It would be nice if you would all understand German. Sin hinders us in our battle for our salvation.

Any sin, no matter what, hinders you and separates you from heaven. And you won't get the crown that will be received by those living on the mountaintop, you'll get a crown of disgrace. Because of sin you won't get a crown of glory, you'll get one of disgrace.

So you need to be on your guard, avoiding sin. You can call it what you like, whether it be small to you or big, but a Christian is not allowed to sin. You need to avoid every sin, if you don't, God's wrath will come upon you.

But people who are just Christians by name, they don't take sin seriously. No, they just go through their Christian life very superficially. It's all just a big joke.

And then in German you also speak about these sins. But how can you be a true Christian and still tolerate sin? How can you call yourself a true Christian when with your eye you are still making contact with sin? But you get these modern Christians that are saved and yet they still tolerate sin, and the world, and the lusts of the flesh. You need to realize that sin is the work of the devil.

How can you say you're living for God and yet you're allowing sin in your life? John the Apostle didn't have the same gift as Peter who had the gift of healing, healing people and even raising the dead. And yet John had tremendous authority, he had a meeting with God and he said, a person who sins is not of God. He had experienced the power of God and he said, I'd rather lose everything, even my own life, rather than that I sin.

Like it says in the New Testament, you haven't resisted sin to the point of the shedding of blood. That meaning that I say I'd rather die than that I should sin. That one says I'd rather die than that I should tolerate sin.

That one sees sin and one does nothing about it because one says, oh well I'm scared of what people will say and what they'll do to me. But one says, I'd rather die than that I keep quiet about it. The Bible says clearly that Jesus came to do away with sin.

We say we Christians, his followers, how can we tolerate sin in our midst? Charles Studd was a missionary in Central Africa where he went to the cannibals there to bring them the gospel. And he preached to the people there, these cannibals. Some of his co-workers said, Mr. Studd, you can't expect such a high standard from these cannibals.

These are just people in Africa, they are cannibals, you cannot expect them to live up to that Christian standard. They said these people, they eat human flesh, they cannibals, you can't expect them to live up to that Christian standard that you expect of them. He said, I don't care whether they are Africans, blacks or whites, this is God's standard and it doesn't change.

And about half of his co-workers left him. So I'm not the first one to lose co-workers. I'd rather lose everybody of them than lower this God's standard.

The Bible says he who sins is of the devil. If you are living a life in sin and there is sin in your life, then the book of John condemns you, the Bible does. Remember that woman who was caught in the act of adultery.

They brought her and the Pharisees said she needs to be condemned. And he wrote in the sand and he said, well, he who has no sin, let him throw the first stone. And they all disappeared.

And when he looked up, he said, where are they? She said, they've all left. Does no one condemn you? He says, well, neither do I. But go and sin no more. Every sin is a work of the devil.

If you can understand German. Every sin is a work of the devil. And you glorify it and tolerate it in your life.

Every sin is a work of the devil. Do you understand what that means? And yet you tolerate it in your life. So if you're a true Christian, a genuine one, not just the hypocritical one, you say, I'd rather die than that I

sin.

I'd rather lose everything, even my own life, rather than that I should sin, even the smallest sin. God's law applies to every single one of us. And when we've become Christians, it doesn't mean that we're not under that law anymore.

Like a person who walks around without any clothes and says, well, God has set me free. And God only looks inside. He doesn't look on the outside.

That's not the kind of freedom and liberty God came to give us. That is not from heaven, it's from hell. And if you allow these things in your life, and maybe you think they're just small things, but allow them in your life, and you'll lose your authority, you will become slack and indifferent in your Christian life.

You're, in fact, already in the lion's stomach. He who runs in the race, he exercises self-control in all things. And remember, there's no greater thing, no greater obstacle than sin in your effort in getting to that mountaintop and living on the mountaintop.

Now I'm going to the last point. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection. Lest when I've preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

You Christians, for truth, what does it help if you speak to others when you yourself aren't living up to it? You're disqualified yourself. Paul says, I buffet my body, I discipline it, and I make it a slave. Years ago, there was a church father.

And he said, my body is my donkey. Many Christians don't make it in their Christian walk because of their body, the lusts of the flesh. And he said, my body is my donkey.

You know a donkey? I always loved donkeys, especially the little ones because they were like little zebras. But I've never had a newborn donkey. When my children were small, I thought, well, I want to get the small donkey, put it in a little box and present it to them just to see their reaction.

Now in our family, we were mostly boys, so I didn't really know how girls reacted in this type of situation. So when we got our daughters, I noticed there's actually quite a big difference between boys and girls. So I don't remember whether it was Butu Manuel Quela that I spoke to, I said, get me a little donkey.

He agreed. I said, I want a small one, a tame one. After about six months or even a year, I said to him, I said, by the way, remember I asked you for a small donkey, what happened? And then he said, no, I got you one.

I said, well, where is it? And he said, no, it's down there at the cattle store. So when I got there, I found this half-grown donkey. I said, no, that's not what I wanted.

I wanted a small one. And they said, well, actually, this donkey has become quite a problem. It really is a nuisance.

The boy that looks after it has been bitten a few times by it already, and we're scared it'll eventually hurt somebody. It's become quite dangerous. Remember, the church father said, I make my body to be my donkey.

I went to some of the co-workers and asked them if they wouldn't be interested in having some donkey meat, and we could slaughter this donkey for some meat. They said, no, we don't eat a donkey. They said, we've heard that they might eat them up there in Lesotho, but not here.

And I thought, well, I still want to teach this donkey a lesson, because it was very cheeky, and I got some people together, some boys as well. And they said, no, we don't eat a donkey. They weren't too sure whether they wanted to get involved in this effort.

But I said, look, I want someone who's brave enough to get onto this donkey, break it in. And the first one tried, but the dust flew before he could even sit on it. He landed on the ground, and the donkey was off.

And I said, no, well, we can't stop now. We've got to teach this donkey a lesson. Another boy came along.

Jumped onto the back. And the hind legs went up into the air of the donkey. And he was... Let me have my passage.

Let me have my passage. But the underneath of the donkey was blisters and swollen with items of its own kind. I say to the children, you kids, Look at how this WAS started.

Bad things that were done to us. They put on a donkey and put one at its base, with its underwear, People were taken by surprise to the bottom, And up into the air. So it was quite a circus, and eventually one young fellow got onto it and hung on for dear life.

And that donkey did every trick it could think of, that boy just hung on. And eventually, the donkey just gave up and became quite tame. Paul says, I punish my body, I make it my slave.

I don't want to preach to others and then I myself am disqualified. Now, you'd be amazed to read the Greek. The Greek word means to hit in the eyes.

So Paul says, I give my body a knockout blow. And this person described a donkey, and I wondered whether he had grown up in Africa, that he knew a donkey so well, the characteristics of a donkey, and how much of that you find in a person's life. I punish my body.

I make it my slave. You know a wrestling match, where two people have it out to see who will win. And the first one tries to trip the other one, to get him to fall.

You grab hold of him, you try to get him onto the ground, and then press him to the floor. Hold him down until he surrenders and he says, I give up. That's how Paul treated his body.

He wasn't a slave of his body. The body was his slave. He didn't do what the body told him to do.

The body had to do what he told the body. Yes. And people say, oh well I can't control my feelings.

They get the better of me. You're just an immoral person. That's the bottom line.

You know Paul. Live on the mountaintop, like Paul from the time he got converted until his death, he was on the mountaintop. Oh, people are a nuisance.

When they become a Christian and then they look back, they become, they are like Lot's wife. Members of CFT, If we live a life that's not on the mountain top We won't overcome, we won't overcome the world. And we won't increase, but we will be overcome.

Christians, wake up out of your sleep. God wants us on the mountain top. I've told you about the Muslims and the Hindus.

If you want to preach to them, I told you what you must live like. Even though other congregations don't do it like we do it, but we want to be a testimony to these people. We want to show them how one can live, how young people should live, how one can go into marriage.

We need to be a good example to them. Like someone who said to me, a couple said, please marry us. But unfortunately, they had had contact with each other.

They were together on their own. The young man came and said, Moncler, look, can you speak to that young lady because I'd like to get engaged to her. I did it.

But all the time, all the time, they had double standards. They had a relationship going between themselves. They were meeting in secret.

They had been chatting together, meeting there on their own. But they told us that there was nothing going on between them. Until the marriage day came.

On the morning of the wedding, there was a vision that the Lord said, I will do something today in the service. I went to the service and then the couple said to me, well, we don't want to sit before the altar, we want to stand. We want to do it differently.

I said, remember, I preach long sermons, not like other preachers. They said, no, that doesn't matter. And when I started preaching, it wasn't long and the bride fell over.

I was still preaching and she was lying there. After the service, the young man came. He said, I'd like... He said, I want to confess.

I didn't do it in the right way. I said I was doing it, but we were having contact on the sideline. And today God has taught us a lesson.

And nowadays... And nowadays... And nowadays people use cell phones to have contact with each other. You'll end up in hell with those cell phones. We are called to an exalted place, to the mountaintop.

Are you going to go away here and forget about it? In German I would say to you, you who are not on the mountaintop, you will be damned and cursed for all eternity. And one could say that if you're not there on the mountaintop, if you don't live on the mountaintop, you will be condemned and cursed. Whether you like it or not, that's where God wants you.

And if you are not there, you repent this, before it's too late. Let us stand up and pray. Lord, you've said it over and over that you want us on the mountain top.

You don't want us just to be like everyone else or just like even other Christians. You've called us to the mountain top. That's where you've pointed us to be.

Now Lord, in your grace and through your spirit, search our hearts and test us to see that we will see whether we always are on the mountain top or not. Whether I'm at home or at work, whether I'm travelling or in a hotel, wherever I am, even in the bedroom, am I really on the mountain top? Lord, those things that are spoken in the bedroom, even there at night, are those things that are spoken on the mountain top or

are they spoken down in the hole? Oh Lord, work and write this indelibly into our hearts and minds that on judgment day we will be able to stand before you and not be disappointed. Amen.

So as you go back, what I'm giving you along as patkos is this. So a city on a hill, may that be your life, wherever you are and whoever you are, may it be written indelibly into your heart and mind. Let us pray once again.

Lord, we pray for your grace, that you will work through your grace in everyone's heart and life. Till you attain to that which brings joy to your heart and which pleases you. So that your children can attain to that crown of glory and of victory and not one of disgrace and dishonor.

Until you appear and we hear those words, well done good and faithful servant. You were faithful even in the small things and I will entrust you with even greater things. Amen.

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