

# Run the Race

by George Verwer

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of living a disciplined life as a follower of Jesus Christ, and challenges listeners to apply the principles of discipline in their daily lives.*

**Duration:** 31:37

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 9:27, Hebrews 12:1

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of discipline in the Christian life. He references 1 Corinthians 9:27, where Paul talks about bringing his body into subjection. The speaker also mentions Billy Graham's statement about the disciplined life being necessary for living for Christ. He warns against overreacting or becoming overly intensive in one's Christian life, and emphasizes the need for balance and relaxation. The speaker also discusses the discipline of the mind and the struggle with controlling the tongue.

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## Transcript

This is, by the way, my third visit. I was here at your midweek prayer meeting once, and then also Sunday night. So it's good to be back again, and this is really a special privilege for us to be able to have a conference in your midst.

And I'll be very honest that in past conferences in the United States, the greatest disappointment I've always had, and I live in perpetual disappointment, so it's not a great problem, is that generally the local people do not support the midweek evening meetings. I don't know why. Maybe in some cases it was because I was the speaker.

This time I'm not the main speaker. We have other men who have far more to contribute. But I think it's probably just that people are incredibly busy, and there's so much to do, and there's so much on television, and I guess some people it's a long distance to come.

So we don't hold that against people who can't come. But we believe it is a unique opportunity. We will not be back in Canada again for another six years with this conference, or five years, and almost surely it will not be in Toronto again.

So it'll probably be another two decades before you see us in Toronto. We are a European-based work, an Asian-based work. A majority of people in North America do not even know what Operation Mobilization is.

So we feel it is unique that God has put us here, and if you could phone up a few people and somehow participate in the evening meetings, it would be a real blessing and encouragement. This is a large and unique number of young people who are launching out, some of them on two- or three-year commitments, some just for the summer. And they need your prayers, they need your encouragement, and I think, personally, it is a little more strategic than most of the other things going on in Toronto at this time.

Because it doesn't just affect Canada, most things we do affect our own country, our own situation, but it affects the world. And it's, in a sense, I believe, one of the things that's on the heart of God the most. We're looking forward on Wednesday to going out door-to-door.

We're looking forward to a night of prayer. A lot of other things are happening, and we want to be involved with you. We could easily have this conference in a retreat centre out in the woods, much more preferable to some of us.

But we want to have these conferences with God's people, and we want to go door-to-door during the conference, and we want to be involved. We're in 20 churches this morning and this evening. That's why many of our people are not here now.

I don't know where we'll fit them. But for the evening meeting, so you let us worry about that. If we ever fill this in the evening, that would be a great encouragement.

I'd like to just say a word about the book tables. You'll find a very unique literature display, both upstairs and downstairs. Downstairs, a lot of the books are at a very special reduced price.

Our burden for this time together is that it can be a time of taking literature out to our friends and introducing it to them. We not only have books, we even have maps. Some of you know about the O.M. or Lagos, the name of our first ship.

World Map has a scripture text on the top. It's a beautiful map. It has all the populations of the world over here.

You can use this to pray more intelligently for world missions. It goes together with this book. This morning, if you purchase the map and the book, you will get a special reduction.

People always ask, where should I put this map? Their homes are usually full of pictures. There's not much room, so I always recommend they just hang it over the front of their television set. It's got a very good place for it.

But wherever you put it, you can even put it on the floor and kneel down and spend time in prayer. Some of you have seen the 52 prayer cards presenting 52 of the most needy nations in the world. They actually are taken from this amazing book, Operation World.

We are especially emphasizing the writings of A.W. Tozer and John White. John White's book, The Fight. His book, Eros Defiled.

Golden Cow is already sold out, but we'll get some more cows, golden cows, during the week. And then, a book I didn't mention in Sunday school, I'd like to mention now, Destined for the Throne. A New Look at

the Bride of Christ, with a foreword by Billy Graham.

A book that really helps us understand what we are doing here in this crazy, mixed up planet in the first place. And a book that brings in the subject of intercession and suffering in a unique way. Another book that I wanted to mention is a book by J.I. Packer, another Englishman just moving to Canada, called Knowing God.

This is a study book in O.M., and it's been a great influence in our work. We just recommend it as one of the great books of this decade. J.I. Packer's Knowing God.

Why are we launching out to the regions beyond? O.M. now has 1,100 people committed to this work around the world. Amazing enough, one third of them in Asia. That's a miracle.

280 in India alone. 450 on the two ships. 150 committed to the Muslim world.

Why? Why do we go out and tell Hindus and Buddhists and Muslims about the Lord Jesus Christ? This seems so narrow-minded. And maybe you have trouble with this question. And you'll never understand us, and why we're even here, until you understand what we believe about the state of people outside of Christ.

And this is a book by a great missionary leader, Dick Hillis. Is there really only one way? It's not very expensive. It's not the kind of book you normally would buy.

And I'd like to commend it to you this morning. Is there really only one way? It's available on the book table. I don't know if they've reduced the price on it or not.

Let me peel this sticker off and see what it says underneath. They've actually increased the price. I think this morning we will sell it at the reduced price.

I know it isn't increased. It's the Canadian dollar. I forgot.

We're going to sell it at the American dollar, dollar for dollar. We believe in Canada and that your dollar is going to get stronger. And so we're going to charge only \$1.25 Canadian.

Just peel that sticker off. I give you permission for that. I bought all these anyway.

And then lastly, I want to mention the writings of William MacDonald. And here's one called Grasping for Shadows, but also his book, True Discipleship. A number of his other books are there.

Just ask for the writings of William MacDonald. Some of my own books are available. Hunger for Reality, Revolution of Balance.

Perhaps this one's important since I tend to make some extreme statements. And sometimes they do need balance. Let's turn now to Hebrews chapter 12.

Your pastor said I could go as long as I want. But I think I'll be very cautious because I would like to see you come back. And I'll never forget this incident in Germany when I was preaching about an hour and a half.

And they like punctuality. I was in Germany last Sunday speaking to about 6,000 young people. Very encouraging opportunity.

About 300 of them recommitted their lives. No, over 600 came for counseling to commit their lives to Christ. And this was an O.N. meeting, so I felt very free and I was going on.

One man in the back of the meeting, an elderly gentleman, he wanted to get me to shut up. So he took his watch or I think he borrowed it from the man next to him. And he kept pointing to his watch.

Real encouragement. I was preaching about discipleship and world evangelism. And I was getting to the part about forsaking all.

So I said, Oh, praise the Lord. Here's a man in the back already giving his watch for world evangelism. You may want to be a little careful of what communication you use to get me to be quiet about 10 after 12.

Here in Hebrews chapter 12, we have these words. 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, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. I think perhaps this evening I will share my own personal testimony of how I came to Christ through the prayers of an elderly lady on the ministry of Billy Graham in New York City 25 years ago.

Perhaps if you know someone, especially a young Christian, or someone who maybe made a profession of faith in the Billy Graham meeting and today is drifting, so easy to do, especially when God's chosen people are often God's frozen people and young babes in Christ feel frozen out. But maybe you could invite them as I think this feeble testimony will be an encouragement to them. Shortly after becoming a Christian, somewhere along the line I discovered it was a race.

It was not a game. It was a race. And I've always been impressed with the demands that Jesus Christ makes upon those who follow him and the claims that Jesus Christ makes on those who follow him.

I was impressed in reading Pollock's new book, not so new now, The Biography of the Apostle Paul. It's interesting, of all the biographies Mr. Pollock has written, a great biographer, his most unpopular and slowest seller is his one on the Apostle Paul. As he's written on Billy Graham and Hudson Taylor and D.L. Moody, all of these become best-selling books.

But a biography on the Apostle Paul doesn't seem to stimulate too many of the contemporary saints. It's been intensive study over the life of the Apostle Paul over the years. That again and again has driven me to reconnect my life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

You may think of me as a Christian leader, but I can tell you my wife can testify that I'm a natural backslider. Not in the scandalous sense, God has kept me from that, and of course if that happened I would not be able to easily continue in my leadership. But I'm a natural backslider in that my heart grows quickly cold.

My mind quickly wanders, and fear and doubt seem to overwhelm me. And at times it seems to be so impossible to even go one more day. I've just returned from Asia.

As I walked through the streets of Turkey just a few weeks ago, in my perhaps 25th visit to Turkey, a land that we have almost pioneered. There were very few missionaries in Turkey when OM started there 17 years ago. And as I thought of the problems and the setbacks, the trials, the lack of response, the lack of

concern on the part of the Church back home and all the other things, I was almost all but overwhelmed.

The secret in OM in some ways is that I have been able to motivate or encourage or serve and work together with many men who are far stronger in the faith than myself. Men who know more about holding fast than I do. Men who are more able to stand against the fiery darts of discouragement than I have been able to.

And it's because of these men, almost 200 of them around the world, that I have the privilege of serving that OM is going anywhere today. I wonder if there are any here this morning that at times are tempted to quit. The waves seem too high, the problems seem too great, the discouragements are too big.

Maybe you've launched out with a naive, blue-eyed sparkle to serve the Lord Jesus some years ago, only to be wounded too many times in the present-day evangelical scene that can be rather frosty to say the least. Maybe you've discovered the hard way that it's a race and it's hard. Many years ago I took up jogging and running, the last thing that I in myself would ever be interested in doing.

I've never been interested in running except when I had to get away from someone. In some of the fights I got into as a young kid, being small and skinny, I used to get one or two shots, usually at a guy's face, and then run as fast as I could. Apart from that, I was never interested in running.

I always liked things that were more interesting, basketball or swimming or something else. But years ago, because I thought it was a good way to learn something of disciplined living, because I learned it was a good way to cut early morning depression, which I was subject to, I usually woke up feeling very unsaved. And because I read about it, I decided to start jogging.

And I was involved in an intensive training program on the ship Lagos, which meant we were working toward a six-minute mile. I remember running the six-minute mile outside the ship in the streets of Calcutta in rather interesting temperatures. I hated it.

I still hate jogging. This morning I was up early because I'm still on British or Singapore time. And so I got up rather early.

After jogging, I was sitting on a park bench and had a raccoon come and visit me. So it's quite interesting, some of the creatures you have walking around your city. So there are a few interesting aspects to jogging.

But again and again, I have been driven to this scripture, and also to 1 Corinthians 9. Paul says, I remember Billy Graham speaking at Urbana in 1957. I've heard the tape at least 15 times. And on that tape he said, Maybe I will be accused of exaggeration, but I dare to say that a high percentage of our problems in the church today are because we've never learned discipline.

We've got all kinds of spiritual clichés. We bring all kinds of special conferences to town. We've got all kinds of programs and at least 300 books on the subject of sanctification.

But when the chips are down to give the expression, we fail and we fall on our faces because we've not learned the disciplined life. The disciplined life enables us to hold fast when our feelings are going in the opposite direction. The disciplined life will enable us to keep the refrigerator door closed.

The disciplined life will enable us with quite a bit of ease to turn off the silly television and most of the garbage that comes through it. The disciplined life will get us into the prayer meeting whether we like it or not. The disciplined life will get us to bed on time.

It will get us up in the morning. The disciplined life will control our tongue so we'll not hurt our own children and destroy our own lives. The disciplined life will take us out in evangelism even though 98% of us, our own choice would never be to go out door to door or in the streets with literature or any other method of evangelism.

And I believe young people, because half of you who are here this morning are going on this crusade, you either have to determine that you're going to learn disciplined living or please don't bother to come on OM in the first place because it'll just be another cul-de-sac, another dead-end street. OM cannot manufacture spirituality any more than a pulpit can give spirituality. Jesus said again and again, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself.

And yet somehow we think there is some other way. Praise God for the writings of Martin Lloyd-Jones, a man who has destroyed this concept that true spirituality comes through just sitting back and believing that somehow God is going to work through you. This man, one of the greatest Bible expositors of this generation, has shown in his books very clearly that the ball is in your court.

My favorite sport is tennis. And the great joy I have is coming back to the States and playing my sister in tennis. I only took up tennis a few years ago because my children wanted to play it.

I felt I didn't have time until my children grew up and taught me a little more about myself. So I took up tennis and I play maybe once a month. I'm terrible.

I break every rule in the book. I play with both hands because I'm actually left-handed, but I got a better shot with this hand. I have no backhand.

I come and play my sister, who lives in the world of tennis. She plays six days a week. She's on a team.

She's won this and that. It's just a funny thing, but she gets on the other end of the court with me, and she goes to pieces, and I win. Not always, but most of the time.

I explain to her that it's prayer. I've got thousands of dear elderly ladies around the world, and I can just hear them praying, Lord Jesus, wherever George is, whatever trial he's in, whatever he's doing, give him the victory. Well, I'm glad that God has a sense of humor.

And if you stick around here the next five days, you'll have to develop one as well, or you'll probably get a case of the blues. But you know, in tennis, you learn that when the ball is in your court, you've got to hit it back. It's as simple as that.

It's a very simple game. And I believe in our Christian life, God has put the ball in our court. And there's no sense praying, Lord, do this thing in me, do that thing in me, because he has already done it.

The Holy Spirit is in you. The ball is in your court. It's your move.

Hit it. And that means disciplined living. I never cease to be amazed the amount of discipline that people do put into the world of sports.

The people that run in the Olympics, the people that even enter into things like like chess and billiards and table tennis, the training programs, the training that the average swimmer goes into. The same thing is often true in the secular world. I think of a McDonald's hamburger chain already negotiating with Shanghai, China to open up McDonald's in China and to give every Chinaman a Big Mac.

It's unbelievable. I thought of infiltrating it with OMers who could slip small tracks in between the double hamburgers as they went out across the country. But I'm sure that vision wouldn't get through the board of directors.

Coca-Cola is already opening a factory outside of Shanghai. The Church of Jesus Christ will perhaps toes or hit the nail on the head when he said if any secular business needed so much raw material to get so little finished product as the Church, it would go bankrupt in six months. When I think of the commands of Jesus concerning world evangelism, concerning being his witness, when I think of all the raw material here in Canada, spiritually speaking, one of the most evangelical nations in the world, you may not think so living here, but you have little to compare it with.

If you could walk with me the streets of Turkey and Lebanon and Jordan and Bangladesh and Singapore and Malaysia and other lands and then come back to Canada and look in the newspapers as I did yesterday and just see the advertisements for the evangelical churches having meetings today, then you would know the heritage God has given you here in Canada, the privilege God has given you in Canada and the spiritual raw material that is available here and that should be used to accomplish so much more. I am deeply ashamed of the fact that after crusading from one end of Canada to the other, that OM has only managed to get about sixty new recruits for its entire summer crusade from this nation, maybe a few more. We have more than sixty from Singapore and Malaysia alone with one-seventh of the effort and they have one-fifth of the spiritual heritage and the spiritual raw material that Canada has.

Something is wrong and I believe we need to search our hearts and I am convinced it will lead us back to passages like Hebrews 12, to passages like 1 Corinthians chapter 9, to the sayings of the Lord Jesus where He commanded us that if we were going to be His followers, we should forsake all that we have and follow Him. What are some of the specific areas of discipline that we yearn God's people, for God's people to enter into and that we long for those of you coming on OM to become serious about? First of all, I believe the discipline of the mind. Philippians 2 says we have the mind of Christ.

The greatest challenge in my life now is the discipline of the mind. For example, I have certain articles I am supposed to be writing. I have some difficult things I am supposed to be writing.

It is easier again and again to turn to an easier letter, to answer a routine letter, to do something else than to sit down and discipline my mind and get that article written. For two years, I have been trying to write part two of my mini book reviews. I did part one reviewing 24 major books that I want people to read.

At the end of it, I said, please look for part two. Some people have been looking for two or three years for part two. It was there in the back desert of Muscat and Oman last week.

Finally, I disciplined myself and I wrote part two. If you think of praying for me, pray that I may have a more disciplined mind. I am accountable for what God has given to me in my mind and I am sure that I am using only a small part of it.

Secondly, the discipline of the tongue. This has been perhaps the greatest practical struggle in my spiritual life and has almost buried me more than once. I have this incredible problem of having a tongue that goes faster than my brain.

If any of you have that difficulty, write me a letter. Send me your photograph or a picture of your tongue that I can pray for you because you are in trouble. Never forget years ago in New York City, hearing Jack Wursten speak at a rally and he took a tongue out of a bottle, a cow's tongue, and he waved it in our faces and spoke about the sins of the tongue.

That really spoke to me. The book of James is clear that our tongue is the last member that we can totally control. Maybe you will never get, as in my case, 100% perfect control.

But let's at least make that our goal. The discipline of the tongue is so important because it's the sins of the tongue that are affecting and destroying many churches. I'm amazed at the amount of church division here in America.

I'm amazed at the church division in England where I live. It's unbelievable. People turning against one another.

People who once sat in a church arm in arm singing the praises to God, two weeks later are at each other's throats and not in fellowship. And often it can be traced back to the sins of the tongue. Gossip, evil report, insinuation, and all the other subtle sins of the tongue.

May God show us this is an area where we need discipline. It will not come easy. Thirdly, discipline in how we spend our money.

We have been tricked. We have been deceived into buying endless things that we do not really need. A.W. Tozer said this materialistic instinct will not come out easily.

It will come out like a tooth being extracted from the jaw at the dentist. And I am convinced that until we get self-control in how we spend our money, in the kind of homes we live in, in what we drive, in where we go, and all the rest, that somehow much of our testimony will be sounding brass and tingling cymbal. It's not easy.

It's a perpetual battle. But let's not give up. And then discipline of the eyes.

What we look at. A high number of young people that come to me for counseling are sinning with their eyes. Pornography and all kinds of other things are quite normal even in the life of confessing evangelicals.

Somehow we have not learned to buffet our body in these areas. We have not learned to avoid these places where this kind of smut and literature is being sold. And so we end up with a double life.

Even very nice-looking, reserved middle-class gentlemen are often in this stuff up to their necks, even church-going people. The devil is no respecter of persons. And pornography is one of his subtle tentacles in the world today.

Reaching out on almost every corner to bring us into shamefulness and lewdness. Then into the guilt trip and the depression that follows. You need disciplined eyes.

This means we have to learn the way of disciplined fellowship. Being honest about these things. I find whenever the devil serves a low blow, especially in the area of my eye gate, I try to share it with someone.

I find this relieves some of the tension and enables me to battle more effectively next time. Do we really think the victory is going to come through continual repression of things that we're ashamed of? Through failure to fellowship with anybody about it? No. Jesus said it's in the light that we will find the victory.

He tells us in James to confess our faults to one another and pray for one another that we may be healed. Perhaps we'll discover in the long run that the lack of discipline in the area of honesty and fellowship has been the greatest mistake of the 20th century church. I know all the arguments against it.

I've been listening to them for 24 years. But I don't believe they really hold water. Yes, there are dangers.

When you become more honest, you become real, you take off the mask. There are dangers. You may get hurt.

But I believe the dangers are greater when you draw in because perhaps you've been hurt in the past and engage in perpetual operation repression. The discipline of the eyes is God's way and it's coupled with the way of fellowship, spiritual reality and true revival. And then, of course, there's the discipline of the body.

Yes, we tend to make jokes about the few who do believe in such things as jogging. We react from some extremists who did too much and ended up having a heart attack. And we all swing to the other degree and decide that we'll take our exercises in bed, massaging our pinkies on the end of the pillowcase.

I believe we do need a physical exercise program. It doesn't need to be much. I believe it's more important for the mind than it is for the body.

It's more important for our breathing system than it is perhaps for our biceps. It can be done in your own home. You don't have to run around outside risking in some cities being shot down or getting lost like one of the American leaders in the jogging push.

It's amazing how we so easily overreact one thing to the other and find it so difficult to maintain the balance. Some people become overly intensive in their Christian life. They need the discipline of relaxation.

They need to learn to just get away and unwind. I'm so free about this that last night though I was committed here to speak, I was incredibly tired. I felt that really in the light of the jet lag in the time zone that I ought to go to bed.

And I told Bert, look, let that man be the only speaker. He had so much to say and he was a good speaker and I just went home and went to bed. I have learned my limit.

And young people, I warn you, perhaps more than others, learn to know your limit. You only go so far and we're all different. Accept yourself, know your limitation and learn the discipline of relaxation.

If we don't learn to refuel, we're going to crash. And we don't let anybody crash this summer or the rest of your life. Discipline is a beautiful thing.

It's not extreme. It's not weird. It doesn't produce some kind of evangelical neurotic who goes down the street like a robot giving out tracts even to the fire hydrants.

It's a balanced thing. It's a beautiful thing. One discipline brings the other discipline into balance so that the person becomes healthy and whole and is able to not just burn out for a summer but live a balanced Christian life all of his life.

No discipline of the eyes, the discipline of the body, the discipline of the mind. Discipline, it touches every area of our life. So much more I want to say about this and I will during the week.

I hope some of you will have the discipline to come. Let us pray. Father, we thank you for this little time together this morning.

We thank you that we're never beyond hope. You love us. You know all about us.

And you still accept us. And we thank you, Lord, that you're not trying to push us into a guilt trip but you're trying to bring us into a new liberty which will only come as we deny self, take up the cross and follow you. As we get into this race, not only laying aside sin but every weight, every undisciplined area of our life that is hindering us and keeping us from being the men and women you want us to be.

We look to you to make that which we talked about this morning from your word a greater reality in our life. And yet we know very clearly, Lord, the ball is in our court. Enable us with our lives to hit it, to do your will, to obey you.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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