

Finishing the Course Well

by J. Oswald Sanders

To finish the race well, we must undergo strict training, run according to the rules, and strip off hindrances, all while cooperating with the Holy Spirit.

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Scripture: Isaiah 54:2, John 1:14, John 1:50, Acts 2:4, 1 Corinthians 9:24-25, Ephesians 3:20, 1 Timothy 4:7, 2 Timothy 4:6-8, Hebrews 12:2-3

Topics: "Finishing Well"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being active participants in our faith rather than passive observers. He compares our tendency to be 'TV athletes' who watch sports without actually participating, to how many of us approach our spiritual lives. The speaker encourages us to have a single-minded focus on our relationship with God and to pour all of our energy and effort into it. He gives examples of individuals who achieved great things by dedicating themselves to a specific goal, and challenges us to have the same ambition in our Christian walk.

Transcript

Would you turn to 2 Timothy, please? I've been asked to speak tonight on finishing the race well. Well, I wouldn't have chosen that, to speak on that, because I'm not finished yet. At least I don't think so.

Chapter 4 of 2 Timothy, verse 6. For I am already on the point of being sacrificed. The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight.

I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Then 1 Corinthians, chapter 9, reading from verse 24. Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things.

They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we are imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly. I do not box as one beating the air, but I power my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

What an end to life. I have finished the race. I have fought the fight.

I have kept the faith. Paul said, imitate me as I imitate Christ. And he imitated Christ.

As we saw the other night, John 17, 4, the Lord said, I have glorified thee on the earth. I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. He finished the race gloriously.

Paul did not do it to perfection, but yet he did it in a very wonderful and a glorious way. And who of us would not like to have an end like that? Enlightening the Christian life to a race, Paul is using a figure of speech taken from the Panhellenic Games, of which the Olympics, of course, is the most famous. But most likely, in writing to the Corinthians, he had the Isthmian Games in view, because Corinth hosted the Isthmian Games once every three years.

And speaking to that group, he would speak to something that was within their special range of knowledge and interest. And Paul and the other writers draw many parallels between the athlete and his striving after the prize with the Christian, in the Christian race, and the prize to which he looks forward. Paul well knew the characteristics of the athletes.

He knew their rivalries. He knew their ambitions. And he draws on this figure of speech in many places, and other writers do too, and it has a great deal to teach us.

Not long before I left home, I was watching a cycle race on TV, and I saw the man come in and win the race very well indeed, and he was being interviewed by the TV sports commentator. And he said to him, now what do you have in view for the future? He said, I want to be one of the best riders in the world. He didn't say, I want to be the best rider in the world, but he said, I want to be one of the best riders in the world.

And in order to do that, he was willing to undergo any amount of self-denial and grueling discipline if only he could be one of the best riders in the world. Why don't we have more ambition to be one of the best Christians in the world? Wouldn't that be a worthy thing? He doubtless had mixed motives, and perhaps we could have mixed motives too. But never mind, it's good to have an objective like that, to be the very best that we can be.

We have a hymn, I don't know if you know it, to be the best that I can be, for truth and righteousness in thee, O Lamb of God, I come, just as I am, young, strong, and free, to be the best that I can be, for truth and righteousness in thee, O Lamb of God, I come. Well, let us aim to be the best that we can be. Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, very shortly before his martyrdom, prayed a prayer.

This is what he said, O God, make me a true athlete of Jesus Christ to suffer and to conquer. Make me a true athlete of Jesus Christ to suffer and to conquer. Now one of the characteristics of a good athlete is that he's got a single-track mind.

This one thing I do. He doesn't allow himself to get distracted. He's got one thing in view, and a whole of his interest, his light, his time, his strength, his energy, is poured into that single channel.

You have a picture of a man up there who had the same characteristic. You may remember in his life, it's recorded that at his funeral service, Billy Graham, who gave the address, said, he was a man who did not say, these forty things I dabble in. He said, this one thing I do.

He had a single-track mind. Most of us tend to be dabblers. We dabble in a whole lot of things, and don't do them very well, because we're dabblers.

It would be much better, and my life would have run a much straighter course if I hadn't been a dabbler. When I was comparatively young, Dr. Graham Scroggie, who was a great Bible teacher, was in our city for a few months, and I had quite a bit to do with him, and he saw the tendency in my life, and he took me aside and said one sentence to me. He said, Sanders, don't sacrifice depth for area.

Well, that's a good sentence. Don't sacrifice depth for area. We can easily spread ourselves so thin.

This one thing I do. When I was traveling around in Asia with Mr. Fred Mitchell, who later was killed in an airplane crash, he told me that when he was a young man, he was a pharmacist, and one of the courses, he took a course in optometry as well as pharmacy. And he and his buddy used to, they used to study together, they took both courses together.

And he said one day his friend turned to him and he said, Fred, one day I am going to be the king's optometrist. This was in Britain. One day I'm going to be the king's optometrist.

And Fred said, oh yeah? Here was an unknown boy from way up in the Midlands in England, and he's going to be the king's optometrist. And then Fred said to me, do you know who the king's optometrist is? I said, no. He said, that boy.

There was a lad who early in life said this one thing I do. And he poured the whole of his life into that channel. And he achieved.

Well, why shouldn't we pour our lives into a channel like that? Something more worthy. Why shouldn't our lives be something that will be greatly to the glory of God? In our sport-conscious world, there are very few participators. The few entertain the many, don't they? Most of us are TV athletes.

How many times have you watched athletic events on the screen that you've never participated in? We are a generation of TV athletes. And you know, you don't develop your muscles very much by watching TV. But the kind of athlete that Paul has in mind here is someone who is every inch a participator.

Who's really in the race and putting everything they've got into it. Before we can finish the race well, of course, you've got to start well. The start has got a great deal to do with the way you finish it.

I was in Australia, in Melbourne, at the time of the 1954 Olympics, and I saw quite a lot of the events. Incidentally, the Olympics on that occasion had a unique opening. They opened the Olympic Games by a massed choir singing the Hallelujah Chorus.

Well, that was a great event and a great testimony too. But I remember being right along the side of the blocks where the runners stood and prepared to run their race for the hundred yard sprint. And I watched the girl who became, they used to call her the fastest woman in the world, Betty Cuthbert.

And I watched those girls in the blocks. And the one who got the best start was the one who usually had the best finish. And I saw that girl just get off just like a bullet and away she went.

There she got the world record. Getting off to a good start. How often have you said when somebody's not making much progress, you know, they go off to a bad start? You've got the opportunity of disciplining people.

Are you seeing that they get off to a good start, the very best start that they can have, so that right from the very beginning they will be in the race and they will be to be the very best that they can be? That you can do everything in your power to see that right from the very moment when they come to Christ they begin to move forward steadily, they get a good start in the race. Some of us didn't have a good start in the race. And it's a handicap afterwards, although, praise the Lord, he wonderfully helps us as we get along the road.

After you've had a good start, it depends on how strenuously you run the race. Paul says, so run, run in such a manner that you'll win the prize. We're to run strenuously, we're to run earnestly, we're to put all that we've got into it.

And you know, the problem with the Christian race is that it's not a sprint, it's a marathon. You know what a marathon is. The Christian race is a marathon.

And you run in a different style when you're running a marathon from what you do when it's a sprint. You've got, unless the Lord comes and cuts it short, you've got a long race ahead of you. Are we really pacing ourselves right so that we'll last out and finish well? Some people burn out in the first few yards.

You notice in some of these road races where you have a few hundred thousand people there, you see the whole lot, but it doesn't take very long before a lot of them drop out. Why? Because they weren't geared to a marathon. They'd been all right for a short sprint.

Well, most people can have a sprint in the Christian life, but God wants us to be marathon runners so that we will last out and finish well. What are some of the ways in which we can finish the race well? The first thing Paul says is strict training. 1 Corinthians 9.25 Everyone who competes goes into strict training.

I think that's the NIV. Strict training is the first thing. 1 Timothy 4.7 Paul says train yourselves to be godly.

J.B. Phillips puts it this way. Take time and trouble to keep spiritually fit, and it'll take both. It'll take time.

It'll take trouble. If you want to keep spiritually fit, then we need to be prepared to set aside the time and take the trouble to keep spiritually fit. For ten months, the athletes that was competing in the Isthmian or the Olympic Games would be required to do training at the Atlas Gymnasium.

And no one was allowed to compete who had not completed the full ten months course. And it was a very rigorous course, too. During that time, they had to exercise rigorous self-discipline.

They abstained from certain pleasures and certain amusements and pastimes. They had a balanced diet. They had to get rid of any superfluous fat.

And Horace, the historian, he said there must be, this were the rules, there must be ordinary living but spare food. Abstain from confections. Make a point of exercising at the appointed time in heat and cold.

Drink neither cold water nor wine at random. Give yourself to the training master as to a physician and then enter the race. Who is the training master? Give yourself to the training master as to a physician.

So those were the actual rules that governed the race. The word that Paul used there for train yourselves to be godly is the word from which we get our gymnasium. And he's saying, gymnasticize yourself to be godly.

He says to Timothy, watch yourself closely. All the way through, Paul is giving these stringent instructions, encouragements, warnings to young Timothy. He knew his tendency apparently, and it's a tendency that for every one of us is a tendency to slacken, a tendency to let ourselves off.

But really there should be no such thing as an undisciplined Christian. Disciple and discipline come from exactly the same word, same root. And yet discipline, not in navigator circles, thank God, but in many circles today discipline is a swear word.

It's not a good word. And you're not treating your children well if you discipline them. You've got to let them do their own thing.

But, you know, doing your own thing is the essence of sin. We have turned everyone to do his own thing. That's what it says in Isaiah, really.

Do our own thing. But that's not God's method. Satan is an expert in catch expressions.

And there are two words that worry me. And you hear them very often. One word is the word excited, and the other word is comfortable.

Now I had as much excitement out of the Christian life as most, I think. I'm not against excitement. I like being comfortable.

But I believe that Satan takes these commonly used words and debases them. It's a great thing because I get excited. Yes, that's exciting.

But is everything in the Christian life exciting? Are we to do only the things that are exciting? I find that in the Christian life a lot of things are very dull. And you've got to do them again and again and again without getting excited about it. And if it's only the things that I get excited about it, I do it.

No. You do it because it's the will of God whether it's pleasant or unpleasant, whether it's difficult or easy. I think that we need to watch that.

I'd be terribly distressed if what I say is misunderstood. I believe that there's much to be excited about in the Christian faith. But the Christian life isn't all excitement.

And the Lord Jesus was so very down to earth. He didn't hold out a soft, easy way. When he said the conditions of discipleship, he said if you're going to really be my disciple, you'll hate your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, and you'll hate yourself also.

You'll take up your cross every day and you'll say goodbye to all that you've got. And that's not exciting. There's no excitement about that.

There is cost. And we're prepared to pay the cost because we love. And I think it becomes a matter of principle and not merely a matter of emotion.

And the word comfortable. I know what's meant when it says I feel comfortable about it. It means yes, I feel that's agreeable.

But that thing can be very much misused. I was talking to a young man in your country a little while ago. And he said to me, you know, I think I'll go out to Asia and have a look at the mission field.

And if I feel comfortable about it, I might go back and be a missionary. Well, I think he ought to join the navigators. But if I feel comfortable about it, what has air comfort to do with it? I said to him, my brother, the Lord Jesus wasn't comfortable about the cross.

You see what I mean? It's so easy for us to think, well, it's only what I feel comfortable about that I have to do. Not what's commanded, but what I feel comfortable about. I know that there's a correct way to use that, but I'm just emphasizing the way in which Satan can twist these good things and use them to give quite a wrong impression.

The athlete doesn't do only that which is comfortable. He'll deny himself anything if only he can win the prize. And we should not be less disciplined in our spiritual life than the athlete is in his physical life.

Augustine, Saint Augustine had a prayer. A prayer with only three petitions in it. But there are three good petitions.

The prayer was this. Oh God, that I might have toward my God a heart of flame. That I might have toward my fellow men a heart of love.

That I might have toward myself a heart of steel. Ah, discipline. It's wonderful to have a heart of flame for God.

We should have it. It's wonderful to have a heart of love for our fellow men. But have we got a heart of steel when it comes to ourselves or do we let ourselves off? And I'm preaching to myself.

It's so easy to let ourselves off, isn't it? A heart of steel. The Apostle Paul knew what it was to run the race. Listen to what he said in Acts 20, 23, 24.

I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me if only I might finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me. I know that prisons and hardships await me.

He knew he was running right into it. He didn't feel comfortable about it, but he knew it was coming and he said that's alright. I don't count my life worth anything to me if only I can finish the race.

If only I can complete the task that the Lord has given me. There was Paul's motivation. It was that that kept him on track.

It's that that kept him rising above all the tremendous hardships that he endured. Now, I believe that we need some of this same kind of discipline as he had. You know, today is a day when there's a great deal of talk about the Holy Spirit.

And that's wonderful. In my youth there was very little said about the Holy Spirit. He was the neglected member of the Trinity.

But today there's a great deal said about the Holy Spirit and that's pure game. There's a lot said about the fruit of the Spirit. But the last of the nine manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit is what? Discipline.

How often have you heard a sermon on the fruit of the Spirit is discipline. There it is. The fruit of the Spirit is discipline.

And that doesn't mean that God does it and I don't have to. Discipline means that I cooperate with God in bringing myself under the control of the Holy Spirit. My will is to be disciplined and the Holy Spirit produces that fruit in me.

The cooperation of the Spirit of God with my renewed will. The second thing, first is training, going into strict training. The second is competing according to the rules.

2 Timothy 2.5 If anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. To quote St. Augustine again, he said this, he said, You may be making great strides, but are you running outside the track? It's quite possible to be running outside the track and no prize. Well, we've got to keep in the track.

Everyone who competes doesn't receive the prize unless he does it according to the rules. And they had very strict rules for the Olympic Games and the Isthmian Games. They had to keep those rules if they were to win the prize.

Do you remember when you were studying for your driver's license? Do you remember the care you put into it, learning those rules, studying the pictures, getting people to hear you so that you got the right answers and so on? My, you knew that unless you kept to the rules, you'd never get your driver's license, and you studied it very carefully. We've got our guidebook too. And we're to study it just as carefully as we studied the road guide.

Here is the book which tells me what I'm to do, what I'm not to do. Here's the book that reveals the resources that are there to enable me to do it. And I've got to run according to the rules.

It's not difficult for us to get out off the track and thus to miss the prize. So that's the second thing. The third thing, if we're going to win the prize, is that we strip off all hindrances.

Hebrews 12 too. Let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles. Now, the Greeks wore flowing robes, but the athlete threw off those flowing robes because they would impede him and trip him up.

You don't see the athlete today in the Olympic Games running in his track suit. There's nothing wrong with a track suit. But there is something wrong with it as far as he's concerned when he's running the race.

He throws off his track suit, and there he is stripped for action. Do we give the impression that we are stripped for action? Have we thrown off everything that would hinder us? Things that are right, track suits are okay. Things that are right in themselves and yet would impede our progress.

Let us lay aside every weight, the King James says. I think that if we're going to be good runners, it involves our being obedient to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. And if he indicates that something is hindering our running, that we'll say, yes Lord, and throw it off.

It's something we do, put off the old man, and so on. And so in the race, we're to strip off any hindrances whatsoever. In Galatians 5.2, 5.7, in the NIV it says, you were running a good race, who cut in on you? That's very expressive, isn't it? Have you ever seen that happen in a race? Here's a person going and somebody cuts in on them and gets ahead.

And Paul says, you were running a good race, who cut in on you? Here is Satan coming in trying to deflect the person from winning the race. And you can be absolutely certain that if you are really striving to win the race, the devil is going to do everything he can just to sidetrack you, to cut in on you and get you to step aside. The temptation to deflect, be deflected, is very great.

There is a Greek myth of Atlanta and Hippomenes that's very interesting in this connection. Atlanta was a very swift-footed maiden, and she challenged any man to race her. If he won the race, then she would give him her hand in marriage, but if he lost the race, then he'd forfeit his life.

Well, quite a number of young fellows, she was so attractive, quite a number of young fellows entered the race, but she always beat them and they forfeited their lives. But Hippomenes, he thought he'd have a chance at it. So he entered the race, but before he went into the arena, he secreted three golden apples on his person.

Well, the race started off and Atlanta rushed ahead and got ahead, but he just pulled out one of these apples and rolled it in front of her. When she saw the glitter of the gold, she stooped to pick it up, and while she was doing that, he tore her head, and then she soon caught up on him again, and he took out his second golden apple and threw it in front of her, and she hesitated a minute, and then it was too big a temptation, and she stopped and he got ahead again. And now they were getting very near the goal, and she passed him again, and then he took out his last resource, and he rolled the apple in front of her, and she hesitated, and then she couldn't resist it, and she picked it up, and while she was picking it up, he reached the tape, and of course she got her hand in marriage.

I know somebody else who's good at throwing golden apples to deflect us in the race, and sometimes it can be a literal golden apple. Not every Christian, not every navigator, not every missionary is on top of gold. It's something that can be very, very, very deceptive, and Satan will throw, if it's not that, it's something else, but he's got a lot in his bag of tricks, and he'll do anything that he can just deflect us so that we'll miss the prize.

And we've got to be alert. We have to strip off everything. Anything that will keep me back from being the best we could be.

You were running a good race. Who cut in on you? The world we know is no friend to grace, and it's no friend to us. We've got an adversary who has had 6,000 years experience.

He knows our soft spots. He knows exactly where to touch me. He knows exactly where to touch you.

The sin which doth so easily entangle us. And that means that if I'm going to win the race, I'm careful about that, and I watch out to see that that thing is not going to hold me back from being the very best for God. The next thing that we have to watch out is where our gaze is fixed.

The fixity of gaze. Hebrews 12.2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus. In the race, the judge, the umpire, is there at the end.

He's watching the race. He's seeing it, and he's there adjudicating. And the text says, let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

There are three words in Hebrews, in that connection. Hebrews 3.1, it says, consider the apostle and high priest of our profession. And the word, therefore, consider, means the prolonged gaze of the astronomer.

The concentrated gaze, without any distraction. And so, that's what the writer to the Hebrews is saying now. Consider Jesus.

The concentrated gaze of the astronomer. And when the astronomer is gazing, he doesn't just have one glance and come away again. He has his telescope trained on the heavens, and he just looks and looks and looks and looks.

The verse, the word in chapter 12 and verse 2, means a concentrated look in one direction. Well, what's the direction? Under Jesus. When we used to work horses on the farm in the days before tractors, they used to wear blinkers.

And the thing was, so that the horse would be able to only look straight ahead. Especially if you're riding a skittish horse, and a piece of paper blew over, then they saw it, they said, the horse would be up in the air. But if the blinkers were there, it wouldn't see the piece of paper.

And this is the idea here, the concentrated look in one direction. This one thing I do, looking unto Jesus, the author and the perfecter of our faith. In verse 3, it says, consider him, the word there means to reckon, to weigh up, to compare.

He's speaking about, consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself. We're to weigh up what he endured compared with the little things that we endured. Weigh them up and compare them.

And so here you have these three thoughts. But in the race, the point is, we're to have a concentrated gaze in one direction. Our eyes on the Lord.

His approval should be the thing that we covet more than anything else. Your parents, your children have their sports. Do you know what a tremendous difference it makes to the performance of the child if mother or father is there watching? I heard the other day of a boy whose parents, mother wasn't able to go, and he missed the race.

And he said, mother, if you would have been there, I'd have got it. Why? The encouragement. And the Lord Jesus, while he's the judge of the race, it's not judicial judgment.

It's the umpire. And he's there encouraging. And his face is a smile of encouragement.

And as we look around the race, there he is cheering us on, shall I say. He wants to see us win the race. And he's going to encourage us all we can.

As we look, there he is. Just as the child looks for the parent's approval when they're running the race. And if mother or father is there, what a tremendous impetus it is.

Well, here is the Lord. Let us get all the inspiration and all the help we can from his presence. What motivation it is.

Now looking back, in 2 Corinthians 3.18, it says, Beholding the glory of the Lord, we are being changed into the same likeness. As we behold the glory of the Lord, a transformation takes place in ourselves. And as we're looking unto Jesus, it stimulates.

There is motivation in it. And he draws us on, encourages us in the race. Then we're to run strenuously if we're going to win the prize.

1 Corinthians 9.24 Run in such a way as to win the prize. Obviously, you can run in such a way as to lose it. This is something that is strenuous.

I'm to put all that I've got into it. Well, how do I run in such a way as to win the prize? I believe there are two or three things that are involved in the race. They are very elementary, but yet they are very fundamental too.

And the first is a consistent devotional life. The Word not only read, the Word not only memorized, the Word not only shared, the Word not only meditated on, but the Word obeyed. And that's the end of our Bible study.

Not merely that we may know or that we may share alone, but that we may do. It's only that which I do, that of the Word of God which I put into practice, that becomes really mine and becomes part of my Christian life. Meditation is something that feeds the soul.

I was speaking in Singapore a few weeks ago, and after the meetings had finished, one wife wrote to me, and she said, I took copious notes, and now I can chew the cud at leisure. Well, that's what meditation is, chewing the cud afterwards. Going over and letting the Lord teach you afresh and put it in deeper into your life, what He's been teaching you.

And that's one of the things from this conference as you go away, you've learned so many things in your workshops and so on, but it won't be much use to you unless you chew the cud. I venture to suggest that the faithfulness with which you go over what you've learned will determine the degree to which it will permanently enrich your life. I, now I can chew the cud at leisure.

Well, that's good. A flexible lifestyle. 1 Corinthians 9.22 I have become all things to all men that by all means I may win some.

A flexible lifestyle. He says to the weak, I become weak. I become to this person, I become that.

I'm prepared to adapt my lifestyle in any way that will make me a more effective servant. Well, am I? Are we prepared to adapt our lifestyle? Well, good question, isn't it? It didn't mean, Paul didn't mean that he'd sacrifice principle in becoming all things to all men. Not at all, not for a moment.

But what he's saying is that he didn't care what inconvenience it meant to him. If by doing without certain things or living in a certain way it would mean he'd be more effective in winning others, he was prepared to do it. That's exactly what David Brainerd said.

David Brainerd said, I cared not where or how I lived or what hardships I endured, could I but win souls to Christ. A flexible lifestyle. And especially in the mission fields of today, where things are so fluid, your brothers and sisters that are out there, they've got to live a flexible lifestyle.

Why shouldn't we have a more flexible lifestyle at home? I don't see any two standards of living in the New Testament. One for a missionary and one for a person in the homeland. I don't think it's there.

And I think that we should be just as willing to have a flexible lifestyle as our brothers and sisters in the mission field have to do. And then we need to incarnate what we're teaching. We need to incarnate the

gospel.

That's what Paul suggested to Timothy, Be thou an example. Let it be in shoe leather. Just demonstrate it in your life.

Incarnate it. If we are more concerned about our public image before men than we are about our private image before God, we are not in the place where God wants us to be. We should be more concerned about how we are when we're alone with God than we are with how we appear before men.

And yet so often we reverse those things. And Paul in that word when he speaks to Timothy, he said, Take heed to yourself and to your ministry, your teaching. My private life before God.

Then my public life before men. In 1 Corinthians 9.26 the figure changes. And now he's speaking about boxing.

He said, I do not fight, I do not box like a man beating the air. Boxing was one of the sports in the pentathlon in the Olympic and Istvan games. And here Paul takes that up now and he says, I don't run aimlessly.

I'm not a man like that. I know where I'm going. I've got my eye unfixed on Jesus.

Neither do I box aimlessly. I used quite often to go to Bangkok and to get to other places. We used to have to go through the city very early, in the early hours to get a bus.

And I used to see the, you're going along the street in the dark and all of a sudden you see a man. All over the place there are people shadow boxing. They never hit anybody.

They did a lot of boxing, but not a blow landed anywhere. It probably did them good, but it didn't achieve anything. But Paul says, I'm not like that.

He said, I land every blow. And where did his blows land? On his body. Because he knew that the body was the instrument that Satan used to reach him with his temptations and to deflect him.

And he said, I land every blow on my body. And I bring my body under and I make it my slave. I beat it black and blue.

That was a very strong figure, wasn't it? But Paul was desperately in earnest and he was prepared to beat his body black and blue. I land every blow, he said. Well, our greatest foe I believe was within us.

Don't you think so? And we have to deal with it as Paul did. And in the next verse, Paul brings before us the possibility of disqualification. He said, so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

That's why I said tonight, I'm not finished yet. Paul wasn't quite finished. And yet there was in his heart a genuine fear lest after all that had been achieved, the adversary at the end might gain the advantage and he might be disqualified.

He wasn't concerned about his salvation. No fear of losing that. But he knew that the world was no less delusive when he was an old man.

And the flesh was no less seductive. And the devil was no less vindictive than he was when he was a young man. And so he had this fear, lest I should be disqualified.

Paul said, anything but the scrap heap, Lord. Anything but the scrap heap. Well, how could we miss the prize? How can we not finish well? Well, neglect training.

That was the first thing, wasn't it? Everyone who competes enters for strict training. Break the rules. Run outside the track.

Fail to strip off the hindrances. Let them stay. Become lethargic in discipline.

Allow the body to dominate, the appetites to dominate. You know, there are only three avenues. I've said it before here, I think, in this room, but it's worth saying again.

There are only three main avenues along which temptation reaches us. The first is appetite, the desire to enjoy things. The second is avarice, the desire to get things, the key sin of our day.

The third is ambition, the desire to be somebody. And if you analyze the temptation in the Garden of Eden, you'll find that those three are there. And if you analyze the temptation, the three temptations of our Lord in the wilderness, you'll find that those were the three avenues along which Satan tempted him.

And those are the three avenues in which he'll try to tempt us. Appetite, avarice, ambition. And it's for us to do those things to death.

It's wonderful to see people who have finished the course well. I think of one man, Cannon Nash of Melbourne. When he was 70, he retired from the Melbourne Bible College.

He had trained 1,000 young people for the Lord's work, and hundreds of them had gone to the mission field. When he was 70, he felt he should give somebody else the responsibility. I was talking to him when he was 91, and he said to me, when I was 80, the Lord gave me the assurance that I would have 10 more years of fruitful spiritual service.

And he was very frail, really. He was a fine, upstanding man with a great shock of white hair, very impressive man. And he said, you know, these last 10 years, I haven't been able to travel about much at all.

But the Lord's just sent people to me. And he said, I would go to a retreat house and stay there for a month. And all the time, there would be groups of ministers coming, and they'd get me to minister to them.

And he said, in these 10 years, I've had more strategic opportunities for God than ever I had in the rest of my life. And his life had been singularly fruitful. He had a great Bible teaching.

Well, at this time, we were at a convention in Australia, and I'd given the missionary address. And quite a large number of young people came forward to offer their lives to the Lord. And I turned to the old man who was sitting behind me.

I said, would you come and commend these young people to the Lord and pray for them? And the old man tottered across. Then he began to pray. It was a monologue.

He just told the Lord about these young people. And it was the most wonderful thing I'd ever heard. He just lifted us right into the presence of God.

I'm sure those young people will never forget that prayer. My wife said to me afterwards, you know, I was scared to look up. I was afraid he'd take off.

It just seemed as though he was right to go right into heaven. How wonderful. He died not very long afterwards, but what a thing.

There at 91 and still going on and still being blessed of the Lord. I told some friends here about an old lady friend of mine who died at 109. But when she was 100, about 100, maybe just a little less, and her two girls, she always called them the girls, they were between 70 and 80.

One of them had been a missionary in our mission, and I used to go and see them when I passed through Perth in Australia. But when she was about 100, they moved to another suburb. And there was no church there.

So they started a meeting in their home, invited the neighbors in. When I was going through to Singapore, I'd call in, I'd speak at this little meeting. Well, years afterwards, I was in Perth, and the two girls were there.

They were over 80 now. And one of them said to me, you know that meeting we used to have in our home? I said yes. He said that is now a church with 200 members, and we've sent out 22 young people into the Lord's work.

An old lady of 102 daughters between 70 and 80 in the hand of the Lord. That was finishing the race well. When she was 107, the Australian Broadcasting Commission got her to go on TV.

And the girl said that in the morning of her birthday, people started coming at half past seven. And they said by the time we got to the evening, we were absolutely out, but Mother was still going strong. And she said, we were so tired, we couldn't go with her to the TV studio.

But she went alone with the men. She gave her testimony of a TV. She read the 103rd Psalm and gave glory to the Lord.

What a way to end life, finishing the race well. I was preaching in Mount Hermon Conference Center in California, and I preached on Caelan, the man who achieved his greatest victory after he was 85. About three or four years afterwards, I was back there again at Mount Hermon, and an elderly lady came up to me.

She said, you don't know me, but do you remember speaking on Caleb when you were here some years ago? I said, yes, I do. She said, well, the Lord spoke to me that night. She said, I thought, well, I'm 70, I've got no ties, I'm independent financially, I'm in good health.

Why shouldn't the Lord have something for me in my remaining years, something worthwhile? She said, I began to pray that the Lord would open up some door of service. She said, for the last three years, I've been a missionary in Brazil. She said, I've had the most wonderful three years of my life.

And she was telling me some of her experiences. It must have been eight or nine years after that, I was in Papua New Guinea, and I was addressing the Wycliffe missionaries there, and I told that story of the

woman, I forget what connection. And as I was going out, one of the men said to me, was that Mrs. So-and-so you were talking about? I said, yes, why, did you know her? Know her, he said.

He said, you haven't heard the end of the story. She said, after you saw her, she came out here to Papua New Guinea. And she was on the staff of our school for missionaries' children.

They had a high school for about a hundred missionaries' children there. He said, she was on the staff of the school, and she was the most popular teacher. She could do anything with those children.

She said, she'd get the boys and do Indian wrestling with them. And they would just do anything for her. She was here until she was 80, and he said she went home.

She's 82 now and still going strong. Well, I thought, that's pretty good. When I was at the Prairie Bible Institute Spring Conference last year, I told that story.

When I came down from the platform, there was a lady waiting me at the bottom. She said, you haven't heard the end of the story. I said, well, what's the end? She was with Child Evangelism Fellowship.

And she said, we hold mini camps for children. And she said, that lady, old lady comes to our camps. She brings her curios from Brazil and Papua New Guinea.

She tells stories to the children, and they just love her. And she's still going. Finishing the race well.

What a wonderful thing it could be if we were able just to steadily walk with God or run with God in this marathon. It's a marathon for her, but she's still going. She must be nearly 90 and still bearing fruit.

What was it? What was the motivation that caused those athletes to go to all that self-discipline, that self-denial? It must have been something extremely valuable, surely. Only a wreath of laurel that would wither in a few days. That was all.

You say, sure, it would be something of intrinsic value. No. That's all it was.

The Stephanos had no intrinsic value whatsoever. It was what it symbolized that mattered. What did it symbolize? It was the honor that it brought that was the important thing.

Cicero said that the person who wins the prize receives more honors than the triumphant general coming back from his campaign. It was the most coveted thing in the whole of the nation. And when he had won the prize, the poets enlarged on his victory in song and in verse.

Sculptors were engaged to prepare a sculpture. His name was canonized in Greek literature. Flowers and garlands and gifts were showered upon him by friends and admirers.

And as they were making their way to the temple of Zeus, the herald would go before him announcing his name and his parenthood and his country. And then there came the moment when he was crowned the prize. And that was the climax of it all.

What joy it could be in a coming day when after concentrating our gaze on Jesus, looking with fixed gaze, with concentrated gaze on Jesus, we could finish the race and receive the crown. I have fought the fight, Paul said. I have finished the race.

I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness the judge will award to me on that day and not to me only, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. To hear the Lord say, Well done, will be the climax of it all.

Oh, that we might, every one of us, know that experience. As I close, and as my last word to you, my brothers and sisters, I'd like to bring before you the vision of a man who finished gloriously, William Carey. The man who was a cobbler without formal education, and yet who finished his life having given the Bible in about 40 languages and dialects to the people of India.

What was it that kept him going? What was the motivation? In his biography, it says his earliest vision had been to give the Bible in Bengali to India. Now God seemed to be telling him to translate the word of God into all the chief tongues of the land. His Nottingham Sermon came to him again.

That Nottingham Sermon was the sermon he preached that sparked the modern missionary movement. His Nottingham Sermon came to him again. Thou shalt see greater things than these.

Enlarge the place of thy tent. Stretch forth your curtains. Lengthen your cords.

Strengthen your stakes. Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.

Dare a bolder program. Dwell in an ampler world. Launch out into the deep.

God is able to do for you and through you exceeding abundantly above all your asking or thinking. The voice rang through him. The vision was blinding.

Have we heard the voice?

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/11/SID11776.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/j-oswald-sanders/finishing-the-course-well/>

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