

# Run the Race Like Abraham

by K.P. Yohannan

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*Finishing well in our Christian journey requires a willingness to forsake all, depend on God, and sacrifice our own desires for His glory.*

**Duration:** 29:42

**Scripture:** Genesis 12:1-2, Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Hebrews 13:7

**Topics:** "Perseverance"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on his own journey of serving God for over 43 years and the caution and fear he feels about his own spiritual journey. He emphasizes the importance of being aware of the deceptive nature of our hearts and the potential to lose focus. The speaker also highlights the story of Abraham, who made a choice to have total dependence on the Lord and ultimately finished his journey exceptionally well. The sermon concludes with the encouragement to fix our eyes on eternity and not be swayed by the superficial and self-centered gospel promoted in our culture.

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## Transcript

This is in the Old Testament, if you do not know. It's a very simple verse. The end of a matter is better than its beginning.

You know, this is true. Somebody starts to build a beautiful house, the blueprint is there, we look at it, terrible excitement, but when the house gets done, sometimes it's a huge disappointment. What we dreamed, imagined, is not what actually we are getting.

Then of course, you know, you go into a crisis of trying to fix everything. So even though we might understand the beginning of the process, the whole thing, but if the thing is done beautifully, then it makes us quite happy. Hebrews chapter 13 verse 7 says like this.

The scripture says, consider these people, you know, like Hebrews 11, consider their end, how significant, beautiful, wholesome it was, and you follow in their footsteps. Paul said in 1 Corinthians chapter 9 verse 24, he said, a whole lot of people are running the race, millions of them, he says, are starting this race, but not all going to finish it well. We learn from bad examples.

You know, I heard one famous evangelist one time, when I was studying in seminary, he said, you know, I grew up in this home where my father was, then he explained, I mean, it's a disastrous example. He said, I

made a decision, I don't want to be like him when I grow up. But then we have incredibly godly examples in the scripture.

Also bad examples, you know. Paul said, follow me as I follow the Lord. So in our life journey, as believers in Christ, particularly as people, those who want to serve the Lord, I think it should be a consideration, especially if you are over age 30.

You want to be concerned that you continue to run the race and finish well. Consider their end, not only of godly people, but, you know, when you think about people like Saul, Solomon, Gehazi, Judas, Demas, I mean, Paul writes in one letter, Demas, my colleague, my co-worker, who labored with me so faithfully, greet you. Just four years later, he writes in 2 Timothy, Timothy, I'm so grieved.

Demas, having loved this present world, he has forsaken me, and he left me. I thought about sharing tonight. I said, you know, this is not the right message or talk for you, my brothers and sisters.

You know, this is the kind of message that would be spoken to a bunch of really bad, mean, backsliding people. But here I'm talking to a group of vibrant, committed, godly people. As a matter of fact, today I was looking at the entire list of our staff, their wives and children and all that, and looking at it, I said, dear Lord, I can't believe what an incredible group of people you raised up, the kind of people we are, the community, the family.

So I kind of felt, you know, weary about sharing this. But then I asked myself, why I even thought about sharing this during our Gospel of Asia Tuesday night prayer meeting. The answer was very quick.

You know, someone like me in Christian leadership, you know, it's now becoming almost a normal thing. I no more should be shocked. There's not a week go by I don't read one email or get a telephone call or hear somebody tell me on the telephone about someone that I knew or I heard about who'd been doing very well for years in their walk with God, all of a sudden disappears.

And it reminds me of this interesting song in my native language. Now, don't get panicky. I'm going to sing it for you.

I want you to remain here a few more minutes. The meaning of the song is, Lord, people that been more godly, upright, sober, holier, knowledgeable and committed than me. Oh, Lord, in this journey now I see only the skull and the bones of these people that remains.

They have fallen by the wayside. Then the last answer, Oh, Lord, preserve me by your grace and mercy that I may make it till the end. And so the answer why I'm sharing this, and maybe you, my brothers and sisters streaming and watching this, maybe the reason I'm sharing this more than anything else, because I am reminded every week that I have to be cautious and be concerned and fearful and have some trembling about my own journey a few more years that left before me.

It's been over 43 years since I began this journey serving God. And obviously you know I have dealt with literally hundreds of people around the world. And the stories of people that I believed to be the best, super great people, many of them are no more in the race.

And I say, Who am I to take my journey for granted? And in Gospel for Asia story of over 30 years of our journey with the Lord, we can tell you story after story of people that, you know, I pledge my life to. And people like David Carroll can tell me I would fly across the world to spend days with someone to pray and

weep and agonize, trying to rescue them from sliding away back into the world. People who walked with God for 20, for 30 years, being Christian leadership.

And so some ways this is a message for my own heart, because I know my struggles and weakness, my failures, as someone who seek to follow the Lord. But then I found Abraham, this amazing individual who began this journey and ended brilliant. He finished exceptionally well.

But here's the thing that encouraged me. Abraham, I'm sure you are saying to yourself, What do you mean? He did a whole bunch of dumb things. That's the reason I like him.

That's the reason I like him. The reason is, he was a man who dealt with many struggles and fears and anxiety and failures. Times as a husband, he couldn't be a husband, but let his wife talk him into doing some real weird stuff and got in trouble and all those different things.

Wives, don't get mad at me. As Paul said, we get knocked down, but not knocked out. So it is not the failures and setbacks and our cold hearts and times we fall in sin or our discouragement or want to kill ourself and temptation to give up everything and walk away from God.

It's not the end of the story, because we see that in the life of Abraham. And finally, we know the promise God made. Abraham, you are going to be the father of nations.

And he did become. In Psalm 2, we read the promise the Lord gave to us. I will give you nations as your inheritance.

Just ask of me. And the promise we have, just as Abraham, we are his children by faith. I will bless you and make your life a great blessing.

The older I get, the more convinced I become. The greatest blessing of my life is not the material things or the books I write or stuff like that. It is some ways the legacy I can leave behind of the influence in the lives of other people that somehow the Lord used the feeble life of mine to bless other people.

And I think this is our inheritance. But here are some key principles that I figured out that could be applied from Abraham's life. Just a few of them.

I will not tell you how many. If I run out of time, then we will pick it up later. One is his willingness to forsake all to obey the call of God.

Genesis 12, verse 1 and 2. Abraham, yes God, I want to bless you. And I want to show you something that is incredibly wonderful. You can't even imagine about these things.

But you have to give up your home, your siblings and everything you know. Just walk away. And there is no way he could explain that to his people and convince them.

There are staff people sitting here. When they heard you are going to Dallas, Texas, I am sure a whole bunch of your people said California or Seattle or somewhere else said where? Texas? And you made it. And there was no way for you to be here without walking away from a lot of stuff.

And not only geographically but also relationships. And even now some of us I am sure are struggling with the old emotions and the pull. And sometimes we slide back like flashbacks.

You know the kids face who have been on drugs. I have never been on drugs so I am just telling you things I hear from people. What you call flashbacks.

And so, but Abraham in spite of the whole world against him. Saying you are the dumbest, most stupid, insane human being on earth to leave everything here. Then go to a place where? I don't know.

What do you mean you don't know? Well God said, which God? We got 300 million sitting here. He said, I can't explain. Logic and reason won't help.

Only the heart help. And my brothers and sisters, a lot of things we do in life, nobody will be able to believe it nor will your reason be able to accept it. But I am telling you like Judson and his wife Nancy leaving the shores of America as the first missionaries to go overseas to India and Burma.

He will have to bury his children and his wife, a broken man. Nobody in the world understand. The whole America cried out, come back.

But he must continue the journey. To leave a legacy over a million Burmese that were lost for eternity. That will come to know the Lord through one life.

He left all. And Abraham did it. And no wonder why we still talk about Abraham, we still talk about Judson.

Number two. Never he gave up the call no matter how many trials, temptations, problems, obstacles, and personal failures he faced. Now here's the thing.

Some of us like me, we travel here and there by airplane, train, all those things you know. Please ask us if you want to know the details. Because our lives are not that easy.

We miss the flights. We get the rotten seats and all kind of things and snow. Sometimes the plane don't leave and all kind of things.

But we don't, you know, hang ourselves and say I can't do this thing. We have to keep going. If you want to know horror stories of my early days of journeys, talk to Heidi Chopp.

We're going to talk about some of those things. Why? Because I knew where I was going. Whether Chicago, New York, or London, wherever I was going, whatever it is.

Many difficulties and obstacles and setbacks and diarrhea and cough and sneezing and all those things, you know. But we don't stop. See, this is what Abraham had to deal with.

Along the way he had many personal losses and grief and disappointments and no kids and promises never coming true. Waiting and waiting for 25 years and God said you can have it but nothing happens. The whole world is mocking at him.

Where is your God? And he says, God told me. It's dumb. But he will not give up one thing.

My God said, go. I will show you. I can't see it now but he said he will.

Brothers and sisters, anyone who really want to follow God and I say this to you, especially after 40 years in this service of my Lord, you will never make it if you are going to depend on the good times or bad times or difficulties to figure out if this is a real call of God in your life. William Carey was called to go to India and his wife was excited. And the last minute his wife said, I'm not going to go.

He says, fine. He stayed back and he got on the ship. And the ship started slowly moving.

And then she stood, then she was screaming, come back! Did I wake you up? That is a deliverer just to make sure you don't sleep on me. And the ship will come back and pick her up again. Did his life get easier? No.

He had to dig the grave with his own hands and nobody would help him to bury his wife on the mission field. What nonsense it is for you to think even one time in this life of serving God you will have all things easy. And you personally will fall in sin and fail but if you remember this is God's call, you will keep going no matter who will cut your hand off, let go, put your eyes out because you have one thing on your mind.

My God called me and I will keep moving till the end. If I cannot run, I will walk. If I cannot walk, I will crawl.

If I cannot crawl, I will sit here, will not give up. When I saw one of these dear brothers in Orissa who said, they asked me to make a choice or my family will be killed. And he made a choice, I can't deny Christ.

And they hacked that young man to death. You think the gospel of Christ for Indians and Chinese and Burmese are different from Americans? How lost we are in the cultural gospel that we are given to us by watered down superfluous Christianity and the promoters of such self-centered gospel in this country. And no wonder half of the world is going to hell while we are agonizing over our few dollars losing its value on our future.

And I say this to you because we need to be aware how deceptive our hearts can be, how can we lose our focus also. Number three, he made a choice that he is going to have his total dependence on the Lord. And you see, God said, Abraham, I'll give you a son.

But God looked at him and said, you know what, Abraham, you are too strong. Now a 75-year-old man is now 100 years old. Romans 4, he looked at his body and said, dear me, I'm dead.

My wife, Sarah, you look more dead than me. I just made it up, by the way. Romans 4 says, he looked at his body and recognized he's dead and his wife too.

Then God says something quite strange. Abraham, yes, God, hey, I want you to do something. Whatever, be circumcised.

What? Yeah, that's what I said. I can understand taking a little boy eight days old to the hospital or rabbi and get them done, but 100-year-old man? Philippians chapter 3 says, we are the true circumcision who place no confidence in the flesh. Your education, your good look, your smartness and your riches, your background, your cleverness and you think you can do it, I can do it.

You know, one of my struggles of my life, often being always and always will be, I think, there are times in my life when I'm speaking to people in meetings and talking to individuals on the telephone, counseling. Once in a while, the Holy Spirit whispers, you're trying to be smart. You're trying to be clever.

Drop it. Don't do it. Don't say anymore.

Leave it. And I recognize my strength becomes my failure, my weakness. And I say, Lord, I'm sorry.

You have your way and I back off. Continually, this is going to be our struggle in our journey with the Lord if we must make it to the end. Our accomplishment should never become our titles and positions and our

abilities, our whatever, nothing should become the reason for us to say, I'm going to do it now.

It's going to be the weak, struggling people that continually depend on God will make it. As a matter of fact, I tell you, a lot of great people that I knew fell by the wayside, not because they fell in adultery or stole money or murdered someone. I can tell you, it happened 99% of the time, arrogance and pride and self-centeredness.

And Abraham found that out very well that he must come back to God for everything and we know that. Number four, serve God with sacrifice. Leave everything you have.

Yes, God. Finally, after God giving him his son, God said, Abraham, I want you to give up your son, the one you love, not Ishmael, but Isaac. And he didn't even tell his wife about it.

And he chooses to do that. And you know the story. And he raises his knife to kill his son.

And God says, Abraham, now I know you fear God. Not that you are a great, mighty leader and you can do great things. No, you now fear me.

I know that. So, one thing we learn from this is this. There's no way we are going to finish the race without continuous sacrifice, whatever that is.

Sacrifice to me is not something that you sacrifice. We all are different. And the Lord asks us for different things in our life, whatever we are holding onto it so dearly.

Sometimes the Lord says, would you just give it up or walk away? And without suffering and the cross, we will not fulfill the call anyway. Let me move fast. Maintaining a life of separation from negative influence is a must if we must make it to the finish line.

That's number five. Lord was a close family member of Abraham. But a time came, Abraham had to make a choice.

Am I going to hang on to him? He said, I can't. Abraham, you go that way and I go this way. If it's king or sodom or a family member, Lord, Abraham must maintain his aloneness, his private walk with God, his separation from negative influence.

I can actually spend another ten hours talking to you. There's nothing more dangerous in your walk with God than the telephone calls you receive from people that want to be nice to you. The emails you receive and the time you are so enticed, gravitating toward that individual or individuals.

Because they say the things you want to hear, but they are not seeking your best. Even among Christians, even among believers. And that's the reason why you must become your own enemy and your feelings and emotions to choose people that would be honest with you and say, look, I don't think this is the right thing you are thinking.

This is not the right thing. And unless you make some choices to say goodbye to some friends. There are, you know, in my own life experience, I can tell you, this is, I won't say names, there are sometimes in my life I made a decision.

I will not want to talk to that individual. I will not want to keep friendship with them. Believers, Christian workers.

As a matter of fact, today on the telephone I told one of my senior leaders, I said, would you give this instruction to so and so? I'm talking about one individual who is in senior leadership of our ministry overseas, who seems to be sliding. And through few dialogues and discussions, I found out one of the key reason is that individual maintaining a continuous telephonic conversation with another brother. These are two brothers, but one influences the other and they both are sliding away.

And I said, this is an order from his leader. He must not continue this telephone relationship and conversation. Cut it off and I will talk to you later a month or so.

That's the instruction I gave. Well, for your ears, maybe it is a tough thing to hear because the culture is different maybe. But I'm telling you, I'm more concerned about sustaining my brothers and sisters in the ministry.

When I know there is a problem, I have to say, this is the end of the journey for you. Don't do it anymore. If he disobey me, that is his problem.

But I'm telling you, in your life, ask the question. Are you, your heart burning with the fire and intensity, the blue flame as it was some years ago, year ago, six months ago? And ask also, what happened? Then ask the Lord. Most probably you'll find it's some friendship, some association.

I ask you to be careful. Number six, life of continuous surrender. Abraham is my friend, which is not one time, it's a perpetual, non-stop, always in the present tense.

And without your daily time in God's word and prayer and meditation and confession, I guarantee you, assure you, you will not survive spiritually. That is one thing I can underline a thousand times. You will not, I will not make it.

And Abraham had to do that on a daily basis. Number seven, the last one, I can't believe I'm doing it. He knew, he knew that the finish line is not that far away.

He considered himself as a pilgrim and stranger on this earth, Hebrews. He looked for a city that has foundations, the builder and maker is God. Therefore he was not attached to the material things, all the stuff around him.

He was least worried about it. Why? He fixed his eyes on eternity. I said this story the other day when I was speaking in Tucson.

It was yesterday. It was kind of really yesterday. When the Lord called me to leave my home, my parents, go to North India 2,000 miles away to serve him.

Really, kind of yesterday. One of the earlier experience I have in America in 1974 when you can America was watching these televisions and there was one guy I really liked him a lot on television. His name is George Burns.

Anybody remember him? You know the old man who played God? And he had a cigar in his mouth, you know, he smokes, I mean all these things coming out of him. But when he goes off from his show, he sings this song, I wish I was 18 again. Remember that? Chris Brewer is trying to say, yes, you are old enough.

I mean it's an 85-year-old man singing, I wish I was 18 again. You know, it's strange. To me, yesterday I was 18.

Today I'm 60. And I said to myself, whatever happened to time, I just don't know. It's just like a second.

How dumb and foolish we are to think that we are here forever. We act and behave as though this is it. Look at your driver's license.

Look at pictures, you know, when kids get old, you know, married, you know, like Terry, John's daughter, she had all little pictures of, you know, little baby crawling and playing with toys and all those things. The next thing you know, she's sitting there getting married. What happened to the time? And Abraham somehow knew, it's not worth wasting my life here.

And I pray that you and I will consider the end of many lives that we heard, read about. May our hearts be encouraged with someone like Abraham and run the race that we may finish well. Let us pray.

Dear Jesus, we want to thank you for this evening that you gave us. Just as you promised Abraham, nations, Lord, you promised us. I'll give you nations.

Multiplied millions in our generation, Lord. You are looking to us, each one of us. That we may run the race and remain faithful to you with our time, resources, our energies, our opportunities, our talents.

That somehow, Lord, you can continue to fulfill the promise that you gave to Abraham. That through us, you find ways to touch the lives of others and call them to be yours. Lord, lead us tonight.

As we spend time with you. And may our hearts be touched by you, Lord. In Christ's name.

Amen. All right. We are going to have time of sharing and prayer request.

And those of you at home or wherever you are, thank you for joining us again. And we'll continue to have the prayer meeting. And again, we are going to share prayer request, as John mentioned.

Divide into small groups and pray right there in your home or wherever you are. Join us in prayer for these prayer requests that we are going to be just now sharing and talking about. God bless you.

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