

# Running the Race Carefully - Part 2

by Phil Beach Jr.

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*The sermon encourages believers to hear and obey the Lord's voice to successfully navigate the spiritual race and avoid pitfalls.*

**Scripture:** John 10:27

**Topics:** "Spiritual Discipline", "Faith Endurance"

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## Description

Phil Beach Jr. preaches on the importance of listening and obeying the Lord's voice amidst the many distractions and voices in the world, emphasizing the need to recognize and follow the voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus. He warns against being led astray by false teachings, self-deception, and spiritual blindness, urging believers to listen to and obey only the voice of the heavenly Shepherd. The sermon also highlights the dangers of discouragement, emphasizing the need to endure God's discipline and not become weak in faith. Furthermore, it addresses the importance of guarding against bitterness, sexual impurity, and becoming profane by prioritizing earthly desires over spiritual matters.

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## Transcript

"Let us run....the race set before us..." Heb. 12: 1b. In my last article, I ended on the note of the importance of hearing and obeying the Lord's voice. This lesson is so vital to learn that it is impossible to over-emphasize. We are daily exposed to many voices, coming to us from a variety of different places. Should we be carried about by these many voices, we will surely be led astray from running the race set before us and may even fail to finish our course and obtain the prize.

Jesus tells us that He is the Shepherd of the sheep. As the good and great Shepherd of His sheep, He not only cares for us, but gives His life for us as well. What a wonderful Shepherd we have! When giving an earthly illustration to teach this lesson, Jesus used the story of a shepherd with his sheep. Many years ago, I used to care for sheep, about 10 or so. After spending time feeding them, I was able to recognize each one in particular, along with its personality. Oh, yes, dear one, sheep have personality.

There are some that are very dominant while others are shy and seem to let others push them around. Others are mischievous and are always getting into trouble. One in particular would often get its head caught in the fence because it was always trying to eat the grass on the other side! In spite of their differences, each one knew my voice! When I called to them at feeding time, they all came running. Jesus said that the sheep can learn to know the voice of the shepherd and will not follow the voice of a stranger.

They actually run away from a strange voice. This is true with earthly sheep and their shepherds. But Jesus wants this to be true with His sheep too. We are called to listen to His voice and not to harden our hearts. Sometimes we hear His Word but do not obey it. James warns us that we can be a hearer of God's Word but not a doer. When this happens we become self deceived and spiritual blindness sets in. Other times, we can be led astray by following another's voice. Perhaps it is our own voice and thoughts that we are following or the false teaching or counsel of a pastor, trusted friend or misguided teacher.

Paul warned the Corinthian believers that they were being seduced by Satan and were being led astray from simply loving Jesus and serving others in God's love. He went on to warn them that Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, appearing to be of God. Satan's false ministers, can also appear to be true as well, and should we listen to them, we will be led astray from our Master's voice. There is an ever present danger of being led astray from hearing and obeying the Lord's voice.

Only our heavenly Shepherd loved us enough to lay down His life for us. Only He knows what is best for us and what will enable us to run the race set before us obtain the prize. Today, we must pray earnestly that our ears can be opened to both hear and obey the Lord's voice and that we may be delivered from following any other voice! Let's remember, God's discipline is so that we may learn His voice and become strong in His grace so that we may be led by Him alone and fulfill the course He has set before us.

Turning From Discouragement In light of God's call to us in the previous section to endure the child-training of the Lord, we are now given a strong word. God says to brace up and reinvigorate and set right your slackened and weakened and drooping hands and strengthen your feeble and palsied and tottering knees. (Heb. 12-12). This is a vivid picture of a deeply discouraged person who because of the Lord's severe and often painful discipline has given up running the race. Often instead of listening to the Lord's voice amidst our suffering and discipline from the Lord we become bitter and blue, resisting His voice.

When this happens, we can become, as the Word says, weak in our hands and knees by a lack of use. Of course this is a picture of what happens when we give up on our spiritual journey. Over 30 years ago while wrestling in a school match, I dislocated my elbow. After it was reset, I had it in a sling for a month. During this time, I was not allowed to use my arm, in any way at all. The doctor told me that once the sling was removed, my arm would be very stiff and I would not be able to move it.

I was warned by my doctor not to allow this condition to remain. He prescribed several exercises for my arm, which were very hard to do. However, the doctor told me that if I did not do these exercises, then my arm would remain stiff with the danger of being permanently lame. This is the idea in this part of God's Word. During times of testing, suffering and God's corrections in our life, we tend to stop exercising our spiritual muscles. There are many reasons why this happens, but the most frequent reason is becoming heavy hearted and discouraged in the middle of the trial.

We stop listening to the Lord and cave in under our emotions. But here God is telling us not to let this happen. We must pray for the ability to hear God's voice and obey Him so that our weak knees and hands can become strong once again. If we remain too long in this condition of being weak in our hands and shaky in our knees, we may suffer such serious damage that our ability to finish the race is compromised. If this happens, the Lord may have to do a very drastic thing to deliver us from this dangerous trap!

So, may the Lord help us to make straight paths for our feet, so we can follow the course of God's discipline in our lives and do nothing that the Spirit of God does not lead us to do! How freeing it is to

become the Lord's love slave and be able to listen to His voice all the days of our lives! God tells us to follow peace and holiness! He is the prince of peace and is Himself our holiness. If we are listening to His voice alone on a daily basis and living in His Word, then we will indeed be following peace with all men and holiness, with the assurance that we will see the Lord, both now and at the day of His appearing for those who are looking for Him.

Looking With Diligence God's last word to us in this section of Scripture is a strong warning. Should we neglect this warning we will suffer grave consequences that will cause us to forfeit the prize being offered to us. Because of indwelling sin together with living in a world that hates God and embraces darkness, we face a number of dangers that can threaten our faith in the Lord. God tells us that because of these ever present dangers, we must learn to look with diligence.

This means to be on constant watch, to look ever so carefully; to take oversight and responsibility to be sure we are on guard. Because of the severity of the dangers that are lurking as we run this race, we must continually be on guard. The great danger is becoming lazy and unguarded in our watch over our own hearts and the path we are following. When this happens, we can easily fall prey to the various traps that Satan sets to snare us. A snared believer trapped by one of Satan's many tricks is in grave danger of being swallowed up by the enemy.

Paul was aware of this danger and even stated it was possible for him to become disqualified from the race, should he become lazy, unguarded and allow his natural passions to guide him, rather than the Lord's Spirit! Let's look at four great dangers that threaten us from being disqualified from winning the race set before us. Without fail, the first sign of moral failure and the danger of falling prey to one of the many snares is the condition of being deficient of God's grace.

God tells us to look very carefully so that we do not fail to find the abundant grace available to live in the good of Christ's life and love. God promises to give His grace to the humble in heart--those who admit to their failures and faults and confess them to both God and man. How wonderful to know that God does not promise His grace to perfect people who feel they are better than others or who believe they are not too bad in God's eyes. To such the Lord has no help. Jesus said that He came to seek and to save people who are lost and know they are lost and make no attempt to come to God in any way other than as lost sinners who know they deserve eternal separation from a holy God.

God makes it clear in His Word that Christ died for people who were without strength, powerless to help themselves, who were ungodly sinners and His enemies! God's grace is a wonderful gift to the whole world and anyone who will embrace God's Word that says we all have sinned can come to know His grace and be transformed by this great grace! It is God's grace that grabs hold of our hearts and changes them so that we can see the Lord's beauty and desire Him with all our hearts.

It is by God's grace through faith that we are offered the divine life of His precious Son so that we can escape from the corruption of sin that lives in our flesh. How amazing God's grace truly is! We see how dangerous it is to become deficient of this grace and find a lack of its power working in us. So, it would be to our advantage to be sure that we are living in the fullness of God's grace each and every day. When we fail in God's grace, we can easily fall prey to very dangerous snares.

Let's look at them now. The Root of Bitterness God warns us about the root of bitterness. Any kind of bitterness in our hearts can destroy both us and many others. When bitterness is given a place in our lives, the Word says that it defiles and makes dirty many. Bitterness can be born in our hearts for many

reasons. Some of those reasons can include a deep disappointment, being neglected or overlooked, an accident that takes a loved one or an illness that brings sorrow and loss to a family.

We can become bitter by being mistreated too. Sometimes bitterness sets into a marriage relationship because one partner does not meet up to the expectations of the other and deep resentment festers. Have we asked the Lord to search our hearts to be sure that there is no sign of any root of bitterness? The person who becomes bitter is often sharp and calloused in heart. They can be very angry and speak words that are harsh, critical and cynical. Cold-heartedness together with unpleasant actions and comments are quite common with the bitter person.

Bitterness can also affect our conscience too. A bitter person is often suffering from a seared conscience that no longer works properly. When our conscience stops working properly, we find it easy to sin against God and others and do not feel the troubling power of a healthy conscience. Years ago, one of my family members became bitter towards another member of the family. This bitterness was so deep and sharp that this person cut himself off the other family member for many, many years, never even speaking a word to them.

Oh, the dangers and damning effects of bitterness. None of us, dear one, are beyond the reach of its terrible effects, so we all must watch carefully to avoid this awful snare. Surely, this can make us to forfeit the prize before us. May the Lord give us much grace to be free from any form of bitterness. The Snare of Fornication ( pornos ) As we look together at the snare of fornication, we can conclude that this is responsible for a great number of spiritual casualties. Before we begin, it is important to acknowledge that sex is not evil but something God created for the enjoyment of a husband and wife within the bonds of marriage.

We are sexual beings with sexual desire that begins early in the years of puberty and continues till a ripe old age. Therefore, when looking at the sin of sexual impurity, God is not referring to the normal sexual desires in men and women but rather the misuse and abuse of those desires. In particular, the abuse and misuse of sexual desire can simply be defined as seeking to fulfill the sexual desire in any way outside of God's original intention. Beloved, because of indwelling sin and the sinful age we live in we must stay on guard!

Consequently, the best way to know whether or not we are falling prey to this sin is to honestly ask the Lord to show us if there is any area in our life where we are seeking expression or fulfillment of sexual desire that is outside of God's original intention. This question requires deep honesty before the Lord if we are to allow Him to make us pure in this area of our lives. Almost every area of society is tainted with a slant toward sexual impurity, including the things we read, the things we see on television, the things we hear on radio, as well as the way culture would influence us to dress.

Truly this is a heart matter that only the Lord can shine light into. We do not want to create legalistic laws of conduct such as what kind of dress to wear, or what to watch on television or where we can go or not. This only results in putting people into religious bondage to rules and regulations, which do not change the heart at all! Rather, we must ask the Lord to give us a pure heart and out of that pure heart will grow a love for Him that will govern our conduct, practices and ways that we handle these issues.

Everything should spring out of love for the Lord and the desire not to cast a stumbling block before our brothers and sisters. Love should govern our personal liberties about matters of conscience, which are areas of freedom where no clear law from God is applicable. There are certain absolutes about these

matters that we will mention. Adultery, fornication, which involves all forms of pornography, all forms of prostitution, as well as homosexuality, are sins and never to be engaged in by a professing believer in the Lord Jesus.

In addition, it is very important to remember that Jesus taught us that these sins start in the heart, so any heart movement toward any of these sins should be a great warning to us that we are in need of much grace, lest we keep entertaining such things and fall prey to this sin. The rule of thumb that Jesus taught is simply this, "Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart". Oh, beloved, we must pray that we stay in touch with the movements and desires of our own hearts and allow the Lord to keep our hearts honest and open to His word of correction and cleansing.

I think we get in trouble in this area when we no longer let God search our hearts about what we are thinking or why we are doing a certain thing. To lose touch with our heart and to just focus on outward things is perhaps the first and foremost reason why we fall into the sins of sexual impurity! For example, if we are dressing in a certain way, with the deep desire to create sex appeal to someone other than our own wife or husband, then we are committing this sin of sexual impurity.

Yet this may not appear outwardly at all. The big issue is what our heart may be after and why are we doing what we do? Why do we read the things we read, watch the things we see on television, go to the places we go to, or dress the way we do? We must not judge one another on these matters but rather seek that we all may be judged by our Father in heaven, who alone knows the motives and intents of our own hearts! Beloved, if we are ensnared by sexual impurity in an obvious way, either adultery, fornication, homosexuality, pornography, or some other form of impurity, then may we turn to God to repent and cry out to Him for deliverance.

He will forgive and deliver us if we will be honest, confess our sin, stop living in denial and seek help. On the other hand, if we are not in any obvious sin of this nature, let us seek the Lord and ask him to reveal the depths of our heart over matters of why we do certain things, and allow him to reveal any form of impurity in our hearts. Esau, a Profane Person Our last consideration in God's Word is the warning to guard against becoming a profane person, like Esau became.

In context, the word profane means to become an unholy person. A profane person seeks to be sensual in his passions and practices and neglects spiritual things. Paul tells us to set our mind on things above, where Christ is, at the right hand of the Father. But a profane person is soiled with earth, through and through. We all have a sensual nature and if we are not careful we too can be like Esau. Esau sold his birthright by submitting to his earthly nature instead of denying it.

When Esau was very hungry and felt as if he would die, he bargained with his brother Jacob. He asked Jacob to give him some food and in exchange for that food, he would give him his birthright! In this way, the Bible describes Esau as a profane person. How does this apply to us? Anytime we choose to place our earthly, sensual passions above the call of God to seek Him, we are guilty of being profane! We like Esau, exchange our spiritual rights for earthly desires and suffer great loss, just like Esau did.

When we care more about our body and its natural desires, more about the things of this life, the desires of our flesh, the passions of our dreams, the things we see with our eyes more than the spiritual things of Christ, then we too, like Esau, are in danger of losing our spiritual birthright. We can also become profane in our speech as well. God's Word tells us that we are to guard our words and make sure they are wholesome and bring health and grace to their hearers. We are warned not to allow any foul or polluting

language to come from our mouths.

Also, we are told to abstain from speaking any worthless or unwholesome words. We are to reject anything that is false and not be guilty of speaking falsity. Profane speech makes a profane person or rather a profane person will speak profanely! When we become profane in either way--by selling our spiritual birthright for earthly passions or by allowing our words to be polluted by unwholesome language--we will grieve the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is often grieved, He leaves.

May the Lord give us much grace to be free from the snare of being profane. This then is the conclusion of our study in this section of God's Word. Following the Lord is more than hearing; we must also obey. May the Lord give us much grace to run the race set before us with patience, keeping our eyes on Jesus, who is the author and finisher of our faith. As we run in this race we must keep looking diligently so that we do not allow any root of bitterness to spring up in our hearts.

Additionally, we must guard against any form of fornication or sexual impurity. Lastly let us beware of the snare of becoming profane, either by choosing earthly desires above heavenly interests or by unwholesome language. May we all heed this sobering plea from God's Word, "...see to it that you do not reject Him or refuse to listen to and heed Him who is speaking to you now" (Heb. 12: 25a, Amp.)

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