

The Pursuit of Holiness (Part 2)

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Preacher: Don Coleman

[0:00] I mentioned this picture of the runners, they're at the starting line and they're all dressed in the air.

There's no wind resistance, you can see that. Then picture some yahoo out there with a deep sea diving seal. You're ready to run. How are you going to run in that?

You couldn't run possibly. You'd like me to win. In fact, I'm not sure that anybody can finish the winds. That's short for the rain 60s.

You've got to picture that. I made the point, there's nothing wrong with a deep sea diving seal. It's just no good for running. That's the problem.

Consulting what is the point? The point is that it keeps you from winning. See, there's the problem. Whatever it may be, whatever this weight is, this quote weight, that's the word that I'm going to use.

[1:21] This bulky thing, this thing, whatever it may be, whatever it is, does it keep you from winning? And you have to answer that question. I had a, Sharon and I have a good friend, a good friend in San Francisco, in Nacogdoches.

I'm going to live in Nacogdoches. And George Benningwood, just a dynamic man of God. I know so few like him.

And when we lived in Nacogdoches, he owned a very large, very prophet, Solomon. And, but at some point, just before we left there, God got up with his heart that he wanted me and his wife to be a part of a revival ministry called Life Action.

We were going to learn Life Action. And so, there was no way that they could serve the Lord in that way that he had called them.

And for him to still operate this very, very profitable business. So it's so, it's so, it's so, it's so, it's so, it's so, it's so.

[2:35] So that he, and by the way, you know, most monks out of the year, they live out of the, the life cycle. And, and they're part of this ministry. Travel around the country.

That support, kind of support ministry for Life Action. Now, there's a prime example of what we're talking about here.

At some point in his race, because you see, he was running his race. I might remind you that Paul says, let us run our race in the way that he's going to say.

Uh, the, the, okay, the race that is set before us. All right, now, everybody's race is a little bit different. Now, the goal, the pursuit of the life of Christ, that's the same.

But, how you run that race, and the way God is directing you in your race, is going to vary from person to person. And so, in George Middlebrook's race, uh, his pursuit, uh, that lumber mill was a weight.

[3:43] And so he sold. So is God telling you to sell your business, to get a business, or to quit your job, or to give up your hobbies, or, uh, to stop listening to the kind of music you like to listen to, or, uh, to stop your involvement in civic organizations, or is he asking you to curtail your recreational activities?

I don't have any idea. And I don't have to know that. Uh, I wouldn't even, uh, make an attempt to answer that kind of question. But the question you have to ask yourself, are you in the race?

And, do you want to win? Then, lay aside every weight, whatever it may be, that is an encumbrance to you, that's not, not allowing you to run that race.

Maybe it's just a simple thing like, like, not watching TV. I don't mean ever. Maybe it's something like that.

Maybe it's some other kind of activity that you enjoy doing, and, and there's nothing wrong with it. But it may be to bring you in what God has told you to.

[4:52] And, uh, if you're in the race, if you want to win, then you have to win those things aside, whatever they may be. Then he says, now we're going to get to sin. So we must continuously, and that is the idea here, continuously lay aside the sin which so easily ensnares us.

And this is quite, quite, quite a phrase. Now, picture that race again, okay? And, uh, you know, there they are, standing there, sleek, muscular, they've got, you know, their racing suits on. And you go along there, and suddenly there you see this guy standing there, with both feet in the sack. And, uh, picture that. And he's about to run this race.

Is he likely going to be able to fit? No. That is actually tripping him up. Have you ever, ever had that kind of race, a sack race? You know, of course you can do another partner or some kind of do it by yourself.

And here's the funniest thing, uh, you never want to see. You keep tripping and falling and, uh, fun, and funny. But, uh, uh, you know, you don't want to try to run a race with both feet, even one foot, in a gunny sack.

[6:12] And so the idea here, the word ensnares, that's in the New King James Version. The word ensnares refers to something that entangles us.

Uh, not just slows us down, not just some bulky thing, uh, that would keep us from the weight of race, some amoral type of thing. We're talking about sin here that would entangle.

Entangle us. That's the New American Standard Bible they use as the word entangle. Uh, of course the old English, we have King James out there, it's beset.

And, uh, I think we, probably most of us would understand the meaning behind that word. I think I, I prefer the ESV, uh, and all of them, uh, uh, you use the word clings.

Uh, you've got to lay aside everything that clings to you. Or maybe, maybe, you know, the, the image of, of the gunny sack, but maybe trying to run a race with a long, floating gown.

[7:17] And you're running in the, the, the gown wrapping around your legs and tripping you up. That's, that's the idea here. Now, this could be a reference to any and all sin.

I mean, that would be our first impression, would you think? Put aside or lay aside, uh, continuously lay aside any and all sin that you identify in your life that would, uh, ensnare you and entangle you and clean you and cause you to drift.

I mean, certainly it could, it could apply to that. Just sin in general. And certainly the Bible says a great thing about, uh, you know, sin, sin, and dealing with it radically.

So, but, the word sin is singular. It's singular. It's singular.

And, uh, preceded by the death of an army. What does that mean? Well, obviously, I'm not talking about, about, uh, sin in general.

[8:25] Uh, but rather, the sin. The sin which so easily is spared.

Now, there is a particular sin, particular sin that easily entangles us as we try to run our race in our pursuit of hope.

Uh, we could argue, maybe, or maybe pull from the text that, that, yeah, it's a singular sin, but maybe that means that it's different sin for different people. And, and that could be very true.

Uh, I mean, all around this room. Uh, you know, each of us that we wouldn't necessarily want to, uh, have a confession time. Uh, but, uh, we could identify, uh, most likely that one sin we have to do is probably.

Uh, and, uh, there would be some, some commonality out there, but, uh, there would be some differences as well. Uh, and I'll just give you an example.

[9:33] Uh, I, I don't, I doubt or seriously that, that we have to be out there that, you know, the biggest besetting sin in your life is alcoholism. Uh, I could, I mean, you could have some, uh, some difficulty with that, I don't know.

But I, I, I'm going to tell you, I, I, that, that sin is never a temptation. I don't have any temptation, uh, to, uh, to, uh, to go into alcoholism. I don't even have a temptation to drink any alcoholism.

I just don't have, and so that's not a besetting sin for me. Uh, if, if, if I get put out of the race, put myself out of the race, in the sense that I just stop running, or I slow down, or I get off track, uh, it's not going to be because, because of alcoholism.

For me. However, but I'm not going to take cherry cheesecake. Uh, you're close.

Uh, all right, so we could think of this, and I'm just, I'm just, uh, offering this to you, because I, I, because Paul's not specific here.

[10:39] Uh, he doesn't tell us what that, that one sin is. The sin. All I know is, grammatically, as Paul wrote, he wrote the words sin in the synchronic.

And, it's preceded by the definite article. Both those things together, and some other issues grammatically that we get into. He tells me his idea is, say, the sin.

The sin. The sin. Which so easily entangles us. Or, ensnares us, trips us up. Now, I'm going to, uh, not really go out on land, but I'm going to suggest to you that the sin, I mean, there is a particular sin that easily entangles us as we try and pursue holiness.

And the one sin that represents the biggest hindrance to winning the race is the sin of unbelief.

And, uh, we say, now, that, that's contradictory. We're believers. We're believers. And, I'm not talking about unbelief in the sense of the rejection of Christ in the gospel.

[12:03] I'm talking about that. I'm talking about an ongoing struggle we have in just not believing God. Not believing his word. Uh, making decisions, uh, that are contrary because we just don't believe the promise of God's word.

Uh, or, uh, being ensnared by fear, cowardice, uh, in pursuing what God is leading us to because we, we just don't believe it for him.

Unbelieving is, is, is, is a dissenting sin. I don't know if you've ever thought about that. Because we, we, we generally associate unbelief with unbelievers and, uh, those who are outside, uh, of, uh, of faith.

Those who are not born again. Think of that in those terms. But, listen, Christians, we deal and struggle with unbelief every day of our lives.

Unbelief holds us back. I mean, you just think about it. The race that we're in, in our Christian life, this pursuit of becoming more like Christ, follow Christ, uh, to be a disciple of Christ, the race, and through all that he has called us to do, commanded us to do, and to follow him and trust him.

[13:30] Uh, that race is hard. Most of the time. If it's never been hard for you, then you're probably up in the stands eating a hot dog. I know.

I know. Um, it's hard. And there are obstacles. Have you discovered that? There are obstacles all along the way.

And, at times, we're confronted with things in our lives that we don't understand. And, uh, it's difficult. We face these things and we're sometimes convinced that we're not going to do. We're not going to do. We're not going to do. We're not going to do.

We've got a hurdle. And you've got a hurdle. That's right. High hurdle. High hurdle. Yeah. Uh, on the front end, we don't understand. Or, uh, are we... are brought to the brink where we've got to make a decision.

Maybe big decisions. Hard decisions. That we don't understand. And, uh, it's difficult. We face these things and we're... sometimes convinced that we're not able to...

[14:31] Oh, a girl. It's a high hurdle. Whatever it is. and you know it is at those times particularly that we're challenged and keep on believing that keep on believing and you know it's pretty easy to quote some of the famous passages out there you know with God all things are possible pretty easy for preachers saying this all things are possible with God nothing's too hard for God and all things are working together for good and those who love the Lord and call according to his purpose and those who love those those pastors God will never leave you nor will he ever forsake you and it's pretty easy to teach and preach those things but what do we really believe about them and and it is the circumstances that take place in the race the challenges that test that belief to prove it for what it really is not that you have no belief but what is the measure of your belief in your work yeah there was a passage where it talks about praying and not painting and a little bit later in that chapter it just came to the mind

I can't do the reference a little later in that chapter it speaks of Jesus coming and looking to find the faith on the earth and some of the taking that passage means you're going to find the people in faith believers but really what he's talking about is he kind of finding the kind of faith that prays about painting is that the kind of faith that's the kind of faith see that's all wrapped up in this whole life and there are all kinds of you know nuances of it but it's all tied to what we believe about God about his work and when the tire hits the road and the run the places come those are the times that test us to see and show and measure of our belief and believing I remember and you remember real well you know that passage in John 14 where where you know Jesus pretty close to time for Jesus to go to the cross and it's at that point that his disciples are beginning to understand that and you know that

famous passage he says do not let your heart control and then what does he say to me believe actually grammatically it's just there it's something believe believe believe God believe God believe me also not not just in me but believe me believe God and so there there you know is the I think sin that easily easily trips us up he's just believing in God and not believe well I've got some time let's move on into the fourth thing The determination to run the motivation to run the opposition to run and now the concentration to run the other everyone knows even if you've never been an athlete maybe you've never run a good race but everybody knows that when you're running it's a good idea to watch where you're going right right when I was in high school I played football and I remember one game we were playing and we were out on the field and had a substitution and one of our guys came in and substituted for another and we get real close you know he didn't get off that field fast and so

I'll never forget looking at him and he is I mean he's running and he's got his head down like he's running for the sideline and he runs past the out of bounds line and runs right into the lamppost just hit right into and it's awesome and he was alright but you can't imagine running a race like that everybody knows you've got to watch where you're going when you're running a race and especially if you want to win now if you've ever watched a race then you have undoubtedly noticed that they never there's several things that are true we're going to kind of work our way through these they never look at themselves while they're running now not to the out like that let's think about a runner they never look at themselves they never look at the ground they almost never look at the other runners though every once in a while you'll catch them looking to see where the rest of the field is especially if they're out in front you know but if they do that that slows them down they never do that or shouldn't and they never look at the crowds you know while they're running the race looking up in the stands they don't look back at the coach you know look at all these things where do they look the goal right ahead for the goal for the finish line for that you know that ribbon that tape that's across or whatever may be used well I guess so they look for the finish line right and the same should be true of believers who are also running the race and so what does

Paul say about that verse 2 looking unto Jesus I mean you have to I really need to include the latter part verse 1 let us run with endurance the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith that's the finish line in a sense so it's much more than that alright so let's just apply the runners of a race what they do apply that to our race so number one winning runners do not look at their bodies at themselves bodies themselves whatever and the same should be true of believers and I'm going to apply it this way because there are a lot of believers who are more focused on the styles and mechanics of running while they're running than they are focused on Jesus himself

[21 : 36] I'll give you a prime example of what they think is odd but there are far too many believers who become so proficient and organized in doing a quiet time so proficient in doing that that you know sometimes we often come away without accomplishing what what we what we need to do and that is to to meet with Jesus and you just think about it how ironic it is we have all the tools today I work for Lifeway you know back in my seminary days from the doctor for Lifeway I assure you I mean there are just a number of tools that are designed to help you have a very productive and very organized quiet time we have all the tools we have our study

Bibles some of them weigh 10 pounds I'm waiting for them to come out with one with wheels and little hands forget about the Bible covers now we're going to have them on wheels take them to church like that and they can just do it you know I have a Bible above that thick so we have our study Bibles and scripture memory tools those are out there devotional books it's amazing to me how many devotional books are available out there a lot of them are very good but we got all those and we even have surround sound official quiet time music we can have that some of your stick or some of my music you can buy tapes let's say quiet time on now we have organized ways of putting together a prayer list you know that you use in your quiet time

I've seen a number of them I use so you know pray for everything from world peace to aunt sue sore toes now don't misunderstand me I'm not against these things wrong with various devotional tools and prayer helps and things like that I'm not against those things but sometimes we're not careful we go through all of the rigors of a holy hour with God and they come away without every other need and that could be true even if you just simply open the bible and read a chapter or maybe just one of mine by the way don't be too ugly with me but one of my criticisms against these programs designed to help you read your bible and they were all doing that certainly not so I'm not

against it however the problem and I'm careful the problem is that you will be so intent on getting that scripture read today so you won't get behind that you don't really have to listen it would be better for you to read one half of a verse every day and really commune with God what do you say in that passage that it would be for you and for that to take you ten years to read the bible and it would be for you to read a chunk of scripture so you can get it written because see we're kind of looking at ourselves in a sense of the mechanics of running the race not really looking at the goal looking to

Jesus all the way through the race also winning runners number two do not look at the other runners do not look at the other runners now how do we apply this to the christian certainly not in this sense that we don't care about the others who run in their races well that's not the idea you're not just so focused on Jesus that you don't care about anybody else and if they get tripped up then that's their heart love not yours the point here or the application I would make here would be for christians to in their running because they're looking at other runners to either fall into the trap of a kind of a spiritual elitism that we're comparing our running with others and I'm running much better than

Jerry I don't even know if that guy's a believer if I should use my son and he could you know you're not a benefit you know what I'm talking about we're not comparing ourselves with runners in the race we're not looking to Jesus and so you know we either are on one side and because we seek out those maybe that are not running as well as we are so it makes us feel much better about our spirituality and or we kind of on the flip side of that or the other side of that there's a kind of a spirit of envy a spirit of envy or even covetousness that takes place you know kind of a spirit of pride in our lives because you know we're more concerned about others running the race and maybe how they're doing it or maybe what you would like them to think about your running all kinds of possibilities

[28:01] Satan and his demons were having a meeting one day and they were discussing what was to be done about this certain godly and one by one all of Satan's demons were coming by and giving report about what each one had done to try to trick this guy up maybe get him to fall into sin and every attempt they had made was fake and Satan you know he was kind of upset about that disgusted with his his minions and so he said I'll just show you how it's done and so he went up to this godly and he whispered in his ear he said he said you know they're going to choose your friend to be chairman of the body this year and not you look on his face and say he had won so Satan turns to his demons and he says envy is our best weapon against those who see old and that's just one small part of one more one small possibility of where we're looking at others and not keeping our eyes on the finish you know looking unto

Jesus the awesome finish of our faith number three winning runners do not look at the bleachers where you could put the grandstand whatever you could pick you know what I'm talking about how do you just never see that they're not looking up there they're looking at the race if that runner is running down the track and he's looking up there for his mom or his dad or his girlfriend and he's running along and he's not going to win he's not going to win he needs to keep his eyes on Jesus so sometimes God's people bless their hearts more to a pastor or maybe to a godly fattening member mom or dad as they're running the race so they're running to maybe impress them or run it because they want to honor them there's nothing wrong with honoring mom and dad and godly friends nothing wrong with loving your pastor and wanting to follow him and admiring him but that's the wrong focus is Jesus so we don't look up into the bleachers and I would add to that and really the same

I guess the same application can be made here the winning runners of the poor do not look at the coach now look at the coach now this may sound a little strange to you but what I'm getting at here is sometimes in a lot of Christians who are in their pursuit of holiness and living for Christ look more to the Holy Spirit than Jesus how does that work there are lots of leaders who focus more on the Holy Spirit than Jesus their entire denominations in my opinion that are looking more to the Holy Spirit than to Jesus and I mean the Bible says we're to be filled with the Holy that's right but when we are filled with the Holy

Spirit our focus is not going to be the Holy Spirit it's going to be Jesus because that's where the Holy Spirit is focused the Bible says in John 16 14 he the Holy Spirit shall glorify him the Holy and number five winning runners do not look at the ground we're going to be the tend to kind of stretch an application but trying to find a good application for that and this is what I would say we don't look

at the ground in the sense that we we're wanting to be sure to put our foot in just the right place because if we don't then we're going to fail and I would apply that to kind of keeping our eyes on some legalistic way of running our race might even apply it this way to not just legalism but even defeatism sometimes the two go together because if you're trying to live the Christian life in a legalistic way where you are relying not upon

God's grace God's power to enable you to obey him you keep your eyes on Jesus but rather you're relying upon your own ability to make sure you step in the right place that you cross every T and dot every I or even be out of the faith it's kind of a legalistic and defeatist approach because if you choose the way of legalism not only are you obviously dishonoring God but it won't work either and it is the most defeated way try to live Christian life because if you're going to try to measure the success of the days you want your own ability to obey every job to the word then you're going to fail number six winning runners do not look at the starting line do that can you imagine that either running backwards so you keep your eye on the starting line or you're always looking back and starting it would be ridiculous there are a lot of Christians who look back at maybe past victories look back at something God has done in the past

[34:42] Jesus back there that I met when I was saved I mean nothing wrong with reviewing the past in the sins and praising God for what he's done for you but the race cannot be run with our eyes looking backward it must be forward back to scripture put the hand in the cloud and move back you're not really fit all right so in the pursuit of holiness number seven here's a positive one many runners do keep their eyes on the finish and what are we to do look unto Jesus look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith as the author of our faith Jesus is the one who puts you in race he's the who puts you in race as the finisher of our faith

Jesus is the one who is the goal it's that point in your life you love to trust you Christ you Lord you saved in you but you didn't manufacture that faith God gave you that faith you exercise that faith because God touched your heart but he gave you the faith by grace are you saved faith in that what grace and faith not of yourself but you give God Thank you.