

Gospel Marked: *Running Rightly* (when the world may be crazy)
1 Timothy 6:11-12

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Introduction: Mankind is built to strive toward the seemingly impossible. Whether it was the Wright brothers in 1903 taking turns flying the first airplane at Kitty Hawk or the United States racing to the moon ahead of the vaunted Soviet Union in 1969, exploration and doing what is hard has thrilled and driven us. After the N. Pole was traversed in 1909 (although somewhat controversially by Robert Peavy) and the South Pole by Norwegian Roald Amundson in 1911, the world (and Britain) turned to conquer Mt. Everest, the highest mountain on the earth (and still growing...technically Mt. Kea is the tallest if you include *below sea level*, but Everest doesn't want to talk about that), is known in Chinese as the "Holy Mother Peak" and by the local Nepalese as "Chomolungma", or "Goddess Mother of the World". Each year, hundreds of adventurers challenge their nerves, lungs, and life itself to traverse to the peak, a climb that has claimed over 300 lives, most of whom are still entombed on the colossus mountainside.

In 1924, a British expedition set out (nearly 30 years before Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay were the first to officially summit in 1953) to be the first to reach the peak. In June 8, 1924, the experienced climber George Mallory and a young man named Andrew "Sandy" Irvine, who was described as being strong as an ox, set out for the summit. After passing through the clouds on their way, they were never seen alive again. By modern standards, their equipment was incredibly inadequate: down jackets that were ok if it were sunny out but not to keep warm in the brutal winds, paltry oxygen supplies, and ropes that would be thrown out according to today's standards. In 1999, a team found the body of Mallory at a height of 26,768 feet, potentially on his way down, with a leg broken clear through, rope burns around his waist from falling, and a hole in his forehead. The mystery remains whether these two reached the top and perished on the way down or simply fell hundreds of feet short of being cemented in history as the first.

What drives people to do this? In listening to climbers, it is clear that it takes more than good equipment and climbing skill to venture into the unknown. It takes a gritty determination, a willingness to push the physical and emotional limits of the human body, and a fixed gaze on a goal, especially one that from an outside observation looks impossible. The destination is worth the effort, the prize worth the pain.

We come into a section of Scripture where Paul gives clear, vivid, and driving commands to Timothy and by extension, all who are the Lord's and make Him known. One of the major warnings that each of us must make an evaluation of this morning: are we at all **bored in our Christian life**, or simply meandering through life, or checking a box so we can do what we *really want to do*. Far too many **men are passive in their leadership and life**, simply trying to pacify the demands of a job and family so they can finally do something they like to do on the weekend. Far too many of our ladies may be caught up too much in the details of life and miss the greater story of what God is doing all around. Perhaps all of us, on the heels of a strange political process are disenchanted and disillusioned with the direction of our country, only to miss the fact that NOTHING has changed in our calling or mission as believers. **This morning we want to allow Paul to help us recapture what it means to be PEOPLE OF GOD**, what marks us as those who know and are known by Him. In doing this, we will not only be effective, but we will recapture the passion and joy of following Jesus Christ, the most satisfying treasure and in whom is the greatest of adventures that we could ever find.

PEOPLE OF GOD ARE KNOWN FOR WHAT THEY RUN FROM (11a)

"But as for you, O Man of God, flee these things..."

There are several parts of this text we must see to understand it completely.

First, consider the context. Remember last week we looked at the fact that the false teachers in Ephesus used their false teaching, their pseudo godliness, to elicit financial gain. Paul reminded Timothy that **true godliness produced contentment**, a way of thinking that saw life as not by gaining MORE POSSESSIONS but in being satisfied in gaining Christ! Contentment is satisfied with much or little, and those that have figured out the secret of contentment are the **wealthiest people in the world**. The love of money produces all kinds of different sins, and to satisfy the desire for money we try to keep gaining, adding, and spending, which is like trying to quench our thirst **by drinking more and more salt water**. It may be satisfying for a moment, but it is slowly killing us and enhancing our craving. When Paul mentions to **flee**, he is particularly talking about running from the **love of money**.

Second, Paul uses the term "**Man of God**", which could seem to be limiting to the audience. This was a title given many times in the Old Testament which referred to one who is in God's service, represents God Himself as a messenger, and speaks forth His name. This was used for a messenger to Eli (1 Sam. 2:27), of Moses (Deut. 33:1; Josh. 14:6), David (Neh. 12:24), Elijah (1 Kings 17:24) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:7). These would have been formal uses, referring to a prophet or one speaking on behalf of God. So when Paul addresses Timothy as a "Man of God", it carried some significant weight. This would have been sobering to Timothy, since it was used of Hall of Famers or GOATS (Greatest Of All Timers) in the OT. But notice that Paul also uses the same term in **2 Timothy 3:17** in reference to the use and work of Scripture in the life of a believer in Jesus Christ. It is profitable....so **"that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."** This was NOT limited to Timothy personally or pastors uniquely, although it certainly IS applied to these groups. This command is also given **broadly, generally, to ALL who would SERVE, REPRESENT, and SPEAK FORTH the name of God in Jesus Christ.**

Third, notice the language that is used throughout this text. Paul uses the present imperative for the first three commands, and then the aorist for the fourth. Look at the words, **flee, pursue, and fight** for a moment. Each of these is a clear command, but it is also to be obeyed in an ongoing way, perpetuating, and never stopping. They also use the language of a **runner, athlete, and even perhaps of a soldier** (although the first two are more in view here). Paul often used terms that would have echoed with connection to the Isthmian or Olympic games, and that had to do with **effort allied with discipline and conviction of an athlete.**

Fourth, notice the first mark of a **man of God is he is known what he runs from**. Far from being a coward who runs away from combat, this is actually the definition of godly wisdom. It is the reasonable conclusion of **being content in and with Christ** and understanding the propensity of our own heart to desire more and more. The root word of flee has the same idea of being a fugitive, running and hiding from the temptation that wants to knock on our door.

Paul uses the same language in other areas of the NT. In 2 Tim. 2:22 we are called to **flee youthful passions**. In 1 Thess. 4:3 we are to **abstain from sexual immorality**. In 1 Corinthians 10:14 we are told to **flee idolatry**. James 4:7 says that when we resist the devil, he will actually **flee from us!**

We are marked by a constant identifying, evaluating, and fleeing from our sin. When I was younger and used to walk alongside young people who would date, get engaged, and get married, the conversation

would often come to the issue of physical interaction in a dating relationship. "*How far is too far physically in a dating relationship?*" (Unfortunately, I do not observe as many today who are even concerned with this question, or the question of purity). We would often respond to this question with this statement, "***you are asking the WRONG question! The right question is 'how far away from physical/sexual sin can I stay away from in my dating relationship!'***"

The mark of a man of God is NOT that he is a **dabbler in sin** but one that is aggressively identifying what he's running from. Dabbling in sin means we are justifying it in our heart, deadening our conscience, and losing the conviction that comes from the Spirit of God. Remember, there is NO NEUTRALITY in fighting sin: we are either walking by the Spirit or the flesh, and that means that either good fruit or dead fruit is being produced in us. Joseph in the OT knew this, as he was accosted by Potipher's wife to sleep with her, he literally tore out of her presence, leaving life and cloak behind to get away from sin and temptation.

Are you active in running from your sin? How have you identified the love of money or lack of contentment in your life? What does it look like for you to flee from the siren song that money sings to us? Are there sins you are dabbling in? The solution is not to get close to it or fight it head on, but to run away and **run toward, which is Paul's next point to Timothy:**

PEOPLE OF GOD ARE KNOWN FOR WHAT THEY RUN TO (11b)
"Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness"

Fleeing from our sin does us no good unless it means we begin to run in a specific direction. We fight sin NOT by taking it head on, but by **pursuing something far better!** The word "pursue" here depicts a runner who is making a very determined effort to overtake the one in front of them. It is a runner who fixes their gaze on the destination down the road and willingly pushes themselves strenuously and perhaps even others out of the way. The idea is to **keep on following, to be ever following, and never let them turn out of sight.**

Sin satisfies for a moment, and then leaves us guilt laden, empty, ashamed, and craving more. Turning from sin and pursuing something better means we are **committed, disciplined, and consistent in pursuing THESE THINGS.** We all have things in our lives that we pursue. Hobbies, kids activities, work promotion, more clients, or furthering our career can take up our time, thought life, dreams, and passions. Here, **defining WHAT we pursue is an absolute must**, since pursuing the wrong thing is a great snare.

There are **six qualities that a believer should pursue as they pursue God in Christ:**

1. Godward pursuit -

Righteousness - this is **right action or obedience** out of a righteous life. Christ not only declares us righteous but gives us His righteousness so we can live differently. So this is a pursuit that requires us to evaluate all aspects of Biblical obedience and make sure we engaged in pursuing God and acting right. This includes our disciplines, priorities, and use of time.

Godliness - this is the **right attitude toward God**, a reverence, respect, and fear of God. Combining this with righteousness keeps us away from moralistic living, box checking, or trying to earn by doing. Our pursuit of God from the inside out, from a desire outward, is where we want total purity.

Here's an important principle: any man of God who wants to be godly has to have as His goal to know God. He is the goal. In other words, the pursuit of righteousness and godliness is imbedded in our pursuit of God Himself. This is exactly how marriage relationships play out, correct? Don't just do stuff for me, pursue me! In pursuing me, you will want to please, and out of that will come consistent actions.

2. Inward pursuit

Faith - Pursuing God in faith means that we put our confidence, trust, and dependency in God. Money is a pursuit of sight. It is tangible, gives us a semblance of control, and makes us believe we can take care of it. Pursuing God by faith means we trust even though we cannot see and give up the mirage of control we think we actually have. We trust God with our finances, kids, relationships, and future. Faith is cultivated by understanding God through His Word and walking by the Spirit.

Love - Love is something to be pursued! That's fantastic. We pursue God IN LOVE, because we know that He first loved us (1 John 4:7-8). Love draws us close to God, and being close to God breeds more love as we see Him for who He is. Don't we find that in our earthly relationships as well. The more I'm with my wife, close to her, communicative with her, seeing her character and actions, the more I love her! If you want to truly love others, folks, make it your pursuit to love God with all your heart. Spend time with Him. Pray your guts out. Make time with the Lord your priority, and experience how it'll become your favorite, most anticipated time of life.

3. Outward pursuit

Steadfastness (Endurance) - this is the character quality where we are patient or enduring (literally 'remaining under') hard circumstances, trials, and suffering. So endurance and patience are not passive, but active. We endure as we trust, and we trust as we are **content in Christ, even as things may be taken from us** (health, possession, freedom, etc.)

Patience (Meekness) - this is the character trait that is revealed when we are under persecution or opposition. The word means that we **will not strenuously assert our own rights but will sacrifice these rights for the sake of others!** Isn't that needed right now?!? Meekness is strength under control, real power that does not always insert itself. When we are reviled, disagreed with, and opposed in our culture, we must practice endurance and patience. I'm not sure its the best thing for my kids to watch the actions of our politicians today, but I'm more concerned that they are watching MY REACTIONS to what's going on around, since they will tend to emulate me in action and attitude more than anyone else.

So this is fascinating, isn't it? We are to be marked with what we pursue. This means that pursuing these things found in the pursuit of God SHOULD make up a portion of our time, thought, planning, and discipline. **If you had to answer what these pursuits look like in your life, how would you answer?** There's one more really important part to pursuing found in 2 Timothy 2:22...we are to do it "**along with those who call on the name of the Lord with a pure heart.**" We cannot do it alone, nor were we intended to. Pursuing God is a team effort, a group project. No one person can make it to the top of Everest alone, but has to have a whole crew to help. We waste so much time in our **pride and selfishness when we try to do everything alone and try desperately to create the mirage that everything is ok in our life when we are DYING inside.** We pursue God together, sometimes drafting behind a friend, sometimes carried by them the last leg, and other times encouraging them to keep going.

Who are you pursuing God with?

PEOPLE OF GOD ARE KNOWN FOR WHAT THEY RUN AND FIGHT FOR (12a)*"Fight the good fight of the faith..."*

The moment God justifies us and gives us new life in Christ, we are entered into a fight filled with spiritual conflict. Our enemy would LOVE to convince us that this is peacetime, the conflict is over, and we can cruise, focusing on our hobbies, activities, and not concerning ourselves with trivial things like **people's souls, holiness, or truth**. A few things to note:

First, this fight is ongoing. We are always in the fight or we are simply losing, and there is no neutral.

Second, we want to engage in the **good fight**. There are a lot of fights people get into to try to save the world, but those are often vain pursuits. Our fight is an engagement in both what we are **for and against**. We fight **FOR truth**, knowing that there is a battle raging for the hearts and minds of all people everywhere. In our day, people look to news sites for truth and come out with polarizing narratives that simply set them against the other side. We must fight to know, love, understand, grow in, and teach the truth of God's Word. There is a reason why the study of God's Word is so hard: our enemy will do everything in his power to keep us away from it, telling us we don't need it, and creating distractions to bring our focus somewhere, anywhere else.

We also fight **AGAINST the sin that so easily entangles us**. We fight against our default settings, against the desire for the path of least resistance, the desire for mere mediocrity.

Third, we fight for faith that is particularly sourced in Jesus Christ Himself. I always think its interesting how Paul commanded Timothy to **REMEMBER JESUS CHRIST** (2 Tim. 2:8), not because Timothy did not know Him, but because he was prone to forget. Faith is hard. As much as my mind believes Jesus is the most valuable and treasured one, I am so easily given to the things that I can see and touch. So we must **FIGHT against our flesh, our old man, our former self**.

Are you in the fight or are you trying to be the neutral nations of Europe during WWII? Have you been duped that there is no battle and that you are merely ok? If that's the case, it's time to pick up the weapons of warfare and enter into fray.

PEOPLE OF GOD ARE KNOWN FOR THE DESTINATION THEIR RUNNING AFTER (12b)*"Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."*

Finally, we are marked not only by what we flee from, what we follow, and what we fight for, but we are also marked by what we are fastened to. To "take hold of" means to grasp or grip. Here we grip onto the reality and surety of our salvation in the present and what is awaiting in the future. When climbers would climb a sheer mountain face, there comes a point where they have to find a grip for the next move, and let go of the former, seemingly secure hold. Here, Paul reminds Timothy that his life is hidden in Christ (Col. 3:3), which is where our minds should be set (Col. 3:2). When we take hold of who we are in Christ, we can loosen our grip on this world and the things in it.

So if we are "Men of God" or "people of God", are we marked by what we flee from, what we pursue, what we fight for, and what we are gripping onto? This is not just a momentary decision. It's what drove Paul. At the end of his life he said, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."* (2 Tim. 4:7). Not an easy life, but a fulfilled one. Not a comfortable life, but a joyful one. Not a possession filled life, but person filled one. Not a boring life, but an exhilarating one.

I leave you this morning with a question posed by Peter that I've been chewing on these last days:

*"Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, **what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the Day of the Lord, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn. But according to His promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.**" (2 Pet. 3:11-13)*

That's a goal worth fleeing from, pursuing, fighting for, and taking hold of.