

Resist The Exist Part 7

Finish Strong

2 Timothy 4:7-8

Memory Verses: 2 Timothy 4:7

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

Me and Lisa have always been fans of shows like Survivor and the Amazing Race so when a new show called The World's Toughest Race came on Amazon we knew we had to watch it. Come to find out, it's not a new thing at all... it's the Eco-challenge which has been around for the past 30 years almost. The Eco-challenge is a 10 day, 417 mile endurance race through some of the toughest terrain on the planet and incorporates sailing, mountain climbing, biking, and of course a lot of running. Teams of four go days without sleep or rest in a race to prove who can beat mother nature the fastest. The 2020 race started with 66 teams but only 44 finished. The first place team from New Zealand finished the course in under 6 days. The 44th team finished just minutes before the course closed on day 10. But here's the thing... whether you finish in 6 days or minutes before the course closes on day 10... to simply finish this thing is an achievement that few will ever accomplish. If you can finish the eco challenge you are without a doubt one of the toughest people in the world.

For example on day two 5 teams had members suffering from hypothermia, 3 teams had members suffering dehydration, and a couple had members with broken bones. One team of elder gentlemen all aged 60 or more had all of these issues and more and were falling behind rapidly. I thought for sure they would end up giving up. As they were all huddled together discussing the possibility of quitting, one of the men spoke up and said, "if we quit we will always wonder... what if we'd pushed through... nothing will ever be tougher than living with that." They decided to push on and finished. Even though they were weak... they finished strong.

It's been a while since we watched the show over the summer, but that one phrase has kind of stuck with me; "if we quit... nothing will ever be tougher than living with that." The regret that comes with having given up on the things that matter the most is often a pill too hard to swallow. Yes, it is very easy to quit something that is difficult. And yes, it is hard to continue a course that is painful and punishing. But if that course is for something greater than you or me, something greater than the trivial pursuits of pleasure and prestige... then perhaps they are worth it.

For us as Christians this goes so much further. We know for a fact that there is nothing more important to pursue than the mission of

Christ glorified through the salvation of sinful people. If we know that life and death hang in the balance... If we know that eternal life and the supreme glory of our God are on the line, then nothing should be able to stop us; no pain, no agony, no adversary, no obstacle. We simply cannot quit. Why? Simple. Because... **nothing will ever be tougher than living with the regret of having given up on Christ.**

For 6 weeks we've looked at **Romans 12:9-13** which tells us to Resist The Exist. We must not give into the notion that we can't make a difference. We must not adopt the mentality that a half-hearted religion will suffice. We must never give up on the great commission or the great commandment. We must never grow weary in doing good. We must not settle into spiritual apathy, eeking out the rest of our days doing as little as possible while we merely exist. We must Resist The Exist.

How? First, we Hold Fast. We don't let go of the things that matter. We don't let go of the Gospel, we don't let go of our values, we don't let go of the vision. We hold fast to what is good and we abhor what is evil.

Secondly, we Outdo. We don't give half measures or good enough. We go the extra mile. We conquer mediocrity with excellence. We Outdo one another in love. We love others so greatly that they can only categorize it as extraordinary or supernatural. We love in a way that is not common or easy.

Thirdly, we Remain. We hold onto our first love. We remain passionate to our God by remaining in ministry, and by remaining dedicated to spiritual discipline. We keep the fire burning by any means necessary.

Fourth, we Persevere. Times will get hard. The road will get tough. But instead of giving up, we patiently wait upon the Lord, who has always come through for us and will always come through for us.

And lastly, we Contribute. While many in the church sit idly by waiting to be served, waiting to be fed, and are there to consume a product... we are there to serve. While many are waiting to be blessed we are there to be a blessing. We aren't customers, we are partners and we want to do our part!

Today we want to bring all of this together and make the final plea to Resist the Exist. Resisting the Exist is not just for today or tomorrow. Resisting the Exist is for the rest of your life until you cross the finish line. We don't know when that day will be do we... but we do know we are not promised our next breath and that we could finish our race any day now. So with that in mind... we should live every single day like it's the final leg, the final stretch and we should finish strong!

Look with me at **2 Timothy 4:7-8** which says... This morning I want us to recognize that **nothing will ever be tougher than living with the regret of having given up on Christ** but you don't need to worry about that... because you have every reason to finish strong. Let's look at a few real quick.

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

First, **We Finish Strong to Protect the Lead**. Paul says, "I have fought the good fight." The implication isn't just that Paul fought in this lifelong war, but that he also won the good fight. How do we know this? Because the Bible makes it abundantly clear that in the end, Jesus and those who fight for him will be victorious. And so the obvious question that I get all the time is; "if we know we are going to win, then why do we keep on fighting?" And the answer is simple... with Christ we were always going to win, but we keep fighting to do our part to ensure the win. It's a bit of a paradox... we know we will win regardless of our fight, but we still must fight to ensure the win. I think the easiest way to explain this is a sports analogy. When a sports team gets a big lead they usually change their strategy to ensure the win... they call it protecting the lead. And they can protect the lead in one of two ways; they can either choose to shut down the enemy with an increased defense, or they can choose to demoralize the enemy with more offense. I've been watching a lot of soccer lately and I have two teams in two different leagues that I really like. In the English Premier league I really like West Ham who are having their best year ever right now. When the Hammers get a lead they pull back their midfielders and forwards on the defensive to make it extremely hard for the opposing team to tie the game. In the German Bundesliga I really like Bayern. When they get the lead they keep their defenders and midfielders pushed up to score even more goals and keep the game out of reach. I like the Bayern way better... they don't let up... they don't just want to beat their opponents... they want to crush them. In our walk with Christ, I would encourage you to protect the lead by continuing to fight hard, ensuring a decisive victory. **A true soldier will always fight to protect what his Lord has already won.**

But we also fight because it is a good fight. Some men fight because they are forced to and some men fight because they want to, which ones do you think make better soldiers? Of course the ones who want to. Those who see the fight as a worthy cause will always fight harder than those who are forced to fight. The same with us as believers. If you approach the Christian fight as an obligation you will be a poor soldier and most likely go AWOL or MIA – you won't keep the desire – you most likely will adopt the mentality of existing. But, if you approach the fight as a worthy cause that you must give your life for, then nothing will stop you or cause you to quit, you will naturally resist the exist.

The bottom line is clear; you can never, you must never give up the fight. Because protecting what Christ has won is worth it, because the fight is worth fighting, and because... **nothing will ever be tougher than living with the regret of having given up on Christ.**

Second, **We Finish Strong to Prove Who Our Lord Is**. Only

those who are true believers will finish the race. This is a race that can only be won by those who run for Christ. But don't be confused... you don't run it for salvation, but because of it. **You don't finish the race to become saved, you finish the race because you are saved.** In finishing the race you prove that you are truly a child of God and Jesus is truly your Lord. Someone who has stopped running, who has decided to apathetically sit on the side lines and wait for the race to be over is not only a very poor witness to the lordship of Christ in their life, but is also in danger of proving that they aren't really saved. To finish says... I am who I say I am. To stop and exist says... I may not be who I say I am. **Matthew 7:18-23** says that we can recognize believers or non-believers based upon their fruit. One who finishes the race has proven their fruit is good. Those who are idle and going through the motions have a fruit that is iffy at best. In the end Jesus will tell many people who thought that they had finished the race to depart from him, for he never knew them. They will be disqualified from the race, they will not finish. There will be people who start the race, and look like loyal runners who in the end prove by their fruit, or lack there of, that they aren't really running for Christ. Therefore, it is imperative that you never give up, that you finish the race. **Nothing will ever be tougher than living with the regret of having given up on Christ.**

Third, **We Finish Strong to Preserve Our Loyalty To Christ**. Paul says, "I have kept the faith." Through all of his trials; ship wrecks, stonings, beatings, and imprisonments... he never stopped believing. Pull a Journey and don't stop believing (one of the greatest songs ever by the way). Listen, **your faith is ever only as strong as your will to win the fight or to finish the race.** The question is... have you remained faithful to Christ your Lord? There's a lot of qualifying questions to this question isn't there? Do you mean have I been perfect? Of course not. We will all be proven unfaithful at some point. We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. I always point to King David; a man after God's own heart, who committed adultery, and murder. At that point in the story many could say that David had clearly proven himself unfaithful to God. But he confesses his sin and repents of his sin, and recommits himself to following God's way and in the end is proven to have kept the faith. He made some mistakes but finished strong. So get this.... your faithfulness to Christ isn't judged according to the sins you've committed, your faithfulness is determined by your ability to confess, repent, and continue running for Christ. We don't run, or fight, because we are perfect... we do it because we aren't, we do it because Jesus is perfect and through his Spirit gives us the strength to conquer our flesh. You can sin, fail, and give up... or you can confess, repent, and finish strong. Don't lose faith... because **nothing will ever be tougher than living with the regret of having given up on Christ.**

Lastly, **We Finish Strong to Lift The Prize**. Verse 8 reminds us that the crown of righteousness will be awarded to those who finish the race. There is a prize to claim when we fight the good fight. But, notice here that Paul says “henceforth” as if his main motivation is not to receive the prize, but to simply run and fight. It’s like receiving the prize is a secondary bonus. In **Philippians 3:14** Paul says, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call.” This can be interpreted in one of two ways. Either the prize is for the upward call or the prize is the upward call. For the longest time I thought I was running for a prize that I would one day receive in Heaven... but **vs8** shows us that the real prize is simply fighting for the upward call of Jesus. Running and fighting for Jesus is the prize. Or more simply put... Jesus himself is the prize. So yes, a motivation for finishing strong is to lift the prize of the crown of righteousness... that will be cool, but **the real prize is simply getting to run and fight for our Lord Jesus Christ**.

Application

In order to resist the exist... we must finish strong. We must never have any regrets for having quit on Christ. **Nothing will ever be tougher than living with the regret of having given up on Christ**. So don't ever quit fighting the good fight. Don't ever quit running the race. Don't ever lose the faith. Don't ever lose sight of the prize of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Conclusion

Paul fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. He truly is an example to all of us of what it looks like to resist the exist. But his race reminds me of **Derek Redmond** in the 1982 Barcelona Olympics. Watch this clip. In the first leg of the race he tore his hamstring and kneels in crushing agony and sadness. He trained his whole life for this opportunity. But instead of staying down, when tragedy struck, rather than quitting, he decided to try to finish the race anyway.

The Christian life will have torn hamstrings, their will be falls and tragedy... what matters is not whether you fall... but whether you finish. I think of William Tyndale who spent his whole life translating the English Bible only to draw the ire of both the Catholic church and the King. As he was being martyred I can imagine Jesus saying... you've fought the good fight. I think of Jim Elliot & Nate Saint who went to Ecuador to reach a tribal people only to be killed by those same people. As they were being killed I can imagine Jesus saying... you've finished the race. And... I think of those two women in their 80's who left their cushy retired lives in the states to go and share the Gospel with the lost and hurting in Cambodia. As their bus was flying off the road to the deadly valley below... I can imagine Jesus saying... you've kept the faith. Don't ever give up on

Jesus. Don't ever resign yourself to simply exist. Fight the good fight, finish the race, keep the faith... Resist the Exist.