

# finishing well\_ DAILY DEVOTIONS



## Week 6 - Day 1 - Run with Perseverance

*Everyday disciples of Jesus are running a marathon. They follow Jesus until the end. Finishing the discipleship marathon well involves patience and perseverance. This Plan explores how to overcome some of the barriers to finishing well and how to keep going, anticipating the great reward in store for you.*

*Please note that this Plan offers more than a daily reflection on Scripture. It is designed to forge everyday disciples who are aware of God's presence and hear God's voice throughout the day. Please try to build the lunchtime meditations and evening reflections into your routine, as well as the morning devotions. Before each session, pause to be aware of God's love and presence.*

### MORNING

#### Scripture: Hebrews 12:1-3

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, <sup>2</sup>fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup>Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

#### Devotion

Christians dropping out of the discipleship “race” is not a new issue. Scholars estimate that there were 7,000 to 10,000 Christians in the Roman world by AD100. With at least 500 followers of Jesus after the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:6), another 3,000 added to their number at Pentecost (Acts 2:41), and lots of evangelism recorded in Acts, 10,000 Christians seems like a relatively small number after 70 years of gospel preaching. There must have been many Christian converts who got entangled in sin (12:1) or grew weary and lost heart (12:3). Sadly, many didn't make it to the finish line.

The solution in this Scripture is to focus on the example of the many who have persevered (“a great crowd of witnesses” - see Heb. 11) and especially “fixing our eyes on Jesus” (12:2) who faithfully continued through all the challenges and suffering to His ascension and enthronement. A great cloud of witnesses has confronted what you are facing, and they staunchly endured. Jesus himself faced the shame and pain of crucifixion and He persevered. Don't focus on the deserters but look to the finishers and be encouraged and inspired by their endurance. With Jesus, you will complete your race well. Persevere.

You're getting tired. Persevere. You're feeling overwhelmed by the pressure. Persevere. You're struggling with sin. Repent and persevere. You're facing failure and criticism. Persevere. You feel inadequate. Persevere. God seems distant. Persevere. You're growing weary. Persevere. Fix your eyes on Jesus and persevere. True disciples of Jesus finish their race.

#### Prayer

Sometimes it's hard work being Your disciple, Jesus. I desperately want to follow You well, but there are so many challenges and disappointments and temptations. However, I know that You (and many others) faced all these things and continued to obey and serve God to the end. So I'm not giving up. Please help me to keep my eyes on You and to persevere.

#### Today's Bible Focus

***“Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus.”***

### **LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)**

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

### **EVENING**

1. *Remember:* Repeat today's Bible Focus.
2. *Reflect:* Reflect on the day and thank God for what He has said and done.
3. *Repent:* Check where you have neglected or disobeyed God during the day and ask for forgiveness and freedom.
4. *Release:* Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.

## Week 6 - Day 2 - Resisting Satan

### MORNING

#### Scripture: 1 Peter 5:8-11

<sup>8</sup>Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup>Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. <sup>10</sup>And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. <sup>11</sup>To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

#### Devotion

Finishing the race is tough because we are up against some powerful opposition. The spiritual being behind all this opposition is Satan himself. He knows our flaws and will attack when we are at our weakest. Sometimes he flexes his muscles and looks like a roaring lion (5:8), trying to make us afraid. At other times, he masquerades as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), pretending that he wants what is best for us.

But don't be fooled, Satan's agenda is clear. He wants to rip you off, make you suffer, and stop you from being a disciple of Jesus. He is constantly prowling around, looking to destroy your faith. I don't want to make you paranoid. Not every problem we face comes directly from Satan's hand. But he is active, and you are a big target if you are an everyday disciple of Jesus.

So, you have to RESIST him (5:9). Don't listen to his lies. Don't believe his promises. Don't fear his power. Call him out. Tell him that you belong to Jesus. And you will find that for all his bravado, he's actually a toothless tiger. He's already been defeated. The real power lies with Jesus (5:11), and each time you resist Satan, you grow stronger (5:10) and he grows weaker.

#### Prayer

I'm no match for Satan by myself Lord. He's too smart, seductive, strong and skilled. But I know that he is powerless against you. You have already shown that with your resurrection. Satan had no strength to keep you dead and buried. He crumbled before you. Please open my eyes to Satan's lies. Fill my resistance with your resurrection power today. Make me strong, firm and steadfast, so that I finish my race well.

#### Today's Bible Focus

***"Resist the devil, standing firm in the faith."***

#### LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

#### EVENING

1. *Remember*: Repeat today's Bible Focus.
2. *Reflect*: Reflect on the day and thank God for what He has said and done.
3. *Repent*: Check where you have neglected or disobeyed God during the day and ask for forgiveness and freedom.
4. *Release*: Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.

## Week 6 - Day 3 - Winning the Prize

### MORNING

#### Scripture: Philippians 3:12-14

<sup>12</sup>Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup>Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

#### Devotion

Everyday disciples of Jesus have three clear foci.

1. Disciples are *past-oriented*. At the center of our faith lies a series of events that occurred almost 2000 years ago. Jesus lived, died, rose again, and ascended to heaven. We constantly remember and celebrate these events because they are foundational to our grace relationship with God. Our faith is founded on an historical event - the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

2. Disciples are *present-oriented*. God is at work in our lives today. We talk with God and listen to His Word. We enjoy His presence and recognize His guidance. God's Spirit lives in us and works through us. We appreciate all that God is doing in our world and align ourselves with His work.

3. But disciples of Jesus must also be *future-oriented*. That's what Paul is getting at in this Scripture. We carry a sense of dissatisfaction with our world and our own brokenness (3:13). We love what Jesus has done for us and what He is doing in and through us, but we know that there is a great reward ahead. We believe that our future is way better than anything we have known and experienced so far. Jesus has called us to follow him because He wants to share this reward with us (3:12, 14). It's our hope, our goal, our prize. Our future orientation propels disciples of Jesus to make a huge effort to follow Him and to finish well. Paul uses words like "pressing on" and "straining." We have a constant eye on our incredible future, and this keeps us persevering and giving it all we've got. We will not miss out on this amazing prize.

#### Prayer

Thanks, Jesus, for what you have already done. I deeply appreciate Your sacrifice for me. Thanks, Holy Spirit, for all that You are doing at the moment to strengthen and empower my spiritual life and ministry. Thanks, Father, for promising me an incredible future with You. May this "prize" be so real that it encourages my effort and commitment today.

#### Today's Bible Focus

***"I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."***

#### LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

#### EVENING

1. *Remember*: Repeat today's Bible Focus.
2. *Reflect*: Reflect on the day and thank God for what He has said and done.
3. *Repent*: Check where you have neglected or disobeyed God during the day and ask for forgiveness and freedom.
4. *Release*: Name any concerns or fears that are on your mind and release them to Jesus.

## Week 6 - Day 4 - The Battle for Your Heart

### MORNING

#### Scripture: Colossians 3:1-4

<sup>1</sup>Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup>For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

#### Devotion

This Scripture shows how what has happened to us now and what will happen to us in the future should change the way we follow Jesus. *Our present reality:* You have died to an independent, self-centered life (3:3) and have been resurrected to a new life in Christ. Your life has radically changed. You are a new creation. *Our future reality:* When everything is completed and Jesus returns to establish His new perfect heaven and earth, you will rule with Him (3:4). Your new life and your future trajectory all revolve around Jesus.

Because your present reality and your future hope are deeply tied to what Jesus has done and what He will do, it would be a complete waste of time getting too entrenched in this world and what it offers. Our hearts (3:1) and minds (3:2) are captured by Christ and His life and His growing kingdom. This seems obvious and straightforward, but of course, it's a huge challenge. We live in a world that seeks to invade every longing of our hearts and every portion of our minds. It tries to capture our desires and thinking and tie us to the temporary and dissatisfying.

But everyday disciples of Jesus "set" their hearts and minds on the reality of their present life in Jesus and their future hope with Jesus (3:1,2). Paul makes this an imperative. It's something we have to intentionally do. It won't happen naturally. Each day we consciously focus on who we are and who we will be in Christ. This is an act of our will, a choice we keep making. You need to deliberately "set your mind on things above" throughout your day.

#### Prayer

This world bombards me with its promises and worries. It's so easy for my heart and mind to be captured by empty dreams and anxious thoughts. But I know that I am a new creation and that I have a significant place with You in Your kingdom forever. Please give me the strength to focus my heart and mind on Your plans and promises today. May I see things from "above" (from your perspective).

#### Today's Bible Focus

***"Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things."***

#### LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

#### EVENING

1. *Remember:* Repeat today's Bible Focus.
2. *Reflect:* Reflect on the day and thank God for what He has said and done.
3. *Repent:* Check where you have neglected or disobeyed God during the day and ask for forgiveness and freedom.
4. *Release:* Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.

## Week 6 - Day 5 - Training Instead of Trying

### MORNING

#### Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

<sup>24</sup> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. <sup>25</sup> Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. <sup>27</sup> No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

#### Devotion

This Scripture brings back memories of footy training when I was a serious Rugby player at school. We'd come back from the Christmas holidays and get straight into training. It was challenging and, at times gut-wrenching, training our bodies into shape, but it paid off when we eventually got out on the football field. In my old age, I no longer play football, but I have been going to the gym for 15 years. I notice at the gym that some people start with great enthusiasm. They *try* really hard for a while, but they don't usually last long. Trying doesn't get them very far. Eventually, they find it too hard, get disappointed, and give up. On the other hand, many *train* their bodies. They have a goal and a plan. They start on a disciplined program with steps to gradually improve. I see them at the gym, session after session, year after year. They achieve their goals. Training works.

Paul says that if Olympic athletes (or gym junkies) train so hard for a gold medal of limited value, he is certainly going to train harder for his eternal reward. A lot of Christians are into trying. They are challenged through a sermon and try to spend more time with God. They feel convicted about a sinful habit and they try hard to change it. They see the needs of others in their community and try to do something. But eventually, it gets too hard and they give up. Trying doesn't bring lasting transformation.

True disciples of Jesus, like Paul, are into training, not trying. They are patient and disciplined because they are building habits and commitments that bring long-term change. Of course, they still fail. But with an eye on the "prize," they get back up and train some more. How are you training yourself at the moment?

#### Prayer

I feel relieved that I don't have to try harder to follow You, Lord Jesus. Trying has not worked for me in the past. It has just produced lots of frustration and guilt. But I've seen athletes train and that's what I'm doing. Help me to serve and obey, so that I will continue to build into my life the disciplines and behaviors that will help me become like You and that will get me to the end of my earthly race still running strong.

#### Today's Bible Focus

***"We train ourselves hard in order to get the crown that will last forever."***

#### LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

#### EVENING

1. *Remember*: Repeat today's Bible Focus.
2. *Reflect*: Reflect on the day and thank God for what He has said and done.
3. *Repent*: Check where you have neglected or disobeyed God during the day and ask for forgiveness and freedom.
4. *Release*: Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.

## Week 6 - Day 6 - Building for Eternity

### MORNING

#### Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

<sup>10</sup>By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. <sup>11</sup>For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup>If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, <sup>13</sup>their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. <sup>14</sup>If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

#### Devotion

In this Plan, we have been emphasizing the future crown/prize/reward that God promises to us when we run and finish the “race” as disciples of Jesus. This prize is life forever with God and it is a tremendous incentive for us to follow Jesus and finish well. While our prize comes as a grace gift from God, being a disciple of Jesus calls for obedience and training on our part. We put in a lot of effort, but does any of this matter in the end?

In this Scripture, Paul suggests that if we build well, there is a further reward on top of eternal life (3:14-15). Now we need to be careful before reading too much into one Scripture. Some biblical scholars are uncomfortable with any interpretation that suggests an earned reward, so I am wary. But because what we do for Jesus on earth lasts forever, then our “building” (the good we have done, the truth we have taught and the lives we have touched) will certainly follow us to the new heaven and earth. Our efforts will be there forever to honor God and to be celebrated by all. They will never be forgotten.

This does not diminish God's grace. Eternal life is completely based on the work of Jesus, not our efforts (3:15). And because everything we do for God comes from His grace, ultimately God will get the glory for all our efforts and achievements. But how encouraging this is. The building you do with God will last forever. It makes following Jesus today incredibly significant. It's a bonus of being an everyday disciple of Jesus. Our driving motive of course is to serve Jesus, but the results of our service will be remembered and celebrated forever. It all counts. We are building for eternity.

#### Prayer

May I build with truth and grace today, Lord Jesus. May my attitudes and actions reflect You. May my seemingly insignificant words and behaviors build on the foundation of Your gospel to make a difference that will last forever. Here I am, please use me, Lord.

#### Today's Bible Focus

***“If what we have built survives the fire, we will receive a reward.”***

#### LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

#### EVENING

1. *Remember:* Repeat today's Bible Focus.
2. *Reflect:* Reflect on the day and thank God for what He has said and done.
3. *Repent:* Check where you have neglected or disobeyed God during the day and ask for forgiveness and freedom.
4. *Release:* Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.