

Joke: Struggling to make ends meet, the pastor was livid when he confronted his wife with the receipt for a \$250 dress she had recently purchased. "How could you do this, you know we don't have extra right now?!"

"I was outside the store looking at the dress through the window, and then I found myself trying it on," she explained. "It was like Satan was whispering in my ear, 'You look fabulous in that dress. Buy it!'"

"Well," the pastor replied, "You know how I deal with that kind of temptation. I say, 'Get behind me, Satan!'"

"I did," replied his wife, "but then he said, 'It looks fabulous from back here, too!'"

How many of you has ever felt like giving up?

Maybe at one time you had a goal, a dream, or a vision of doing something and you started it with excitement and anticipation, but you hit some resistance, and you stalled.

Maybe you've had very little or seemingly no progress and frustration set in. You're discouraged and you feel like just giving up.

I don't know what it might be for you, maybe there was a relationship that you tried to restore and when you reached out to bring healing things didn't go well and reconciliation seems impossible.

Others of you might be really fighting to save your marriage, you're doing everything that you can, but you feel like you're running out of fight.

Others still, you're believing for a miracle and you've been praying for your child to come back to Jesus, or you've been praying for healing, for financial provision, or you've been asking God to help you overcome some addiction and you've tried and you've prayed and you've believed, but you haven't seen the results and now you're discouraged and possibly even losing hope.

Today I want to talk to those of you who feel like giving up. And let's be honest. I think most if not all of us have had that feeling at some time or another.

Today we are concluding a message series Determination.

We have been for the last several weeks talking about the importance of our decisions.

I mentioned several times that the problem is for most us is that we are not very good decision makers?

And that's why instead of waiting for the heat of the moment to decide in the future when the situation arises, we are seeking the wisdom of God through the word of God, to determine in advance and make some of those decisions ahead of time.

We started this series looking at simply learning to make better, wiser decisions. We talked about putting on the full armor of God so that we are ready for the attacks of the enemy because truth is he is going to attack, his only intention is to kill, steal, and destroy. We followed that up with talking about being consistent, devoted, and last week generous.

And today we are concluding our series on finishing well.

One thing I know about the desire to finish is that it's easy to start something new, but much more difficult to finish.

And this idea is more important than most people understand.

Let me start off with a couple questions: What do you think separates average people from amazing people? What do you think separates those who are really fulfilled in life from those who are often empty? What do you think is the difference between those who struggle and those who succeed?

I asked a similar question earlier in this series and once again let me tell you what it's not.

It's not their intelligence and it's not their appearance. It's not their talent or their education. It's not who or what they know.

The difference is their perseverance.

It's their willingness to stick to it, it is their drive to persevere, their refusal to quit.

Author Angela Duckworth who wrote the book *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. She took to the field and studied what make successful people succeed.

She visited cadets struggling with and through their first days of West Point, teachers who are working in some of the toughest schools, young finalists in the National Spelling Bee, as well as CEO's and at least one coach in the NFL.

And the secret she determined to outstanding achievement was not talent, but a special blend of passion and perseverance she calls "grit."

Grit, she defines "as the strength of character that refuses to quit."

The difference isn't what you know, it's not even who you know, it's your willingness to stay in the fight, it's the strength of character that refuses to quit.

She has a quote, I love this she says, "Enthusiasm is common, but endurance is rare."

It's easy to start but it's often way more rare and difficult to finish.

And so today we are going to determine in advance that we're finishers because by nature we tend to take the easy way out, we tend to take the path of least resistance.

If things get difficult, it's oh so easy for us to quit so our decision today is going to be this. We are going to decide this. We are going to determine in advance that when I commit I don't quit.

Let me read you this it's found in Nehemiah chapter 4. I'm going to jump around a few verses so hold on to your hats.

Nehemiah 4:1–2 (NIV): When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, 2 and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?"

Nehemiah 4:6–7 (NIV): So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.

7 But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry.

Nehemiah 4:8–10 (NIV): They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. 9 But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat. 10 Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."

Nehemiah 6:1–4 (NIV): When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it—though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates—2 Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono." But they were scheming to harm me; 3 so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?" 4 Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.

Nehemiah 6:15 (NIV): So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.

Actually they came a fifth time with a different tactic. There was opposition that occurred even after the wall was rebuilt.

My point in reading all that was when God calls you for an assignment. There will always be opposition.

But we need to determine in advance no matter what opposition comes we will not give in or give up.

So, how do we as disciples of Jesus, how do we strengthen our perseverance when the devil wants us to quit? How do we strengthen our character, our refusal to quit?

In order to answer those questions let's look at the words of the Apostle Paul as he gave what appears to be a very emotional farewell to his spiritual son in the faith, Timothy.

And to give you the context of 2 Timothy. The Roman emperor Nero had sentenced Paul to be beheaded.

Wrap that around your mind, Paul is writing this letter to someone that he loves dearly as he's awaiting execution in a deep dungeon underground.

And so this is where Paul is likely writing this very emotional letter days before he's scheduled to be beheaded. And he writes to Timothy, his spiritual son, these words of encouragement.

2 Timothy 4:5 (NLT): But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you.

Don't be afraid of what? Suffering for the Lord.

Hear this church being a Christian doesn't mean that you don't have hard times. The fact is you will most likely have hard times. Jesus said, "in this world you will have trouble," but then he said, "take heart I have overcome the world."

So He will walk with you through the storms.

And do, Paul said, "don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord."

And then watch what Paul tells his spiritual son. He says, "Work at telling others the good news," and do what? "Fully carry out the ministry that God has given you."

In other words, finish what God called you to start. "Fully carry out the ministry God has given you." And then Paul says, very emotionally he says:

2 Timothy 4:6–7 (NLT): As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near.
7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful.

I have remained faithful. I've been in the battle. I haven't given up. I fought the good fight and I've remained faithful.

It's obvious that Paul had finished his race but church you have not finished yours. God has more for you to do. And, if you find yourself discouraged, if you find yourself feeling like giving up, maybe God would say to you, as long as there is breath in your lungs the gifts and callings of God are without repentance, I still have something for you to do.

There is more for you to do.

God has more plans, God's got more assignments specifically for you. There's more to do, there's more love to give, there's more people to help, there's more ministries to start, there's more businesses to launch, there's more hope to share, there's more friendships to make, there's more addictions to break. One people to help encounter Jesus.

Look at the person sitting next to you. Tell 'em, God's got more for you.

If you're not dead, you're not done.

There's more for you to do so. What do you do? Fully finish the work that God had you start.

Philippians 1:6 (TPT): 6 I pray with great faith for you, because I'm fully convinced that the One who began this glorious work in you will faithfully continue the process of maturing you and will put his finishing touches to it until the unveiling of our Lord Jesus Christ!

And maybe some of you are thinking but pastor you don't understand, I'm tired, busy tired, you don't get it I have so much to do and no time to it. I'm just tired. Anybody relate to that?

David Allen in his book called "Getting Things Done." Said this, "Much of the stress that people feel doesn't come from having too much to do. It comes from not finishing what they've started."

I don't know who this is for right now but maybe some of the stress you have, isn't that you got so much to do, but rather you haven't done what God has called you to do.

As I'm speaking I want you to be in a posture of prayer. Just have your heart open to receive what God wants to show us today.

Say this simple prayer with me, God, show me what you want, help me see what you want me to see.

And I'm going ask you a question and I want you to see if God doesn't give you an answer to this question. Are you open to hear?

What I want you to do in just a moment is I want you to think about what you started, but you haven't finished, what God prompted.

I'm not talking about binge watching that series you heard so much about and you didn't follow through watching at the suggestion of a friend. That's not what I'm talking about.

I'm talking about something that God prompted you to do. Something you felt in your spirit to do and neglected to do.

Now let me just pause here a moment. Some opportunities are gone. Maybe God prompted you to share something with someone at the store and you didn't take the time to do so.

Finish next time, God is gracious and will give another don't dwell on a mess up, just move up. And respond to the next one.

But there are some things God is still leading you to.

Let me read you a Scripture and then I'm going to ask you a question. It's found in Revelation chapter 3 Jesus said this to the church in Sardis:

Revelation 3:1–2 (NIV): I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God.

Jesus says you didn't finish what I called you to start. You have some unfinished business.

In that posture of prayer, I would ask you this question and have you just listen to what God may say to you. What is your unfinished business? What is your unfinished assignment?

What is it that as a follower of Jesus, you were prompted to do, you know you're supposed to do, you thought you were supposed to do it, you were going to do it, you hope to do it, you thought about doing it, you knew you were supposed to say it, you were prompted to give it, you were looking to reach out to someone, what is it that you're prompted to do?

It could be a number of different things. Perhaps for you, you were going to try to heal a broken relationship and you never reached out that someone. You were going apologize to someone and never reached out to them.

Maybe for you God had prompted you to share your faith with somebody.

Maybe you were supposed to give something and you never gave what you were supposed to give. It might have been, you were going to start some kind of a hobby, or serve the church in some capacity, and you knew you were going to use your gifts to serve but you never followed through.

It was a ministry that you were supposed to start or business you were supposed to launch or it could some physical goal like you were going to lose 20 pounds.

Whatever it might be, what is the unfinished business that God had called you to start and you haven't followed through.

Think about it. Let the Holy Spirit speak into your heart.

I love the advice that the Apostle Paul gave to the Corinthians.

They were going to give big and they started but they didn't follow through. And Paul said, here's my advice. His advice to them, maybe God's advice to us. He said, here's my advice. "It would be good for you to finish what you started a year ago. You started well with good intentions now go finish what you started.

2 Corinthians 8:10–12 (TPT): So here are my thoughts concerning this matter, and it's in your best interests. Since you made such a good start last year, both in the grace of giving and in your longing to give, 11 you should finish what you started. You were so eager in your intentions to give, so go do it. Finish this act of worship according to your ability to give. 12 For if the intention and desire are there, the size of the gift doesn't matter. Your gift is fully acceptable to God according to what you have, not what you don't have.

What is your unfinished business? What is it that God prompted you to do that you haven't done yet?

Maybe your thinking what's the big deal if I quit?

And honestly, there are some things that you will want to quit. And probably should quit. But that's not what I'm trying to point out in this message.

You actually may want to quit somethings you're not called to so that you can complete the things you are called to.

Because there are some things that would be like divine assignments that you haven't done yet.

Why does it matter if you quit that? And the reason is because every decision you make is a step toward your future.

Every time you decide in the moment you're voting, what kind of person are you and whenever you decide to quit, what you're doing is voting that you really don't have what it takes, that you're not a finisher. That God must of called the wrong man or women for the task.

On the other hand, when you stand strong in the Lord and you persevere and you don't back down and you finish, you are voting I am a finisher. I persevere. When I commit, I don't quit.

Acts 20:24 (TPT): But whether I live or die is not important, for I don't esteem my life as indispensable. It's more important for me to fulfill my destiny and to finish the ministry my Lord Jesus has assigned to me, which is to faithfully preach the wonderful news of God's grace.

Paul said, my aim, my goal, what's important to me is to fulfill my destiny and to finish the ministry my Lord Jesus has assigned to me.

My only goal in all of life is to finish the race.

There's something in that verse that so many people miss.

Why could Paul finish the race?

It's because he wasn't running for himself.

He said, But whether I live or die is not important, for I don't esteem my life as indispensable.

The New Living translation says it like this. . .

Acts 20:24 (NLT): But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God.

One of your assignments, each one of us is to share the Good News of the Gospel.

Talk about video of atheist and sharing.

Paul said, My life is worth nothing to me unless. . .

Unless what? I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus.

In other words, It's not about me.

It's not about my desires. It's not about my dreams. It's not about my 401k. It's not about my popularity.

He said, "I consider my life worth nothing to me."

And I want to speak to somebody right now. If you are quitting, what God called you to start maybe it's because you care about something more than you care about running with and in God's grace.

And so for you, he said, "I consider my life worth nothing."

You'll want put something in that blank that'll be very personal to you.

I consider my what worth nothing. If only I may do what you called me to do.

I don't know what you'll put in there, but I hope you'll put something in there. I consider my personal comfort worth nothing if only I may please Jesus and finish his race. I consider my net worth worth nothing. I consider the opinions of other people, what they say. I consider my social media following, I consider my personal hopes and dreams worth nothing if only I may finish the race that God called me to run.

And listen church, can I be really honest with you right now. This message is just as much for me as it is for you. I have looked at where we are as a Body and thought we are not where we should be. I expected more by now. And I have thought more than once why keep going.

But I'm still here.

When our family went through hell, I didn't quit. When I got tired, I didn't quit. When my healing did happen as soon as I hoping, in the way I thought, I didn't quit.

How do you run your race? How do you finish?

You don't run it for you, you run it for God.

And then here's what you do, If you want to finish, and I hope you do, here's what you do. You take the next step.

That's what you do. You take the next step.

And the great news is you don't have to finish your race today. You just take the next step.

Nehemiah just took the next step. He posted guards while others built. And the wall was completed opposition and all.

And when you look at the life and ministry of Jesus, it is indescribably powerful and emotional to look at how it ended.

But if you look at every step He took from when He started to when He finished, he just faithfully ran for God, taking step after step.

Think about it on the cross. Right before Jesus looked up to heaven and he cried out to His Father, into your hands I commit my spirit and he breathed his last, right before that Jesus said this. He said, Tetelestai, that's Greek for, "It is finished."

Actually so much then that. It comes from the verb teleo, which means, "to bring to an end, to complete, to accomplish."

It's the word you would use when you reach the peak of Mt. Everest, or you cross the finish line of that marathon, or you make that final house payment.

The word means more than just I survived, it means I did exactly what I set out to do.

Now in the case of Jesus it gets even better because Tetelestai is in the perfect tense in Greek. That speaks of an action that has been completed in the past with results continuing in the future.

So, not only did Jesus say everything you sent me to do Papa I did. I finished the race. But also said my church, my children can walk in victory, they can run with perseverance, they can finish their race.

How did Jesus do it? He wasn't running for himself. He was running for his Father and day by day, week after week, month

after month, painful moment after painful moment, he just took the next step.

When they hated him, he just took the next step and loved them back. When they struck him on the cheek, he just took the next step and turned the other cheek. When he was carrying the cross up the hill and he fell to the ground, he just stood back up and took the next step. Hanging on the cross, when they mocked him and shamed him, he just took another step and said, Father, forgive them for they don't even know what they're doing.

From the very moment he started he had decided, determined in advance I'm always ready, always consistent, always devoted, always generous, and when I commit I don't quit because I am a finisher.

What are you going to do?

The trajectory is always toward what's easy. It's always toward what's convenient. And the devil will want you to quit what God called you to start. Because he knows that if you do it will keep you from reaching your full potential in the Kingdom.

So you need to determine in advance that when I commit I don't quit.

And honestly I don't know how this will play out in your life.

Maybe for you when you're about to give up, you just decide, no, I'm going say one more prayer or I'm going make one more call.

Or even when it's difficult, when they hurt me again and again I'm going forgive again and love some more. I'm sending one more email or I'm running another mile or I'm memorizing another verse or I'm taking another lesson or I'm asking for another

meeting or I'm talking to my child again and I'm praying for my child again and I'm loving my child again or I'm doing what's right even when everybody else says what's wrong.

Stay in the game, take another step.

They knock you down, you get back up. They tell you you can't, you just believe with God's help you can. You run for God and you just take another step.

Then what do you do when you have no more? You've forgiven with every bit of faith you have. You've loved when they've taken advantage of you. You've given when they didn't care. You've prayed and you see no results.

What do you do when you've tried to run and you don't have the power in your own strength to take another step?

Maybe this illustration will help. . .

In the 1992 Barcelona Olympics there was a British athlete, a sprinter named Derek Hammond who was the potential favorite in the 400 meter race. And he got off to a great start and midway through the race, he ruptured his hamstring, fell to the ground. Every Olympic dream crushed knowing he didn't have what it takes to finish the race. And in one of the most emotional moments in sports history, he gets back up and begins hopping on one foot, determined to reach the finish line, after the pain just got so unbearable his dad who was in the crowd got up out of the stands and came down onto the track and carried his son to the finish line. Even calling off the trainers that came out to look at Derek.

When the son could not go on, the father carried the son to the finish.

What I hope you'll understand is this. You never run alone.

And that's why you can be confident of this, "that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day that Christ Jesus returns."

Our God will carry it on. When you are weak, He will be strong, You never run alone. He's next to you helping you along to complete the race.

He will never leave us or forsake us.

When you think about it, it's an interesting question. Why is it that so many people quit? Why do so many people quit on their marriage? Why do they quit on their dreams, why did they quit on God?

Well, probably the most simple reason is because quitting is an option.

What if it wasn't an option for us when God calls us to it?

What if, when we got married, we got married into a covenant, not a contract and said this is something till death do us part. What if when God calls us with a vision, with a dream we said, this is from God and we believed that if God is for us, who can be against us?

And instead of walking away and quitting on God, what if we ran to him even in our doubts, even in our fears, even our disappointments and cried out to him saying, I don't understand, I'm struggling to even trust in You but I'm clinging to you and I'm not letting go.

Church you may see me struggle but you'll never see me quit.

Listen I may not be your pastor forever, but I will always be His disciple.

Because the author and the perfecter, the finisher of my faith dwells within me.

So Father today, I pray that your Holy Spirit does a work in each of us. Papa lead us, show us and God by the power of your word transform us, by the truth of your spirit empower us to be faithful, to run this race. God, speak to us. Help us just take the next step. We don't have to finish today, not at the end of the week, just help us take the next step. And God, I pray that just like Paul we might have the blessing toward the end of our life, toward the end of our days on earth to look at you and say, "I ran a good race. I'm finishing my race. I've been faithful to you." God help us to be faithful and honor you in all that we do. My life is not my own. I surrender it all to you. Thank you for forgiveness. Thank you for your spirit. Thank you for your love. In Jesus name.