

A Marathon, not a Sprint

Alright, let's go to the Lord in prayer and we'll get started. Our Heavenly Father, we love you and we praise you, and we thank you that we can come to your house, Lord, on a Wednesday evening, Lord, the middle of the week, and we can just praise your name for all the things that you do in our life. Lord, we just pray tonight that you would just encourage us, Lord, we all need that no matter who we are this crazy tough world we live in, in Lord, and it's getting tougher every day and we just need that encouragement from you. We pray that you'd be with Pastor Brian in the back with this discipleship class, with our children's ministry, and also with our students. Lord, a lot of things are going on tonight. We pray that you just be with our entire campus, Lord just helps you to be glorified and honored and praised and all we do and all we say, your name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Well, title of the message tonight is it's a marathon and not a sprint. Now I'm going to start off by saying this to you, used to, I remember the longest race I ever ran when I was jogging. I remember I ran the Gasparilla one time. I had run the Howard Franklin Bridge when they opened up the Newnan. I ran that, I ran the Bayside Bridge when they opened up the Newnan of that, I ran the Turkey trot, I don't know how many times, 10, 15 times. But I went over to run the Gasparilla and the Gasparilla is almost a 10-mile run. And it was years ago. I don't think I could write it tonight. But anyway, we started out and I can remember that when we started the race, there was so many people in that race when they shot the gun. There were so many people that it seemed like it took me five minutes just to even get to the starting line because there were just thousands, thousands of people. In fact, I started off that race next to Kelly Ring was channel 13. She's retired now, so had a chance to talk for a little bit and she was an average runner and of course she didn't stay with me long, she was gone.

But anyway, the guy that I started with, I'm not a fast runner anyway, and I was always just running it to be able to, of course not win, not even the place. They ran out of ink before they got down to my name putting the people were in the race. But I just ran to finish, okay? And I didn't want to ever stop. I wanted to finish the race. So, I started, and we got down probably to, I don't know, maybe two miles, two and a half miles, three miles, whatever it was. And I started to see so many people on the side of the road, they were just absolutely sitting down, and they were sitting down, and I asked my friend that was running with me, and I said to him, I said, what are those people doing over there? He says, those are people like there.

He says that don't know how to run a race. He said what they did was they started out like a ball of fire. They started; they just gave it everything they got. And of course, unless you're just super a human, like the people that won the race, you're not going to be able to run full bo for almost 10 miles. It's not going to happen. So, it is almost like you got to be like the tortoise in the race like this, at least if you're like me. So that kind of reminded me tonight of what I'm going to be preaching on and that is that the Christian life is not a sprint, it is a marathon and it's a marathon because I say this, in the years that I've been in the ministry, I have seen so many what I would call bright and shining stars for the Lord that people that they come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior, they get all excited with Jesus as we should.

And they just say, man, they just get involved, involved, involved. And then pretty soon they start to do things, allow things in their life they shouldn't allow, and then pretty soon you can't find 'em with a

search warrant. Alright? In other words, those folks started with the sprint, and they didn't understand that we're going to encounter bad things. Just because we're Christians doesn't mean we're not going to have hurdles in life. In fact, if you're here tonight and you're living for the Lord or you're trying to raise your family and the nurturing admonition of the Lord trying to have a good marriage or trying to be a great spiritual blessing to your grandchildren or at work or wherever you are, Satan's going to throw everything he's got at you. He's going to throw the kitchen sink at you. And we're all going to have those times where we are going to feel like, hey, you know what?

Maybe I just need to kind of back away a little bit. Maybe I need to put it into low gear or whatever. Because Satan wants us to stop. He wants us to be on the side of the road. He doesn't want us to be in the race. So, I want to give you a few things tonight that I pray will be an encouragement to you that'll help you and help me as we run the race that God has for us. Pick it up in your notes if you will. It says, living a Christian life is demanding. Everybody agrees with that. Yes, very demanding. Okay? If it's not demanding, you're not living the Christian life. Okay? That's pretty simple. If you live in the Christian life the way you need to be living the Christian life, you are going to have all kinds of things in your path.

Alright? Look at Galatians chapter six, verse nine. You didn't bring your bibles on the screen, so let's not get what? Tired. Tired. Some of y'all are tired, you're not even answering the question. Alright, let's try that again. So let's not get what Tired. Tired of doing what is good. In other words, don't get tired of the Christian life. Don't get tired of doing the things that you need to do in the Christian life. And you know what? Because it says at just the right time, if you keep doing the things you need to do, we will reap a harvest of blessings. If we don't, what if we don't give up? There are a lot of Christians that have given up. There are a lot of Christians that are still Christians that are going to heaven when the role is called up yonder. They will be there but they're not going to be able to receive all the blessings of life that God wants 'em to receive here on earth because they're simply not living the Christian life like they ought to live.

The Christian life, we believe once saved, always saved. We believe the Bible teaches that amen can't lose our salvation, but we can lose our fellowship. I will say to you tonight that a lot of Christians have lost their fellowship, been preaching the last couple of weeks on Ephesus and how everything looked good, everything looked dandy, but inside they had a problem and it was a problem that only the Lord could see because they had a heart issue on the outside they look great, but on the inside they weren't doing too good. A lot of Christians on the outside look like they're doing pretty good, but on the inside, they're not doing so great, alright? Because they're not doing the things that they used to do when they were strong with the Lord. And there's a thing that we need to understand and that is this, living the Christian life, a faithful Christian life tonight takes a lot of diligence, okay?

You don't pop out of bed every day and just automatically say, I'm going to follow the Lord a hundred percent today. And it doesn't just happen by accident. You have to be purposeful in that. I'll get the word purposeful. You have to be purposeful in that. You have to be diligent in that it's not just going to happen. You got to be that way. You got to be diligent. What do you mean by that pastor? I mean doing the things that keep your Christian life on fire. Alright? What does that mean? It means prayer. You got to keep your prayer life fervent. You got to keep your discipleship, you're reading the Bible, reading the devotional. You got to keep that fervent. Listening to good podcasts, reading good books, coming to

church, being a part of things that the church has. All of those things are going to keep you on the path of being a passionate Christian or going to keep you right?

There's not a single Christian here tonight or watching that would say that, hey look, I don't feel sometimes in my life that I'm frustrated. Any of y'all ever feel like you're frustrated? Sure, you do. We all are there, okay? We get frustrated, we get discouraged. You say, pastor, you're never that way. You always seem like you're up. No, listen, I get discouraged, I get frustrated, okay? I go through those battles, and you look around sometimes and I was just talking to somebody today actually at lunch and I said to the person that I was eating with, I said, look, I said, I've been noticing some things going on. And I said, how is it with other churches that you know about? I mean, what's going on with other churches? Because this person that I was having lunch with has his hand in a lot of different places and he, he knows a lot of pastors and everything.

He says, Branson, listen. He says right now we are fighting a battle. Like I've never fought a battle before. In all the years that I've been in ministry just like me, he's been in ministry a lot less than I have. But he said, I'm seeing some things today I thought I would never see, are you? And I said, yeah, I'm fighting some battles today that I thought I would never fight. Are you? Yeah, I'm seeing this happen and this happened, and this happened and I'm seeing so many pastors of course backing away. They're not doing what they used to do. Churches are not doing what they used to do. What is happening? What is happening? They're losing their passion. They are not getting that. The Lord has called us for a marathon journey and it's not going to be easy. We are living in the last days.

We are living in the last days, okay? We are seeing the word of God being fulfilled right before our very eyes. And the Lord says that in the last days is going to be a falling away. We're seeing that we're seeing a fall away even in some of the largest churches that we've got in our association right now. We are seeing a lot of falling away. It's a lot of people just switching seats every single Sunday. All these people used to be faithful but now they're not quite as faithful what's happened? A lot of those people are frustrated. A lot of those people are not as passionate as they used to be and they're not as hungry as they used to be. They're discouraged and they're falling away. And then sometimes Satan plays a trick on us, and he says, okay, you need to look around.

Everybody else is doing having a fantastic Christian life except for you. Look at this person over here. Look at this person over here. Lead this person over here. Lemme tell you something, all of us are in the same boat. We all are in the same boat. I am in the same boat. You're in this because I'm a pastor doesn't mean that I don't go through the same stuff that you go through. People think sometimes, well pastor's immune to these things. No, we're not. Alright. If I'm doing what I ought to be doing, Satan's coming after me. If you're doing what you ought to be doing, Satan's coming after you and Satan makes, even a pastor will look around and say, well man, that pastor over there, he must have it really going. He looks like things are really going, but when you really get to talk to him, you understand that he's fighting hell by the inch too and we all fighting hell by the inch, every single one of us.

So don't let Satan get you into the thing where you try to play the comparison game with other Christians. We all have our weaknesses; we all have our battles. There's nobody in this room tonight or watching that'll ever say in their life. I've got it all together. It ain't going to happen. It ain't going to

happen. Okay? Any of my life, I say, hey, I've got it together today. By the afternoon I'm a train wreck. Alright? And everybody's the same way. We coined a phrase years ago and Brian just heard it from somebody he ran into the other day. We are the perfect church for imperfect people. And that's true. That's what we are. We are the perfect church for imperfect people because everybody in our church is imperfect. Everybody's a sinner. All right? We're a whosoever will church because everybody that comes our way, sinners and that starts with me at the top.

Guess that right? Not supposed to say him in there. I'm just kidding. Alright? Alright. Listen to me closely, I want to try to give you some encouragement. God does not demand perfection in you, and he doesn't demand perfection in me. You know why? Because he never thought that you and I would ever be perfect. You know why? Because he went to the cross and died on the cross. Why? Because we couldn't be perfect because none of us could keep the 10 commandments. That's why Moses broke it. He broke it in half. He got ticked off because soon as the Lord gave him the 10 commandments, he went down there and saw most of 'em being broken right before his eyes and he got ticked off and he broke the 10 commandments. But you know what? Before God gave Moses the 10 commandments, he knew, knew what had to happen because he knows that none of us are perfect and we don't wake up every day and say, you know what?

I wonder what kind of sin I'm going to do today. I want to make it my mark in life today. I want to do as many sins as I possibly can. I want to be a real good sinner today. We don't say that. It happens naturally and I don't care how strong we say that we want to be with the Lord. We're going to sin. We're going to sin with our mouth. We're going to sin in our thoughts. We're going to sin in our actions. Something's going to happen, alright? And we're going to sin. We've sinned today, right? Some of us, it didn't take us 10 minutes before we sinned before we woke up this morning, alright? We always already called the dog and cat something we shouldn't have said to him, alright, sometimes our toaster didn't work right, and we've said something to the bread or something or we ran out of jelly and said something to somebody.

I don't know what it might be, but something today has already taken all right that away from all of us. But the Lord says, you know what I want you to understand? You are accepted by me a hundred percent. A hundred percent all the time. All the time. Even though we're not perfect, even though we blow it even times we really blow it. Even times we really get off the road and maybe we're away from the Lord for a long time. The Lord says, listen, I want you to know I understood before I even made you that you were going to be imperfect. And what I want you to understand is this. I know you and I get you because I made you. God gets everything about us. He gets everything about me. Sometimes people don't get things about me, but God gets things about me.

God understands me because he wired me. He's the one that made me. He understands my weaknesses. He made me, and he knows I'm not going to be perfect. He knows I'm going to strive to be perfect. But here's the deal. I put my faith in Jesus when I was a little boy, eight years old and Durham, North Carolina, as I've shared with you before I came to know Jesus as my Lord and Savior. When I did that, the Lord knew everything about me and he says, I want you to come to me just as you are little eight-year-old boy. You say, oh, but you must've been really clean. No, I was pretty mean. I've told you those stories. Very mean little boy coming to him. All right? Probably the meanest kid in Durham, North Carolina. I'd already probably sinned more than anybody, 20 years old.

But listen, the Lord accepted me the way I was, and the Lord accepted me, not only how I was, but he accepted me for what I was going to be. There's not one single thing and I'm going to do ever do in my life and you're going to do in your life that's going to surprise God. He knows all about us and he still loves us. As much as I try to grasp that and put my mind around it, I don't understand that. I don't understand God's grace. I don't understand God's love. I really don't. I don't know if you're like me, but sometimes I just say, Lord, how in the world, how in the world, why do you keep on putting up with me? Why do you keep putting up with me? And I don't get it? But that's an amazing thing about God. And God says, listen, I love you just as you are. I love you when you fail me. I love you unconditionally. And listen your life, pastor Branson is not always going to be an academy award performance, and neither is yours. Alright? We all have our days, some of us have our weeks, some of us have our months, some of us have our years. Alright? That's just who we are because we are human. It's like when our kids, we are raising our kids. We raised our kids to hopefully to do things right.

I can remember when my kids, they wanted to make money so I, I taught 'em at home how to mow grass. My kids were just like any other kids. Even though I tried to show 'em how to cut grass, they always tried to cut corners. I can remember there was a certain tree that my kids would always want to miss because they thought that I would not see it. I saw everything. You know why I saw everything? Because when I was a little kid mowing grass, I did the same thing, and I picked a long way away that I didn't think my mama could see. My dad never saw it. I don't think he's still seen it. But anyway, my mama saw everything. She was just omnipresent. It was unbelievable. But anyway, and they said, dad, how in the world do you know that we missed that tree?

I said, I used to do the same thing. I used to call 'em out and I used to say to 'em, I said, look, a job worth doing is a job worth doing. Well, if you're going to do it right, that's the only way to do it. I gave them all that speech, but when they didn't do it right, I didn't say to them, you know what? I'm going to disown you. I'm not going to ever take you out to mow grass for anybody else. You're a bum. You're not going to ever learn how to do this or that. No. What I did was I made them get the lawnmower back out. I made 'em go back out and I made a mow underneath that tree. Dad, wait a minute. We have got 98% of the lawn mow. That's only 2% under that tree. Yes, go get the mower.

Go crank the mower up and go mow the 2% that you knew was there when you put the mower up, what am I doing? I'm teaching them. I want 'em to learn a lesson. What happens to us when we sin? We hopefully are learning a lesson. Sometimes God allows us to learn a lesson. Sometimes he really makes sure that we learn a lesson because some of us are stubborn and some of us are hard, hard. But God, you know what? Gods got all the patience in the world, folks. He really does. He'll sit back and he'll say, keep on. I'll keep on. If you'll keep on. He's got all the patience in the world. Why? Because he wants us to know how, that our life needs to be blessed and life needs to be blessed when we're not spending our time doing things that we shouldn't be doing.

But the Lord never gives up on us. Number two, he gives us the encouragement to be a good finisher. Look at Philippians chapter one verse six, and I am certain, and that's a big word there, certain that means a lot. I am certain I'm not wavering in my thoughts. I don't hope so. I am certain absolutely certain that God who began a good work within you will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day. Christ Jesus returns. Folks, we need to understand that God began a work in me, and you when

we received Him as Lord and Savior. Amen. All of us have crooked roads. We all have crooked roads. Some of our crooked, crookedest roads were when we were teenagers, so a lot of wild oats and maybe knew the Lord and we went off the track. Some of 'em were in our early twenties, late twenties, thirties, forties.

Guess what? Some of it's in the forties and fifties and even sixties and seventies. We go off the road, every one of us goes off the road. God knows that we go off the road. And here's the deal. He's anticipated every time we've gone off the road, he knew it when he died on the cross for us, he died on the cross and he saw every crooked road that I would ever take. He died on the cross and knew every crooked road that you were going to take. And you know what? He is there when we get off the road and we need to understand that we don't need to let Satan ever tell us that we are finished, that we have done something so bad, so terrible that God has turned his back on us. He's given up on us. He's taken our purpose away.

He's taken our dream away. He's taken our aspirations away. I can never do that anymore, pastor, because of what I've done. Listen to these words right here, the Apostle Paul. I am certain it doesn't say I'm certain, hey, because of all the things that I've done, I, I'm guessing, I'm guessing and hoping that God's going to do it. No, he's saying, listen, I know. And the person that wrote this, he said that he was the chief of all sinners. I mean, you're talking about a person that had this verse right here that was right in this verse when he was in prison and he used to kill Christians before he came to know Jesus, his Lord and Savior. And he had a lot of crooked roads after that. But he's saying, listen, I want y'all to be encouraged. If God can straighten my path out, if God can use me, if God can continue to get me out of the gutter and to keep my path and keep my dreams alive, he can really do it with you.

We need to be encouraged by that tonight because sometimes Satan gets on us and he says to us, our best days are behind. And I'm thankful to God that we've got some senior adults in this church that don't believe that because there are some churches today that senior adults in those churches, they believe that they believe their best days are behind them. No. And here's what I've always said. As long as you have breath, you still have your best days. God still has a purpose for you. And when he's done, he'll take you home. But before he does and until he does, keep on swinging for the Lord. Amen. You may not swing his hard, you may not kick his high. You may not yell as loud, but you keep on moving. You keep on doing something. You keep on saying, Lord, I still want to accomplish what I need to accomplish for you.

And if you're here tonight thinking that your dreams are gone because of something that happened in your life, don't let Satan pull that game with you. No, I'm certain God, you've begun a good work in me when I got saved. And you know what? Hey, it's not dependent upon me. It's dependent upon you because you're the one that holds my future, and you can give me back my future. You can restore unto me the lost days that I've lost. Yes, you may have lost some blessings. Yes, I may have lost some blessings. I may have had things happen in my life, have taken away me from this and this and this and this. But guess what? I still got a lot of good things in my future. If I allow myself to get back with God, he could bring those things back just like the potter on the wheel. He never gets tired of shaping us. Right? And I've said about the potter on the wheel. We're all crack pots.

We are well aren't. We are crack all bunch of crack pots. All of us are say, pastor, I'm not a crap pot. Oh yes you are. Paul's saying here, listen. I want you to understand. I want you to understand my

difficulties. I'm in prison right now. I'm in prison. I'm washing rats go across my feet. I'm getting stale bread. No wonder bread. I mean no jelly, no peanut butter, no whole milk. I'm having a hard time, alright? Having a real tough time here. But you know what? Even when I'm here in this dungeon, I want you to understand something. God is still working in my life. Amen. You know what? I'm having a time I'm talking to. I'm to all the jailers out here that are keeping me and I'm talking to y'all. You're coming to my bar, the bars and you're outside and I'm talking to you and listen, God was still performing that good work in him.

He didn't get down. He just said, hey, whatever God is doing in my life, I'm just going to thank and I'm going to praise the Lord for it. We need to understand that sometimes too when we're going through tough times, we praise God when we're going through the great times, but we bellyache when we go through the hard times. The Lord says, listen, I want you to praise me even when you're in the dungeons, even when you're fighting hell by the inch. Paul said, listen, I'm certain God's going to finish what he started in my life. God's the finisher, folks he is. He's a finisher. He said, hey, I may not look like much, but God has not finished with me yet. You know why He's not finished with you yet. You know why? Because you are precious to him. You are special to him.

Nobody else may think your special tonight, but God thinks you're pretty special. He thinks you're pretty hot stuff. You know why? Because Jesus didn't die on the cross for nobodies. He died on the cross for somebody's. It makes no difference what this world has to say about you. What's your family says about you? How they dash your dreams, how they tell you you'll never do this, never do that. Listen, I've said this a million times. We live for an audience of one. That's him. I love you, but I don't live in pastor to make you happy or so you'll say, pastor, that's wonderful. No, I live, and I minister for an audience of one every day. My only desire in life is to please one person. And I found this out when I please him when I'm right with him. It's amazing how things go in my life, right?

I'm precious and I'm special to him. He's a finisher. You know why? Because he went to the cross. He died on the cross for my sins and he says, you know, pastor, hey, I'm with you. In spite of your imperfections, in spite of your imperfections, in spite of y'all's imperfections tonight, he is still working on you. He's not a quitter. He is a finisher. He will finish what he wants to do in your life. Paul says, listen, I am going to finish. I'm going to finish very, very strong. Look at Acts chapter 20, verse 24. It says, 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. We can only take one thing with us tonight when we go to heaven, and that's the soul of someone else.

We are not here, as I've said many times for our own agenda. We are here to let our light be a light to somebody else that doesn't know Jesus, his Lord and Savior, so that somebody will look at our testimony, somebody will hear us talk about the Lord and they will come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. That little child that received the Lord, Trish said to me, they were visiting on Sunday, said, we will probably never see them again. And I say, think about this. I said, of all the churches that they could have gone to on Sunday, it was predestined before the foundations of eternity that that child should come to our church and hear the gospel and receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Oh yes, we will see them again. Oh yeah, we'll see 'em again. And I've always pictured this into my mind, and I don't know if this will Lord happen or not, but wouldn't it be neat if child goes to heaven, which we know is going to go to heaven.

Person that had the gospel message on Sunday, the workers that were in there and that child went up to them and kind of poked them on the back in heaven and said, hey, you remember me? You remember me? I just want to thank you. Listen to what I'm going to say. I just want to thank you for staying faithful. I want to thank you for staying faithful and being there in kids' world on that Sunday morning. Do you know how hard it is to faithfully serve the Lord? Do you know how it is to say to not give in to, I'm tired of that. I'm quitting. I'm tired of that. I'm not going to do this anymore. I'm not going to do this anymore. There's not one single person that serves in this church that doesn't feel like throwing in the towel. Not one single person including me.

I had my days, but I can't stop. You can't stop. You know why? Because of kids like that. What would happen? What blessings would those people had have missed had they said, I'm not going to be a part of that anymore. I'm not even coming this morning. I'm going to stay in the bed. I'm going to sleep. You don't think that Satan come after people like that? Sure, he does. But the Lord says, stay faithful to what I've called you to do even when it gets hard and it's going to get hard. When it gets hard, just be determined that much more because there will be victory that's coming right over the rainbow, if you will, or light at the end of the tunnel. Whatever you want to say, there's victory coming. If we stay true to what God wants us to do, it says our life is worth nothing unless we use it for finishing.

Big word. We have got to finish. You and I have got to finish. We got to finish folks. We're right here at the end of the line. Alright? I believe it with all my heart. Some people say, well now they got a hundred years to go. It may be whatever, but I will tell you I don't know how it can be. And me looking at it right now, don't understand. I don't know how it can be God's God. He does whatever he wants to. He comes back when he wants to. But one thing, when I do get to heaven, when God does call me home, I want the Lord to be able to look at me and say, pastor, you finished strong. I want to be able to say I did everything I possibly could. Yeah, I failed. Yeah, I blew it. Yeah, I went off the rails here, here, here.

But you know what? I still got back up and I still kept on going. And I think that's what the Lord's looking for. I think that's what he's looking for in all of us. He's not looking for perfection. He's not looking for a straight line because he knows it's impossible. He's not looking for us to keep the 10 Commandments because he knows that's impossible. He's just looking at us and saying, listen, I just want you to have a passion in your heart to love me with everything that you've got. And I want you to give me everything that you've got. Okay, I understand the turns to the right and to the left but get back up back in the race. Get back where you need to be. And the same thing as I started. When those people that had stopped after two and a half miles or three miles, listen, what are you going to do about it? Are you going to sit there for the rest of the race? Why did you come? Why did you come to the race? Why did you come to the Gasparilla? Did you come to sit down? Did you come to sit down? No, you came to run the race. Okay, you blew it. You started strong; you gave out. Now you've sat there for 10 minutes. You've got your wind back up, get off your fanny and get back in the race.

It don't run quite as fast and you may be able to stay up on your feet a little bit longer and maybe you run another three miles and you got to stop again. Okay? Sit there for 10 minutes, get up your fanny and get going. You came here to run the race. You came here to finish the race. I finished that race. I didn't stop. I was one of the biggest things out there. I was close to 300 pounds at the time. I was one of the biggest things out there. People looked at me and they thought to myself, good gosh, you probably had

the pothole crew right behind me. But I finished the race and as I rounded the top of that hill, ready to go, a little bridge, ready to go down into, I think it was Cass Street or wherever you finished, people were lined up all over the road and they were cheering. They were all on the side of the road. And it was people that had finished long before me, long before me listen. And they didn't go home, and they were lining and they were just yelling and screaming and clapping and I could hear 'em as I was getting close and everything within me, within I was probably three quarters of the mile away from finishing Everything in me wanted to shut down. Everything in me, wanted to stop thought, I want to tell you something, I was done.

But I heard the cheers. I heard the cheers and that encouraged me. And I kept on going and I kept on going. And I got to the top of the hill and I saw those people. And man, I had a burst of energy that I didn't even think I had. They gave me a medal, did gave me the medal. Last place. They gave me a medal. They gave me a piece of paper and they were saying to me when they gave me the medal, you're a finisher. You're a finisher. That made me proud. I was thinking this afternoon, we're in a marathon. I may be preaching to y'all tonight. And you may be saying, pastor, I'm tired, pastor, I'm really tired. I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired. I just want to just quit for a while. I want to quit. I want to throw in the towel. I can't do it anymore. And here's what I want you to hear tonight. I want you to listen really close. I want you to listen. It's called selective hearing. I want you to listen. If you listen really, really super hard, here's what you're going to hear.

You're going to hear the great cloud of witnesses of people that have gone on before you and me. Some of them are your family, some of them are your friends, some of them are people you've never met, and they're lying in the streets of heaven. And I believe when we get there, I believe it. You say, show me a scripture. I don't have one, but I do know this. The Bible tells me that when we get ready to go home to be with the Lord, the Lord sends a escort for us. And the Lord says, when we do things that help other people come to find the Lord, all of heaven rejoices. Here's what happened Sunday. There's a lamb's book of life. And the Lord says, come

Here.

Come here talking to an angel. Come here, grab that pen right there. Grab that pen, give it to me. There's this little child down there at the point Church, come on, come on now, come on, give me the pen. He took that pen, and he wrote that child's name down in the lamb's book of life. And when the role is called up yonder, that child's going to be there because of the faithfulness of our workers of our church staying and being finishers those, it's getting hard to be churches of finishers anymore. Getting really hard to be churches like that. Gods called us to be finishers. God doesn't stop working with you and me when we stray some of our paths g p s can't even figure out, but God still figures it out and talking about children. I wrote this down little song. I'm not singing it. I'm reading it. He's still working on me to make me what I ought to be. It took him just a week to make the moon and the stars, the sun and the Earth and Jupiter and Mars, how loving and faithful he must be. He's still working on me.

We're all a work in progress. And the Lord's words to us this evening be a finisher. And when you get the urge to quit and to throw in the towel and think that your best days are behind you, just get alone with God. Get into a real quiet place and start listening. I have how much I love my father. Didn't ever get to meet my mom. Love my dad so much. Right behind my desk, you come into my office, right behind my desk is a picture of my dad. It was taken when he was right over here on the second row. Always sit on the front row right behind me. Every Sunday morning. Somebody got a picture of my dad years ago and

they got a picture of my dad, full-blown cancer, fighting hell by the inch, just going through an awful, awful time holding his arms up like this with the biggest smile on his face. He was praising Jesus. I wouldn't take anything for that picture. He got a hold of that picture and they put it on canvas and it's about this and about like this. And I've placed it right behind my desk for a reason.

When I pray in my office, a lot of times if I'm not kneeling at my sofa, I turn my chair and facing this way, I turn a little bit more and I'm facing the picture of my dad. And I said, dad, kind of hard going today. Kind of tough sledding today. I don't feel like this. I don't feel like this dad, I feel rough today. I just having it hard. And I see him going like that. I'm thinking to myself, my dad was a finisher. Yes, He sure was.

If you come into my office and you look straight ahead in my office when you come in, it's a beautiful picture that my wife bought me years ago. It wouldn't take anything for. It's a beautiful artist rendering of a pastor stand in a pulpit and all around the back of the pulpit, you can come in and look at it as all the saints of old. You're looking at Elijah, you're looking at Moses, Peter, Paul Angels, and they all are having their hands on the pastor. That's a great cloud of witnesses. I'm like you. I have my times. I have my times. And when I have those times, I look at those two pictures and I say, what's it going to be? Am I going to let the devil win or am I going to harness all the power that God gives me and his love and his grace? Am I going to be a finisher? I don't know how tough it's going to be folks before God comes back. I don't know. I told you years ago that I've envisioned the point Church being like the Alamo before God comes back. A lot of people aren't going to be able to have stand the truth and not going to want to be a part of a church that preaches the truth. They want to be a part of a church that has a Broadway show. Every Sunday, smoke lights, loud music that they sing, spend 10 minutes preaching the word in an hour and 15 minutes, hooping and hollering, bubbles, popcorn, whatever else they're doing.

That's okay. We're going to stay to the truth. We're going to stay to the word of God and we're going to stay doing what God has called us to do. And that's preaching the gospel, ministering the gospel, and being here for this lost community that needs Jesus. Who's going to be here, pastor? The people that want to be finishers, the people that aren't going to be finishers, they won't be here. But I want to thank y'all in advance for being a finisher. A lot of finishers come on Wednesday nights. Amen.

Well, thank y'all for being here and it's a privilege to preach to people that are serious about loving Jesus and sharing the gospel. Amen. I'm going to let you out earlier than Pastor Brian,

And when I do this, you make sure that you all go to him and tell him how you love me preaching on Wednesday nights instead of him because you get out early. I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding. Don't take me seriously. Come on please. Brian's a wonderful teacher. I'll tell you, he's just a great teacher. Heard another pastor today say to me, they said Brian came and he preached at our church, and he just did a super job. They really, really loved him. And I said, well, that's great. And I know he is going to be a blessing wherever he goes. Amen. Father, we love you tonight. Thank you, Lord, for our time this evening. Lord hadn't been anything dynamic, it's just been kind of simple, but Lord, it's just been some simple things that we need to keep in mind. But we thank you for loving us the way that we are. And Lord, thank you for not giving up on us and Lord has helped us to always keep the desire in our hearts that we are not going to be quitters.