

069 Soaring over the obstacles of life

Romans 12:11, 12

Message by Dr R Bruce Montgomery ~ Grace Church~4/2/2017

Introduction

Life is often likened to running a race – in my experience, not straight out running. More like jumping hurdles – people, events, trying to grab your feet and pull you down.

Not sure what circumstances in your life are trying to trip you up this morning. Maybe it's health, or finances, or relationships, or something else.

How can you leap over the constraints, the burdens, the hindrances that would drag you down?

How can you do what today's title suggests and soar over the obstacles of life?

Starts with having a spiritual fire – lit by Jesus and fueled by the Holy Spirit.

Romans 12:11 *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.*¹

KJV – *not slothful*. Not lethargic.

Fervor from a verb meaning to boil. Like a pot on the stove bubbling over. Aglow with the Spirit.

What lights your fire?

What keeps your fire burning.

How can you stay red hot despite all that would drag you down that would quench your zeal? Answer discovered in verse 12.

Romans 12:12 *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.* Will look at first two today.

Greek construction – starts with preposition “*in/or as regards*” then a noun, then an adjective or participle describing it.

Verse 11

¹ In original Greek construction *servicing the Lord* doesn't modify keeping spiritual fervor, but is a separate item. Literally reads *as regards the Lord, servicing*. Jesus rebuked his listeners, “*Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?*” **Luke 6:45**. If he is truly Lord, we will obey him, gladly serving him.

In zeal, not lacking (not slothful)

In spirit, burning

The Lord, serving

Now in **verse 12:**

in hope, rejoicing;

in affliction, showing endurance;

in prayer, steadfastly continuing.

1. **Rejoicing in hope = in hope rejoicing.**

Hope is always future oriented. In the Bible something God has promised us, but haven't seen or received it yet.

Scripture talks about our future hope of eternal life with God, and also refers to Christ's return as “*our blessed hope.*”²

Having a future orientation sets Christians apart from the secularist for whom, as Carl Sagan says, “*the cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.*” Our horizons aren't boxed in like that. We look to Jesus, our hope is in Jesus, and we look forward with confidence and excitement to an eternity with him.

Often in Scripture we read something to the effect that we're to rejoice in everything, or give thanks in everything. How is that possible? How can you rejoice in everything?

The bedrock, the foundation, the ground where joy grows and flourishes is hope!

Without hope, you will have no joy!

This is so crucial to understand: our joy is rooted in our hope. Christians have their hearts set on how good it will be in the age to come and in the presence of Christ after death. But understand this: our hope is not just for the “sweet by and by.” Hope makes a tremendous difference in our present day daily

² In **Titus 2:13** Paul refers to the “*blessed hope*” of *the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*”

Acts 1:10 After Jesus' resurrection, and various appearances over the next 40 days, Jesus ascended before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood before them.

Acts 1:11 “*Men of Galilee,*” they said, “*why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.*”

lives, for it influences our attitudes and perspectives on what is going on.

When the pressure and difficulties of life increase they drive the roots of joy down into hope, and the joy of our hope streams back into the present and lightens every load.

Hope is what enables Christian to rejoice always – in times of stress and tribulation, and not just in health and peace and security.

Two of the most joyful people I encountered this week are named Ruth. Ruth Singleton on hospice, Ruth English on radiation.

Friday had annual appointment with our accountant for preparing tax return. As waited our turn I noticed that amidst art work hanging on his walls, he had a framed a quote. Stepped over to see, and there in English and Spanish was one of my favorite quotes from Chuck Swindoll. **ON SLIDE**

"The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company ... a church ... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude ... I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me, and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you ... we are in charge of our Attitudes."

How can you keep a positive attitude when everything and everything around you is negative? It starts with having hope!

I am enjoying a book: "**The Hope Quotient**" by pastor and author Ray Johnston.³

³ Last weekend he was at Southwest Community holding a **Thrive** conference attended by several thousand people. Last month Michael Felt reviewed in adult SS – can ask him for a copy of his four page synopsis.

In his book he asks a simple question: why are some people more effective than others, enjoy life while others endure life, and soar while others sink?

His answer is that such people are committed to things that produce inner strength and hope.

Without hope, you cannot be the person God wants you to be. When you lose hope despair replaces joy, fear replaces faith, anxiety replaces prayer. When you lose your ability to dream for the future, you stumble through life.

Whether you're a leader, a parent, a grandparent, a teacher – the greatest gift you can give another person is hope.

E.g. Raising children, not focusing on what they are like right now, but focusing on what that child can **become!**

We sing ***My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness.***

And we sing: ***Then we shall behold him, we shall behold him, face to face, in all of his glory . . .***

Hope, we've seen, produces joy.

So, let me ask you a question: Are you enjoying life? Don't buy into the enemy's lie that to be a Christian is to be miserable. It is the exact opposite.

John 10:10 *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.* KJV: *that they might have it more abundantly.*

The term "***to the full/abundant***" appears fairly frequently in its various forms in the New Testament.

In every day usage it referred to something that was

- Out of the ordinary, not just "run of the mill"
- Not just minimal, "barely getting by"
- It always speaks of excess and fullness, overflowing surplus, like a container that is overflowing. Something
- Superfluous
- Excessive
- Extravagant
- More than you can handle
- Life beyond our wildest dreams.

This verse reminds us that there is a **thief** lurking in our lives, whose purpose is to steal, and if necessary he will kill and destroy to get what he is after.

Matthew 13:19 Jesus is explaining the parable of the sower, seed and soils: ***“when anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.”***

Some of the thief’s tools that he uses to burglarize and even destroy our lives are:

- Hunger
- Sickness
- Sorrow
- Worries – *can’t add a day to your life by worrying, all worrying does is rob you of enjoying the time you do have*
- Busyness - *we become deluded into thinking if we maintain an intense pace of life we’re really living! But all it gives us is ulcers, stress, heart attacks.*
- Riches *“Life does not consist in the abundance of things.”*
- Pleasures
- Sin.

Jesus offers freedom and victory over all that would drag us down and destroy us, he offers peace and joy and love. He provides for forgiveness of sin.

God intends for you to enjoy life! Have you let “thieves” and “robbers” rob you from your joy, keeping you from enjoying life to the full?

Don’t let them get away with it! Take back the encroachments where Satan has trespassed unhindered in your life! Throw the bum out!

Before you can know the abundant life, you must first know life. That is, you must be made alive through faith in Christ. Only after this can you “have it to the full.”

John 3:3 ***Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”***

When we were born to our mothers, we were given *bios* life. Until we enter into a relationship with God by entering through the doorway of his dear son, we may be physically alive, but we are spiritually dead. When we come to faith in Christ,

when we are born again/born from above he breathes *zoe* life into us.

Probably the best definition of *zoe* life I’ve run across is *“life as God has it.”* Receiving that life as God has it, eternal life, gives us a new vitality, new significance, new meaning, a new purpose, a new direction a new outlook, a new hope, a new joy!

2. Patient in affliction “In affliction, showing endurance” Romans 12:12

Trouble, calamity, conflict, cancer, death – these are all the normal conditions of life into his fallen world. Don’t be surprised when they happen to you. But Jesus Christ has broken into our tribulation and taken it on himself! He carried our sin to the cross, and bore our curse, and absorbed God’s wrath and became our righteousness, and conquered death and hell and Satan, and opened the door of paradise to all who place their trust in him.

We aren’t just to be patient in a resigned, fatalistic, stoic sense – accepting what can’t be changed – but confidently waiting in hope for God’s own solution to the problem. Knowing that he sees the big picture, he is causing all ***things to work together for the good for those who are called.***⁴

Hebrews 12:1b ***Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.***

(1) How: Run with perseverance – don’t quit!

Keep running. You’ve got to keep running until you reach the finish line.

Word used for “race” isn’t the usual, but word for “contest” (Greek *agon* = agony!) Sometimes the course God has us on is full of pain. You get blisters on your feet, there’s a knife in your side, your legs turn to oatmeal. Your muscles are screaming.

You’re tempted to quit, but God wants us to finish – DON’T QUIT when the going is rough.

⁴ Also knowing that the great Judge will reward the good and punish evil in his own time (recently looked at the freedom that comes from not having to retaliate, to set things straight, to take things in our own hands but to let God take care of it in his time and his way. ***“Vengeance is mine, I will repay”, says the Lord.***)

Movie a few years ago called **Chariots of Fire**. True account of Eric Liddell who ran for Scotland in the 1924 Olympics. Refused to run on Sunday, thus forfeiting some of the awards he probably would have won.

Another scene in the movie, also true. One year before the Olympics, Eric ran in a meet between England, Ireland and Scotland. In the 440, he got off to a bad start. When the gun sounded there was a lot of shoving to get into the advantageous inside lane.

Liddell tangled feet with another runner and tumbled to the track. He sat there dazed for a moment, not knowing whether or not to get up, when the official screamed, "*Get up and run!*"

He jumped to his feet and took off after the pack, which by now was a full twenty yards ahead of him. That's a big distance to try to make up in a quarter mile. But Liddell took off after the pack, pulling into fourth place ten yards behind the leader JJ Gillies. With forty yards to go, he pulled into third place, then second. Right at the tape he passed Gillies, stuck out his chest, won the race, and collapsed in total exhaustion.

Some of you have been knocked down. Maybe Satan tripped you. Maybe some other people have wronged you. Maybe you have only your own foolish decisions to blame.

When we're down on the track we feel embarrassed. We're ashamed, full of self-pity, depressed. We feel like just staying on the track.

God's word to you is, "*Get up and run!*" Forget those who've done you wrong! Forget what lies behind you, and run! Run for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus! To paraphrase a line from the movie "*Forrest Gump*." **Run, Christian, run!**

Philippians 1:6 doesn't say, "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day you fail and fall on the track. It says, "**He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**"

(2) What: Run the race marked out for you – Cross country teams, marathons – flags to mark out where to run. Can't deviate from the course, make up your own path, take short cuts, say, "*that hill is just too steep, think I'll cut around it.*"

"*Marked out for us.*" Each race is unique. God has gone before you – knows all the days of your life. In his great foreknowledge, he has gone ahead of you and planted these flags ahead of you.

Tend to compare ourselves, when race gets tough, and feeling sorry for myself, look around and say, "*If I had her race to run, no problem. I could handle that. If I had their money, I could run the race with perseverance. If I had that husband or wife, those children, I could run with perseverance. If I had his health, I could run the race with perseverance.*"

Down on the track we mournfully sing, "*Nobody knows de trouble I see, nobody knows my trouble. . . . sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down, oh yes, Lord, sometimes I'm almost to the ground, oh yes, Lord.*"

We rationalize, "*It's okay for me to quit, because my course is so much harder than that of other people's.*" But GOD SAYS, "Get up. I want you to run THIS race. Don't think about others. You just look at me."

Hebrews 12:2 *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning it's shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Notice what this verse says about who Jesus is and what he's done.

a. **He's the author/pioneer** of faith. Jesus Christ **initiates** and **bestows** the gift of faith. **Eph. 2:8,9**

b. **Perfecter/finisher** of faith. On cross, cried out, "It is finished!" Means "to finish, carry through completely, to make perfect or complete."

Work of redemption was completed at the cross. Nothing is lacking, else is necessary, nothing can be added. It is finished! It is complete!

Jesus looked beyond the cross for the "**joy set before him.**"

He endured the cross, with its intense pain. He scorned it's shame, which was every bit as intense.

Others have suffered the pain of the cross, but he alone endured the shame of human depravity in all its foulness and degradation.

But he scorned it – didn't let it bother him, because of the joy his obedience would bring! He looked right through the cross to the coming joy:

- Joy of finishing the work – a job well done!
- Joy of reconciling sinful, rebellious humanity with a holy, loving God
- Joy of restoring man to that for which he was created – to be God's companion, enjoyer, friend, lover!
- Joy of reunion with the Father! Personal joys of coming home from boarding school – a three day train trip. Dad waiting with welcome arms. Imagine the joy of that homecoming!

Hebrews 12:3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Consider Him – another athletic term - so won't grow **weary** and **lose heart**. So you won't **collapse** on the track, but make it across the finish line!

Why do we get discouraged, and grow weary, even burned out in Christian service? Could it be that we have allowed our eyes to be fastened on something other than Jesus? Our own goals, perhaps, what we think others expect of us?

Eugene Peterson in **The Message**: *Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed – that exhilarating finish in and with God – he could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. And now he's **there**, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. **That** will shoot adrenaline into your souls!*

Close with another story from the Olympics. This one from 1992 Olympic games in **Barcelona**, Spain. It was Monday night, August 3. It was the semi-finals for the 400 meter race.

Britain's Derek Redmond was favored to medal in the 400m race at the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games. The gun went off. He started well. But 250 meters from the finish, Derek crumpled to the track with a torn right hamstring. Against all odds, he got back to his feet and began to hobble toward the

finish line. His Dad fought security to get to the track and help his son finish.

Medical attendants rushed out to assist him, but Redmond waved them all aside. "*I'm not quitting,*" he said to himself. "*I'm going to finish this race.*" He struggled to his feet, hopping, and sometimes crawling down the lane in a desperate effort to finish the race.

Suddenly a big guy wearing a T-shirt, tennis shoes, and a Nike cap that said *Just Do It!* barreled out of the stands, hurled aside a security guard, ran to Derek Redmond's side, and embraced him. He was Jim Redmond, Derek's father. With his arm around his son's waist, Derek's arm around his dad's thick shoulders and neck, they continued down the track.

At home, Mom and sister were watching the race on television. The pregnant sister went into false labor. Mom was weeping. The crowd stood, cheering as Derek and his dad worked their way around the track until, finally, arm in arm, they crossed the finish line.

If that's the way an earthly father responds to his son who is determined to finish the race no matter what the pain, how much more does God, our heavenly Father, run to the side of his son or daughter who is determined to finish the race. As he wraps his arm around you and lifts you up, he whispers into your ear, "**stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know your labor in the Lord is not in vain. (1 CO. 15).**"

As you limp along he squeezes you close and whispers again, "**Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.**"