

# THE RACE

A full-page background image showing a runner from behind, wearing a blue and yellow backpack, a grey t-shirt, black shorts, and blue and red socks, running on a dirt trail. The trail leads down a steep, forested mountain slope. The forest is dense and green, with some rocky patches visible. In the distance, more mountain peaks are visible under a blue sky with light clouds.

A powerful message of encouragement and practical advice for every Christian running the race of faith.

**Miki Hardy**

# **The Race**

by Miki Hardy

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Miki Hardy

## Introduction

# Called to Run

*“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.” 1 Corinthians 9:24.*

I often ask myself how Christians are leading their lives these days? Where exactly are they in their Christian walk? Jesus has saved them; and yet, the reality is that many no longer belong to a church. They began the race of faith well, but have since become discouraged, and some have even given up. Others may still belong to a church but feel dissatisfied and disillusioned. Nothing is happening in their lives, and they have lost any sense of purpose or zeal. Sadly, most of them are not even truly conscious of the state they are in, which is hard to believe, but true.

Furthermore, there are others who have drifted back into the world and are now far from the Lord, living their lives to please themselves. Yet there was a time when they tasted God’s love and forgiveness. They experienced His grace and peace, and for some, even His miracles and healing. God had touched and changed their lives in so many ways. So how did they get to where they are now?

If I had to describe these people in one word, I would say that they are lost. Their spiritual compass is broken; they have no vision and no idea where they are going. They may have started the race, but got lost along the way. But the good news is: God has a plan and the time has come for Him to restore His people. I believe very strongly that God wants to win back the hearts of those who once knew Him.

## *The Race*

My dear brothers and sisters, there is hope for all of you who are tired and discouraged and have given up. The Lord desires to stretch out His hand and draw you back to Himself.

So, let us take some time to examine some of the reasons why Christians abandon the race and stray from the Lord. I pray that through these few pages you might discover the Father's heart and, if necessary, get back into the race.

Scan this QR code to watch the program  
"Back in the Race"  
with Miki Hardy.  
<https://youtu.be/hRxuK6cfNgE>



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# BACK IN THE RACE

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## Chapter I

# Encountering Obstacles

Anyone running a race knows it is important to be prepared for the various obstacles they will have to face and overcome along the way. The same is true for us in our Christian walk. Unless we are prepared for what could come across our path, we can easily become overwhelmed and lose heart. To understand this in more detail, let's take a look at the well-known parable of the sower from the Gospel of Matthew, *"Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside."* Matthew 13:18-19. Here, Jesus is speaking about a person who hears the Word but is not ready to receive it. What he hears makes no difference to his life. He remains indifferent to it.



## Facing Persecution

The following verses clearly illustrate the obstacles that all Christians should expect to face in one way or another. *“But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.”* Matthew 13:20-21.

This verse reveals the devastating effects that persecution can have in a person’s life. I don’t think we realise just how many Christians today have dropped out of the race as a result of this. After coming to know Jesus, they faced opposition and were persecuted, perhaps even by their families. For a while, they may have persevered; but, as the suffering became stronger and not understanding the purpose of it, they eventually gave up.

A great number of believers do not understand that trials and persecution are not only normal, but an important part of our Christian life. Jesus prepared His disciples for this when He said, *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.”* Matthew 5:10-11. That is why it is so important to read the Bible and understand what to expect if we are to follow Jesus and be His disciple.

I’m sure that many of us have known a number of newly born-again Christians who, because of their newfound faith, were persecuted by their family, friends, or colleagues. Unable to endure such opposition, they eventually fell away from the faith and their love for God, going back to their old ways. This is perfectly illustrated in the parable we have just read. The seed that falls into rocky soil and stony ground gives us a picture of the Christian who receives the Word into his heart but when persecution comes, it is too much for him and he immediately gives up, forsaking the Lord.

It's hard to believe that when Jesus takes someone from an ungodly life and changes him for the better, that instead of rejoicing, those around him end up persecuting and opposing him. It might seem strange but we must understand that this reaction is a spiritual one. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that *"...the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."* We should, therefore, not be surprised when faced with reactions like these.

Jesus came to give His life for the world, but what happened to Him? He was persecuted and mistreated. He was even accused of being possessed by a demon. Despite the suffering He had to endure, He still went on to the end and gave His life for all mankind, accepting to die on the cross and to bear all our sin. Three days later He rose from the dead and appeared to His disciples.

Hallelujah! He is alive today! This is the truth and a reality. Through His suffering and death, Jesus unveiled the plan of God for His children. Those who believe in Him are called to follow in His footsteps and will also suffer and be persecuted as Jesus states in John 15:20, *"...‘A servant is not greater than his master’. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."* If Jesus is our example, then it makes sense that we are called to identify with Him in His suffering, and in His death, so that we can also inherit His resurrection life.

## **Understanding the Plan of God**

We all need the revelation of God's purpose when faced with the tests and trials of life. Our spiritual maturity and growth depend on it and this will enable us to finish the race set before us. That is why we need to be strengthened in Christ and understand that the tough times are actually opportunities that God uses to work in our lives to make us grow and become more like Jesus. These experiences are there to make us stronger and better equipped to serve the Lord. If we welcome them with joy, they

will cause us to grow spiritually, otherwise we will struggle to finish the race and risk losing our way.

Apostle James understood this well: *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”* James 1:2-4.

Although testing times form part of the race that we have to run, allow God to do what He needs to in your life through them. Remember that they will not last forever, but that victory awaits us on the other side. If we accept them, knowing that God has a plan, then in His time, we will see His hand intervening and we will be able to make it to the finish line.

## **Running from the Spirit of the World**

Jesus had more to say about the obstacles we face in Matthew chapter 13:22: *“Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.”*

Here, He is talking about the Christian whose life is caught up in another kind of race. His eyes are on the world and all that it has to offer him. Notice that it says that he cannot bear fruit - why is this? It is because he is absorbed by his own interests and personal gain.

When Jesus talks about *“the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches”*, He is referring to an attitude of being consumed by the spirit that reigns in this world. Christians like this are obsessed by success, ambition, and all that the world can offer them. They have an idyllic idea of the Christian life, one that is free from any problems or worries, and with their every desire met.

How many Christians do you know who have allowed themselves to be seduced and influenced in this way? *“But those who desire to be rich*

*fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”*  
1 Timothy 6:9-10.

They don't want to accept any problems that come their way believing that everything should go according to their plans. They struggle to understand that the Lord could allow any kind of tests and trials; and, by rejecting any form of hardship and suffering, they stray from the faith. It's sad to see that many Christians are willing to do anything to avoid the 'fiery furnace' experience. They simply do not realise God's purpose in it. And, as long as they are fleeing instead of facing these times, they will never grow.

## **Equipping Ourselves**

To stay in the race, Christians need to hear sound doctrine that will equip them to face the difficulties of life and encourage them to turn away from the spirit of the world. Unfortunately, the lack of sound scriptural teaching has caused many Christians to backslide, simply because they are ill-equipped when faced with tough times. We need to be reminded again and again that, according to Scripture, tests and trials are a normal part of Christian life. This will help us persevere.

Where there is a lack of revelation, Christians will not be equipped to face attacks from the enemy or go through times of hardship. On the contrary, they will run away from them. Being weak and vulnerable, they become easy prey for the enemy. Sadly, many believers are in this situation today. They resist what the Lord desires to do in their lives and so begin to drift away from the faith. They stop growing spiritually and lose their joy. Their hearts become hard and this can open the door to sin.

This is why Apostle James encourages us to endure the temptations of life. *“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been*

*approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” James 1:12.*

Temptation is the carnal desire to give in to the snares of the enemy. In the midst of trials, some believers take back control of their own lives. Instead of facing the circumstances they make plans to go around or get out of them. They blame others, justify their reactions and behaviour and allow their hearts to become full of unforgiveness and bitterness. As these positions take root in their hearts, they become discouraged and start to backslide. Sin creeps in, and as a result they feel condemned and rejected by God.

Even though the Lord is always ready to forgive and restore His children, they still struggle to change their attitude. They persist in holding onto their lives and justifying their actions. They find it hard to repent and to put their hearts right before the Lord; and sadly, often one sin leads to another, and then another. Eventually they become insensitive and their hearts are closed to the Holy Spirit. There is no room for the conviction of sin and before they know it, they are back living their old way of life.

In Hosea 4:6 we read that God’s people “...are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” This passage is speaking of the consequences of a lack of vision and revelation. Those who do not understand the way God works in their lives are easily deceived by carnal teachings that lead them to believe that the Christian life should be easy. They fall by the wayside because they cannot see His purpose in the midst of hardship and difficulty. They backslide by refusing to identify their lives with Christ, being blinded by the spirit of the world. They no longer see the plan of God in it all and so lose their way.

Let me remind you that a believer who is rightly taught in the ways of the Lord will be equipped to face adversity with Godly wisdom. It will enable him to accept the challenges that come his way and to grow to maturity in Christ. When trials come, he will rejoice and say, ‘Lord, strengthen me through this, and cause me to grow.’

## **Don't be Discouraged**

You may ask, but what about those Christians that have already given up the race and are far from the Lord today because of the difficulties they faced in life or from family and friends?

If you are one of them, don't be discouraged. Whatever may have happened in your life and no matter where you are in your heart, the good news is that the Lord loves you; He is faithful and will not forsake you. If you have drifted from Him, He wants to bring you back and to restore your soul because His plan for you hasn't changed.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd and He will leave the 99 sheep in the fold to go and look for the one that has strayed. His desire is that you finish the race. This is the Father's heart for His children; His plan and purpose for every believer.

My heartfelt prayer is to see all those who have strayed from the faith come back to Christ. It is not a time to lose hope but to be encouraged and get back into the race!

## Chapter II

# The Right Model

I have often noted that Christians do not find their pastors to be true examples to follow or to inspire them.

*Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep." John 10:11-13.*

This passage is crystal clear. The shepherd, or pastor, is called to give his life for the people, to serve them and take care of their spiritual needs. He is not there to take advantage of the flock. Being a pastor is a calling, not a career. He is not a hireling but a servant in every respect. His life should be an example. Yet, today, this is not always the case.

It reminds me of what Apostle Paul said to the church at Corinth, *"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ."* 1 Corinthians 11:1. His life was a great example to them and they were able to observe how he responded in times of suffering, persecution, and hardship. It was a demonstration of how they too should live and behave.

Where do we find such examples today? It is sad to say that new Christians often do not have the right model to inspire them. There is no one to learn from, no one to follow. New believers are sometimes confused at what goes on in some churches. They observe things that are contrary to what they read in Scripture, and even hear things preached from the pulpit that

do not witness to their spirit. Some have been abused financially and even morally, all under the guise of the Church and often 'in the name of Jesus'! They have been tricked into giving their hard-earned money and are hurt by lies and deception, so that they end up drawing away from church.

They no longer want to attend; with many never wanting to set foot in any other church ever again. They are more comfortable to stay at home saying, "I'm just going to serve God by myself." But, dear brothers and sisters, this is not the solution and it will never work. If you remove a lump of coal from a burning fire and set it aside, in time its flame will simply die out.

This could be your case. Maybe you have been at home, staying away from church for a few months now, or even a few years, reading your Bible on your own.

Beware of the dangers of isolating yourself like that. If you are living your Christian life alone, how will you face trials when they come? It's possible that you will manage to overcome them to begin with; but, little by little, you run the risk of being misled, of clinging to the world, and letting your love for Jesus fade away.

Wherever you go today, you will find Christians in this state. When they left the church because of their negative experiences, their heart was still on fire for the Lord. They had no intention of forsaking Him or His plan for their life; but, somehow, as a result of all these experiences, their hearts hardened. Bitterness, unforgiveness, and rebellion seeped in leaving them empty of life, of peace, and of joy. They are no longer interested in the things of the Lord to the point where they cannot hear the Holy Spirit and repent. This is a very dangerous place to be in.

Without doubt, one reason for the shipwreck of their faith, is that they didn't have good examples of Godly men and women to follow and learn from. They also needed to hear a strong biblical message that would build their faith and deepen their understanding of God; a message that would



equip them to face up to their mistakes, help them to grow in the midst of adversity... and, finally bring them to maturity.

However, the good news is that there are still churches today where the right message is being proclaimed – the message of the cross. Churches where the leaders are living what they preach, whose lives are an example, and a place where people can be cared for and restored.

## **False Doctrines**

I would like to take this point a little further. In the Early Church, Apostle Paul was aware of the dangers of false doctrines. Notice what he says in 1 Timothy 4:1: *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.”*

Let’s be clear here. There are many Christians today who are being deceived by the message of prosperity that causes them to run after the riches of this world. Church leaders even use Scripture to manipulate and control God’s people into giving and even investing their money. They incite them to believe in a downpouring of material blessings. But, when nothing happens they end up disappointed, discouraged, and in some cases bitterly disheartened.

Sadly, I have witnessed this countless times during my mission trips in Africa and elsewhere. It breaks my heart to see so many suffering as a result of this erroneous teaching.

## **A Message that Restores**

As I have already shared, there is a message that is able to heal and restore their hearts and bring back the fire of God in them. The gospel of Jesus Christ does not just bring someone to salvation. No, this is only the first step, but it is far from being the last. There is so much more. Indeed, it is

about His life, His death, and His resurrection, but this needs to become a revelation that then touches every aspect of our life, and transforming us increasingly into the image of Christ. It's a message that causes us to grow and become strong. It brings us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, walk in humility and keep our heart pure, no longer desiring to harbour wrong attitudes. This is the true power of the gospel and what the Church needs to hear today!

It is for this reason that Apostle Paul warns believers against false teachings that can so easily distract us from the powerful simplicity and truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## Legalism

Not only was Apostle Paul concerned by the false teachings that were filtering into the Church, but he also saw the danger of legalism and all its implications: that sense of obligation that was carried over from the Old Covenant, and that is so often still the case today.

Christians are sick and tired of the expectations and rules imposed upon them by church leaders. 'You have to do this. You musn't do that.' Submitting to the constant pressure to be blameless, they become weakened in their faith. They easily condemn themselves and give up. Sadly, sometimes even resulting in them being criticised, judged, and finally written off by their community.

I have met numerous Christians who started out well in their walk with the Lord, but became victims of legalism in the church. It sapped the life and joy out of them and destroyed their faith and hope in the Lord. The weight of condemnation and failure was too much for them to bear and they disqualified themselves from the race. Apostle Paul describes this in 2 Corinthians 3:6 when he writes, "... *the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*"

You may have drawn back from the Lord and now find yourself empty and alone. I want you to know that despite all of this, the Lord has not given up on you. He is a God of love and mercy and desires to see you back in the race. He wants to lift you up and bring life back into your relationship with Him, so you can continue the race in joy, peace, and victory. He is right there for you!

## Chapter III

# Back on Track

The Lord doesn't want to see any of His children stumble and crumble under persecution, or to feel that they are unworthy. Above all things, He desires to see them get back into the race and finish it.

He longs to heal and restore all those who have drifted away from Him. It is His love that first touched us and brought us to salvation. And, when we find ourselves far from Him in the difficulties of life, it is His love once again that can break down the barriers of rebellion, resistance, and unbelief in our heart, enabling us to start serving Him once more in freedom and truth. God's love never changes, and He will never give up on us.

This wonderful truth is clearly demonstrated in the story of the prodigal son, found in the Gospel of Luke: *"A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood."* Luke 15:11-12. In effect, the younger son was saying to his father, I am old enough to make my own decisions about my life, let me go.

*"And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with*

*hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."* Luke 15:13-19.

What do we see here? This is the story of someone who decided to take control of his own life and to live it as he pleased. He left his father, his family, his home - everything, just because he wanted to do what he wanted. Then, when the money ran out, he found himself alone with neither hope nor future. This was a direct consequence of his actions.

## **The Enemy's Trap**

That is why, my brothers and sisters, when we forsake the Lord and drift away from Him, we can find ourselves in situations that may be very, very tough and difficult to live through. The prodigal son did not grasp the necessity of his relationship with his father, nor fully understand the protection and provision that he had in his father's house.

Likewise, many Christians in the world today who leave the church and the family of God find themselves spiritually destitute and facing terrible hardship. They do not see the need to be in the house of the Lord hearing the gospel, and growing together with the people of God. Since they are isolated, they become vulnerable and the devil rejoices because the door is now wide open for him to attack and destroy them.

Once we abandon the Lord, the enemy will try everything to seduce us into giving free reign to the desires of our flesh. Slowly but surely, he strips us of everything that is good and right, and steals our peace and joy.

Once we have left the Father's house, we can no longer hear a message that causes us to examine our lives, and brings awareness of our carnal nature. The young son just wanted to have fun with his friends and party without realising what was really awaiting him out in the real world. He truly believed that he would be fine and was going to have a wonderful time. In

the same way, at first, we will feel free, and have a sense of relief. But, as it turned out for him, there are consequences when we draw away from the Lord and take back the control of our life.

My fellow believers, if you deprive yourself of the presence of the Lord, you will see your life begin to deteriorate slowly but surely. If you are married, it will expose your marriage and family to danger and will very likely open the door for potentially irreparable damage. The young man eventually ended up with nothing; homeless, destitute and forced to consider eating pigs' food.

## **Coming Back to the Father**

What's wonderful is that the Bible tells us that *"He came to himself..."* He started to examine his life and realised the seriousness of his situation. He remembered all the times he had lived with his brother in his father's house, and the way his father had fed and clothed him, comparing it to where he was now, eating with pigs. That is why he said to himself, *"I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'"* Luke 15:18-19. He not only realised that he was missing everything and that he needed to return to his father's house; even more importantly, he knew that he had to repent and put things right with the Lord and with his father.

## **Don't be Afraid**

This young man had ruined his life completely. He had left the house in rebellion and turned his back on his father. He lost everything, including his dignity, and yet his father was waiting for him with open arms. *"And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him."* Luke 15:20. When we come back to the Lord with a humble

and broken heart, He welcomes and restores us. This is the heart of the Father towards everyone who has drawn away from Him. This is the power of true repentance.

Yet, it is precisely in times like these that the devil, the enemy, comes with his lies and tries to make us believe that our Heavenly Father doesn't love us anymore; that our sin is too great and there is no more hope for us. If we believe that God has written us off, we then begin to feel condemned. This is why when we backslide, we hesitate to come back to the Lord, because somehow, we cannot believe that He could forgive us and accept us the way we are. Even the prodigal son doubted in his heart: *"Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son."* Luke 15:21.

But his repentance opened the door for complete restoration with his father. There was no need for explanations or details. The father could see and feel that his son was broken and ready for anything. *"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'* And they began to be merry." Luke 15:22-24.

If anyone who has drifted away truly repents and returns to the Lord, he will be accepted and experience complete restoration. God's people will rejoice. Where the Spirit of Christ reigns in the Church, there will be no judgment against that person. God's grace is sufficient, our Lord heals and forgives.

Many Christians struggle to come back to church, often because they expect to be judged and penalised. But my brothers and sisters, this should not be the case. Anyone who humbles himself and repents should feel welcomed. Repentance wipes everything of the past away and opens the door for complete restoration. The Father rejoices when He is able to say, *'...my son was lost, and is found!'*

The prodigal son lost everything, but through his repentance he was reconciled to his father. Like him, you too may be facing the consequences of your actions today. But if you truly repent your relationship will be restored with your Heavenly Father; and by His grace, you will experience a new faith, a fresh zeal and true joy in your heart to serve Him once again. That is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.



## Chapter IV

# Facing Reality

We come across a multitude of problems and temptations every day, and we know that our Christian walk will become increasingly demanding in the days to come. It is time to strengthen ourselves, to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and to allow Him to take care of us, as He alone knows best.

### **Beware of the Dangers**

Scripture tells us to “...*be separate...*” (2 Corinthians 6:17). This means, come away from, do not play with, the world and compromise the truth. Swimming in troubled waters is dangerous. Beware of allowing yourself to become lukewarm as it will draw you away from the Lord without you even realising it. Likewise, do not harbour unforgiveness in your heart as it will produce roots of bitterness which, in turn, will become a platform for the enemy to use, and it will affect your entire life. It is for these reasons that the Bible tells us, “*Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.*” Proverbs 4:23.

Even though we are all responsible for our own actions, we should never forget that the devil is our enemy. He prowls around and will use whatever means he can to entice believers into one of his traps. This is why, as Christians, we need to be very wise, knowing where we are going and what kind of race we are running. By giving in to the desires of the flesh and opening the door to the enemy, we come to the place where the Lord is no longer in control of our lives. Now, it is no longer the voice of the Holy Spirit that we are hearing, but our own will, and our own desires. This is how Christians end up in the world and fall back into sin.

## Drifting Away from the Lord

It is time that Christians realise the severity and danger of living far from the Lord, and that it has consequences. Firstly, we lose our peace and joy - and this is just the beginning. The faith that motivated us, the vision for our lives and families - it all disappears! This is not Divine punishment, but simply the result of our disobedience and rebellion.

The devil deceives and distracts us to draw our attention away from the plan of God for our lives. Over time, he will rob us of everything that is good for us. Persisting in this state and not repenting can lead to us being crushed and end in the destruction of our lives. Do not be surprised to see your old way of life coming to the fore once again, even as you lose the victory and freedom that was once yours. This is what we read in Proverbs 26:11, "*As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly.*"

One bad decision can lead to another, and another; and, in a very short space of time you can find yourself drowning in the things of the world, in sin and iniquity. You convince yourself that you can play with the world and get away with it. You believe you are in control and have nothing to worry about; but the reality is that you have underestimated the power of your flesh and that of the prince of darkness!

The problem starts in the heart, and like a disease, it spreads and gradually affects every aspect of your life. For those who are married, where you were once happy and fulfilled as a couple, strife creeps in and, consequently, the children start to suffer as well. One thing leads to another, and soon your family can end up looking just like any other family of non-believers in the world; without God, and without hope, to the great satisfaction of the enemy. All because as parents you took back the control of your lives.

No Christian should experience such difficulties and problems that are the consequences of a heart hardened by sin. But, all is not lost brothers and sisters: No matter how far you have gone, God's grace is still there for you. His heart and desire are always to forgive and restore you. The door for

reconciliation always remains open so that you can return to Him and taste of His love again. There may be situations that seem to be beyond repair, but even in the worst case, the Lord is able to intervene, if you are willing to acknowledge your state and repent.

## **Coming Back to Him**

I encourage you, brothers and sisters, to humble yourself before him, acknowledge your fault and return to Him in brokenness, putting the control of your life back into His hands once again. You will taste afresh the peace and joy you experienced in the first days of your salvation.

Looking back at the Old Testament we see how the people of Israel hardened their hearts against the Lord and began to worship Baal and idols. They gave themselves over to all sorts of evil and idolatrous practices. They were far from God in their hearts; and yet, when they cried out to Him, He heard and answered their cry. This is because He had established a covenant with them which He would not break. God is faithful and will never go back on His Word!

Allow me to say it again: As Christians, we must not be ignorant of the consequences of sin in our life. It's one thing to be drawn away by the lusts of our flesh and to lose our peace and joy for a time, but there is another aspect we must consider, and that is eternity.

## Chapter V

# Looking Ahead

We can be far from the Lord for months or even years; but, this is nothing when compared to eternity. Let's not forget that the purpose of our salvation goes far beyond our life on this earth. Salvation brings an inheritance that cannot fade and is incorruptible, reserved for us in heaven. Despite our bad choices and what the devil has tried to steal from us, we should never lose sight of the promise of what awaits us in eternity. See what the Book of Hebrews says in 10:36, *"For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise..."*

In other words, the way we live our life here on earth will affect us for eternity. We won't be here on earth forever. The Bible tells us that we are sojourners, and that we are just passing through. Only those who know Christ will live forever with Him. This is a fact that we cannot ignore.

### Keeping on Track

Many Christians today live a life that is so focused on the here and now, being caught up with the natural world, that they forget that our real inheritance is to be found after we die, in eternity. This is why Apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:4 of *"...an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away..."*, reserved in heaven for all those who love Him and belong to Him.

However, we are also given a warning in the Book of Hebrews: *"For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith. But if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure*

*in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.”* Hebrews 10:37-39. Notice that the author refers here to those who have drawn back and are no longer running the race of faith anymore. There was a time when they were living by faith, but through circumstances and adversity, they have stopped running and are no longer taking part in the race. But what needs to really catch our attention in these verses is the word ‘perdition’.

We are faced with a clear choice: Remain far from the Lord in our sin, with its present and eternal consequences, or restore our fellowship with God. That is why these verses encourage us to continue living by faith, which is pleasing to the Lord.

We are living in a crucial time for the Church, a time of apostasy, where many Christians are being drawn back to the world and to their old way of life. They do not seem to realise the present and eternal consequences that their rebellion and backslidden state will bring. This is why we need to hear the right biblical teaching that will challenge us, protect us from the system of the world, and help us walk in righteousness every day.

The Bible reminds us, *“the just will live by faith.”* This is the race we are called to run. Yes, there will be obstacles, and unexpected challenges, but every Christian must look beyond these things and see further into eternity to what awaits him.

## **Discerning the Times**

I would like to emphasise what I said earlier that this apostasy, this falling away of the brethren, is a sign of the end times. *“Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, ‘When it is evening you say, “It will be fair weather, for the sky is red” and in the morning, “It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.” Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.”* Matthew 16:1-3.

We must discern the times that we are living in. Without doubt, we are living in a time where the Lord is preparing the Church for His return. There are so many indications of this great event mentioned in Scripture that are coming to pass before our eyes. Earthquakes, disasters, wars, and iniquity that is increasing daily. All these things that are happening in the world around us today are signs that point to the second coming of Christ. We need to wake up and see beyond our own circumstances, and prepare ourselves for His return.

*Apostle Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words."*

This is the Word of God. This is the truth. Every Christian must prepare himself for Christ's return. We cannot just carry on in our sin and rebellion thinking or hoping that everything will be alright. We need to see that eternity awaits us all, and each of us must be ready.

If today, you are far from the Lord, then it's time to wake up and face reality, and realise the seriousness of your state.

Beloved, there is no more time to lose. Be ready!



Scan this QR code to watch the program  
“Stay in the Race”  
with Miki Hardy.  
<https://youtu.be/itMRHezmWkk>

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# STAYING IN THE RACE

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## Chapter VI

### Preparing Ourselves

*“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.” Matthew 25:1-10.*

This parable highlights the importance of being well prepared. There are many Christians today who refuse to believe that the door of the Kingdom could ever be closed to them. Yet this passage clearly portrays the nature and character of God. When the bridegroom arrives, the virgins who have

no more oil in their lamps, do not have access to the wedding. Too often we don't measure the consequences of our choices because we say to ourselves: 'God is a God of love and grace'. Of course, this is true; yet, as a believer it is our responsibility to prepare ourselves to meet Jesus. This is what Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6:10-11, *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."*

My dear brothers and sisters, let us not behave like those foolish virgins! It is a serious misconception to think that our salvation is enough to carry us through all of life's temptations and struggles. Let's prepare ourselves and be strengthened in the Lord, so as to stand firm in the evil day.

## **Get Ready**

The five wise virgins had extra oil to make sure that their lamps didn't go out. They had no idea when the bridegroom might arrive, but they made sure they were ready. In the same way, we don't know when Jesus will return, but the important thing is to be ready.

Apostle Paul strongly encourages us to strengthen ourselves in the Lord. In other words, not to depend on our personal strength, ability, knowledge, or accomplishments, but on Him alone. Only the revelation of the message of the cross to our hearts will preserve us from compromise, lead us in all truth, and help us to live according to the spirit of the gospel. It will confront our actions, correct our attitudes, and enable us to walk by faith and stay in the race.

The five other virgins who were taken by surprise were foolish. When the bridegroom came, they tried to get oil from the wise virgins, but it was too late.

The lesson we need to draw from this parable is that each one of us needs to be prepared. We cannot rely on our spouse, our family, or anyone else. It is up to each of us, alone, to be ready to meet the Lord.



I am sure that all of us feel a bit of compassion for those foolish virgins. It is difficult to accept that when the door closed, they were left outside and lost everything because of their stubborn and foolish attitude. Whether you are lukewarm, half asleep, or backslidden, believe me it is high time to wake up and get back in step with the Lord again.

## **One Way Back: Repentance**

You may have strayed away from God; but today, realise that you are in danger spiritually. Know that just being aware of that is a grace from the Lord.

It's not time to find excuses; the only thing you must do is to repent and cry out to the Lord. As we saw earlier, I encourage you to have the heart of the prodigal son: to acknowledge your state and come back to the Lord with a contrite heart. The Lord Himself will restore you, and you will be able to continue the race once again.

Just like the Christians in the Early Church, nurture the desire to hear a message that confronts you with the reality of your state, that draws you away from the world and closer to the Lord.

There is only one way back and that is through repentance. It is not just saying sorry, trying to find excuses, or explaining and blaming your circumstances. No, I'm speaking here of true repentance like that of the prodigal son, where we cry out to the Lord, humble ourselves, and ask for His forgiveness.

## The True Gospel

We read in the book of Acts, how the early Christians sat at the feet of the apostles to hear the true message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. What they heard filled their hearts with a deep desire to know more about the Lord and to be separate from the world, powerfully transforming their lives.

The apostolic message brought them to desire to identify their lives with Christ, in His suffering, His death, and His resurrection. They were not seeking after the things of this world, but understood that their life was no longer their own. Jesus was persecuted, and they too were ready to be persecuted. Jesus paid the price, and they too were ready to pay the price.

While repentance is always the first step in returning to the Lord, it is important to see that this is not just a decision or act of our will, but rather a work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man. This is how we grow and how our spiritual life is built. One step will always lead to another as the Lord works in our heart and brings us to maturity in Christ. Apostle Paul puts it this way: *“And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”* Galatians 5:24.

The tests and temptations the New Testament Christians faced are very similar to those we face today. They may come in different forms and sizes, but ultimately the challenge is no different. In these times, the choices we make are vital: either they lead us into freedom, or into bondage.

## Identifying with Christ

The key is the choice we make in each and every situation, how we react and what we do. If we are ready to accept that God can work in our lives through these difficult times, then we will be strengthened and grow in the faith. But, if we resist and look for a way around them, or run away, we will miss out on all He has planned for us in His great love.

Having made the right decision, we must then be determined and keep an open heart. This attitude of submission and perseverance will allow us to face the challenges of life while still staying in the race. This should be the foundation of our relationship with God, as it was with Paul when he wrote in 2 Timothy 1:12, *“For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.”*

Unlike many Christians today, Paul did not consider suffering as something shameful or embarrassing, to be avoided. When things go wrong, many Christians tend to think they must have failed in some way and often blame others, or even the devil. But this was not Paul’s understanding. He knew he had nothing to fear. He lived by the simple but powerful conviction that his life was in God’s hands, and nothing would hinder His plan.

Jesus goes further when He says in Luke 14:33, *“...whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”* This is a simple, but profound, message which must become a revelation and the foundation of our lives.

When we identify our lives with Christ in every way, He works His character in us. We will be better equipped to stand firm against slipping back into our old ways, and more able to face whatever comes our way.

Once again, this is the power of the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

## Chapter VII

# Staying Awake

In the Gospel of Luke 21:34-36, we are challenged by Jesus' words when, speaking of His return, He warns His disciples: *"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."*

As Christians, we need to make sure that we are in the right place spiritually and are being prepared in the right manner. We must take seriously the fact that we are living in the last days, and that there is no time to lose. *"Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is."* Mark 13:33-34.

Let us be serious, therefore, about our walk with the Lord and what He wants to do in us, so that we do not slumber at this crucial time.

My brothers and sisters, the signs are all around us that the end is near, so let us be alert and ready for what is coming. *"Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming."* Matthew 24:40-42. Let's stay vigilant and rooted in Christ so as to stand firm in the evil day. (Ephesians 6:13).

## **...Until the Great Day**

The Bible tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, that at the return of Jesus *“...the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”*

My prayer is that not one of us is left behind. That is why we must identify our lives with Christ, deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow our Master.

Should we happen to fall or drift away from the Lord, let us never forget that, by His grace, He is always there to forgive and purify us. In His great love, God ardently desires for all of us to be ready when He returns to fetch us.

Scan this QR code to watch the program  
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<https://youtu.be/UFnB4Lr2LhY>



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# FINISHING THE RACE

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## Chapter VIII

# Bearing Fruit

Having looked at how essential it is always to be ready and prepared to meet the Lord, there is something else equally important for every Christian to understand. To see what it is, let's go back to the last part of the parable of the sower in Matthew chapter 13:23: *"But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."*

Here, Jesus is referring to Christians whose hearts are well with the Lord. Those who have tasted His grace and allowed the Lord to work in their lives through trials and tribulations that have brought them to become more and more like Jesus.

Some may have fallen on the way and others drifted; but each time, through repentance they have got back into the race and are now living a victorious life. They are ready for eternity waiting for the return of Christ

with great joy and expectation. It is evident that these believers will bear fruit on this earth.

As they identify their lives with Christ each day, they shine and will have an impact on their families, the Church, and even the world. This is the fruit Jesus was talking about. You won't see them 'flirting' with the world. Instead, they keep themselves from becoming caught up in the atmosphere and attitudes that prevail in today's society. They separate themselves from ungodly activities and unrighteous behaviour, and their lives will exemplify the nature and character of Christ.

It's one thing to come to the Lord and be restored in your heart and life, but it is quite another to bear fruit. It is not about trying to become a better person in your own strength, No! I am speaking here about giving your life to Christ in every aspect: your home, your marriage, your family, your finance, your work... in fact, every area of your life!

## **Having Vision**

There are two particularly important aspects to note after you have been restored to a right relationship with the Lord.

Firstly, gratitude for what He has done for you, for His forgiveness and grace, and for having brought fresh hope to your life.

Secondly, determination not to go backwards again. How? By allowing the Lord to work in your life so as to keep bearing fruit. This should become your aim and priority.

I have noticed that many Christians who come back to the Lord often struggle because they do not have this direction. They become comfortable and complacent after having been restored, but don't see the danger that, without a Godly vision, they could easily slip backwards again.

That is the reason we should desire to bear fruit more than anything else. If this is the purpose of your heart, then wherever you go you will leave a good testimony. People will see the difference in you and testify to the change. This is what bearing fruit is all about.

A Christian who bears fruit has a vision for the Kingdom and is generous. He will always be ready to give his life and his money to support the gospel. He is not just consumed with his own wishes, plans, and worries, but he discerns what God wants to do in and around him, in the Church and in the world. He has grasped God's heart.

## **Redeeming the Time**

This is the challenge we are all called to take up. We need to ask ourselves the question, 'Am I growing in the Lord and bearing fruit?' It is a good time to reflect and see where we each stand in this respect. We may be at every church meeting and reading our Bible everyday - but does our life, our marriage, our children, our finances testify to the grace of God? Are we allowing Him to do what he wants in all of these areas?

If this is not the case, and you've come to realise that you have wasted time, know that it is not too late. Through repentance, you can redeem the time and make up for what is lost. Don't look back, but accept the challenge that the Lord is placing before you today: being conformed to His image. Embrace it as the goal and vision of your life.

If you truly desire to finish this race, be determined to bear fruit in abundance, and to be a testimony to the life of Christ in you.



## Chapter IX

# Good Nutrition

Any athlete will tell you how vital nutrition is if you want to be sure to do well in a race. The same is true when running the race of faith. In the previous chapter, I shared about the importance of bearing fruit and having a vision for one's life: being conformed to the image of Christ. This is God's plan for each and every one of us, and this is the race of faith that we are all called to run.

### The Right Message

If we are to stay on course and complete the race, then we need to make sure we are hearing the right message. Only the correct biblical teaching or sound doctrine can prepare, establish and equip us to overcome all the obstacles of life and take up the challenges. I have referred to this several times before, but I want to give more detail in this chapter, as it is so important. Hebrews 5:13-14 tells us, *“For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”* The problem nowadays is that very few Christians ever get beyond the stage of just ‘drinking milk’. They never reach the point where they are mature enough truly to discern good from evil and right from wrong.

Each of us must realise that the message of the cross is not simply ‘knowing’ what Jesus accomplished there. But, as mentioned earlier, it is about accepting His call to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Him. This is what every Christian needs to grasp. It is the attitude of

humbly accepting that every circumstance of life is an opportunity to grow, to put to death the desires of our flesh, so as to become more and more conformed to the image of Christ.

If this message is not preached, understood, and lived, Christians may rebel in the midst of trials, because they do not realise what God wants to do in, and through, them to bring them to spiritual maturity. As a result, they will lack discernment and could easily be led astray by the many strange and questionable teachings that are sadly prevalent in the Church today. The message of the cross is far more than a principle or a teaching, it must become our way of life!

In the same way that a new born baby is entirely dependent on his mother's milk, so this truth needs to be clearly embedded in the hearts, minds, and lives of new believers. It is the foundation upon which the Lord is able to build. It is what I often refer to as the 'true' gospel. No Christian should be denied this revelation. Hearing messages that focus on material blessings and self-promotion goes against this, and undermines what God wants to do in our lives. It was for this same reason that Jesus addressed the Pharisees in Matthew 23:13: *"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in."*

## **A Revelation**

When the message of the cross becomes a reality in the heart of a believer, it will enable him to be established in his faith, and it will help him not waver when persecution and trials come his way.

Sadly, there are many churches that pursue the 'sensational' in an attempt to make the gospel more appealing and less offensive. This opens the door to *"...every wind of doctrine..."* and leaves Christians vulnerable to unbiblical practices. It is hardly surprising that believers lose sight of the eternal riches that God has prepared for them when churches are placing

so much emphasis and attention on material 'blessings' in this world. Spiritual growth is measured incorrectly by success and wealth on this earth, which does not prepare the believer for hardship or tribulation when it comes. If we are not hearing the apostolic message that causes us to grow, and are not being strengthened and equipped to face the tests and trials of life, we will very likely struggle to finish the race.

The message of the cross is powerful and reaches deep into the heart of man. It brings conviction of sin and separates the ways of the Spirit from the ways of the flesh. It will protect you through all the circumstances of life and enable you to keep your heart pure and undefiled. One thing is certain, when we hear the right message and it is established in our hearts, it will bring us to maturity in Christ. We will grow in discernment, learn to walk wisely, and bear much fruit.

With all that is happening in the world and in the Church today, it will be hard to finish the race if we are not getting the right spiritual nourishment. The need for this message to come back into the Church is more important than ever before. The revelation of the cross of Jesus Christ needs to be preached in simplicity and power.

## Chapter X

# Running Together

### The Family of God

The Christian life is not simply about our own personal experience with Jesus. It is important to understand that when we are born again, we become part of the family of God and are no longer alone. Henceforth, we are joined to brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we share a common hope and faith. No matter what our race, tribe, language, or social standing is, nothing can separate us anymore; we have become one family through Christ.

Clearly, the Christians in the Early Church understood this well. *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”* Acts 2:42-47.

From the moment they were saved, believers met to pray, break bread, and encourage one another. That is the family of God. This sense of belonging and giving our lives for one another needs to be a revelation for us. It’s not just about going to the same Sunday service or Bible study, but actually

belonging to a spiritual family where we find refuge and safety for the rest of our life. This is what every church should be.

## **A Security**

Too often, many Christians who are new in the faith or have recently come back to the Lord stand alone, and do not recognise their need to be integrated into the family of God. Yet this was not the case in the Early Church, as we can see in Acts 4:32: *“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.”* Can you see how they were one, and how they loved and took care of each other? Their hearts were knit together with the same desire to serve the Lord, but they understood that they couldn’t do it alone; they needed to depend on each other for strength and support as they faced adversity daily!

Sadly, there are some Christians today who are afraid of taking a stand for their faith. Others remain far more attached to their natural families than to the Lord’s.

Jesus said in Luke 14:26, *“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”* In other words, if you feel obliged to please your natural family above obeying the Lord, then your priorities are not in order. Please understand that we are talking about an attitude of the heart here. This is certainly not to be taken as a principle or law. No, instead, it is about willingly putting the Lord first in everything.

I remember when I first became a believer, there were certain things that I no longer wanted to do, and places that I no longer wanted to go to. The stand I took sometimes offended many of my family members and friends who held it against me.

But know, my brothers and sisters, that this kind of persecution is inevitable when we desire to serve the Lord and we cannot run from it. We cannot be afraid of what people will say or do in response to the stand we take for our faith. It's at times like this we need the strength and support that comes from our brothers and sisters in Christ who have faced the same difficulties, and are now in a position to help us. Nothing can compare with God's family!

## **A Grace**

Many believers today do not grasp how precious and important the family of God is. They are not willing to open up to other Christians, depriving themselves of available support from their brothers and sisters in Christ, and so struggle and suffer alone. This simply reflects a lack of revelation and maturity. We are all in the same race; and we need to be ready to help one another. This is how we grow and how we find faith for one another.

Church is just like a normal family where, at times, the children are disobedient, but are accepted with patience and loved by the rest of the family; and over time, change and maturity comes. Likewise, in the family of God we need to have faith for one another; faith and patience to see the Lord have His way and bring growth in each of our lives.

Apostle Paul put it this way in Ephesians 2:19, *“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”* Through our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, we are no longer strangers; we are now a part of the household of God. This is so precious and so powerful and needs to become a reality in the life of every Christian.

Your relationship with fellow believers will help keep you away from the world, and those who may try to pull you back into your old way of life. It will encourage you to keep you running in the right direction and to finish the race.

## Chapter XI

# Keeping Our Eyes on the Finishing Line

Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew 16:27, *“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”* Many Christians seem to be oblivious to this verse, unaware that one day, when they stand before the Lord, what will count is not just the fact that they have finished the race, but how they have run it.

There are many obstacles and unexpected challenges that will come our way. Of course, we will make mistakes and sometimes fail, but as long as we are ready to humble ourselves and repent, the Lord in His grace will always be there to forgive and to restore us so that we can continue and finish the race.

If we are to stay in this race and not lose sight of the eternal promises, we need to hear the apostolic message: the message of the cross. It encourages us to lay down our lives and helps us to be separate from the world and its desires. The more we hear and open our lives to it, the more it will establish us in truth and righteousness. The way we live our life will determine the reward we will receive when we stand before Jesus.

Paul understood that nothing was gained in advance and that he needed to finish the race if he was to obtain the prize. He affirmed this when he wrote to the Philippians (3:13-14): *“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind*

*and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

But that was not all. In every situation he went through he never took his eyes off the goal, refusing to dwell on the things that were behind. This is the same attitude we should all have.

## **Prayer**

Do you remember how you were when you were first born again? I'm sure like me you used to pray at every opportunity and in every situation? It seemed like second nature to you. But when we start to drift from the Lord, we stop praying and start bearing the weight of our problems. Our heart becomes heavy; sin creeps in, and very soon, we find we can't pray anymore because we feel condemned. This is why Jesus said in Matthew 26:41, *“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

Prayer is not an option. In the midst of trials, temptations, and persecution a believer needs to pray. He needs to keep his heart pure, allow the Lord to strengthen him in the faith which will assure him of victory. Remember, whatever happens, the Lord is only a prayer away!

When Apostle Paul was in prison and facing many hardships, his faith remained strong because he had learned to put everything in the hands of the Lord through prayer, as he explains in Philippians 4:6-7: *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”*

Prayer is talking to Jesus and sharing everything with Him. He is always there to listen and to encourage us to persevere.



## God's Word

It is so important to take time to read the Word of God and meditate on it. It will feed you, encourage and protect you. Matthew 4:4 states, *"It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."* The Lord uses His Word to speak to us and enlighten us. It helps us to know Him and His ways better. It is amazing how in the midst of tough circumstances when we are really struggling, He can bring a verse of Scripture to mind that will inspire and encourage us to continue in the race. *"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* Romans 10:17.

I am not talking here about looking for principles or new doctrines in the Bible, but of reading it regularly and asking the Lord to speak to you through it. Let it become fresh manna to your heart and soul. It contains everything you will ever need!

## Faith and Perseverance

Sometimes it may seem that everything is against us, and it's easier just to give up. This is exactly what the devil wants. Once he gets you to do that, feelings of guilt and condemnation quickly follow, and soon one small incident becomes a disaster. We must learn to stand firm in the faith even if everything has gone wrong. The Lord is faithful, and He will always be there for us. It's a time to taste His grace and mercy.

During times of testing and tribulation, we need perseverance to allow the Lord to continue His work in us. It is the key to experiencing the hand of the Lord powerfully at work in our life.

Be aware of the devil, the enemy, who always seeks to deceive and devour us. Peter encourages us to watch and resist him with a firm faith in 1 Peter 5:9-10: *"Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the*

*God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.”*

Don't forget that the tactics of the enemy are to incite us to blame others and make excuses for our actions. If we run away or just give up, we miss out on everything that God has planned for us. If we persevere, we will surely see the Lord intervene in our favour.

Although we have already mentioned the verses in James 1:2-4, it is worth looking at them again, *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”*

It's far too easy to try and go around or get out of situations in our own strength; drawing back from problems, or looking for a natural solution, instead of opening our hearts to the Lord and allowing Him to do what He needs in us. That is why more than ever today the Church needs to hear the precious message of the cross.

## Conclusion

# Crossing the Finishing Line and Winning the Prize

My encouragement to you is not to look back, but to look forward to what the Lord has planned and purposed for your life! The Bible is full of such examples of men and women who were called by God and faced many difficult challenges, and of some who even fell away from His plan. But He never gave up on anyone of them, and He was always present to heal and restore. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The devil is a defeated foe. Never give him a single opportunity to accuse or condemn you in any way. The grace of God is always there for you. Your heavenly Father will never turn His back on you. He is ready at all times to reach out to you in His grace and to help you get up and continue the race. He delights to see you run with faith and determination. The finishing line is within your reach, and He will do everything to get you there.

Let me finish by asking you where you are in your spiritual life today... Take a moment to consider, *“Am I running the right race?”* and *“Am I bearing fruit in my life?”* This is not the time for guilt or regret; but instead, it’s the time for Him to touch your life and prepare you for the future.

My prayer for you today is that the message of the cross becomes a revelation to your life and equips you to face every situation with humility and perseverance. That through it, the Lord enables you never to draw back from the race of faith; but in everything, your life becomes a wonderful testimony of His love and grace to all those around you; that together with

Apostle Paul, in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, you also will be able to say: *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”*

May the Lord encourage you in this wonderful race and help you press on to win the prize of the heavenly calling of God in Christ Jesus.

# Salvation Through Jesus Christ

If reading this book has touched you, and you are not already a born-again believer, then the next few lines are for you. John 3:16 tells us, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

The Bible, which is the Word of God, teaches us that man cannot be saved by works, or religion, but only by believing in what Jesus Christ did on the cross to forgive us of our sins.

When Jesus spoke to one of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, He said in John 3:3, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* Jesus also declared in John 14:6, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*

Apostle John writes in John 1:12-13, *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”*

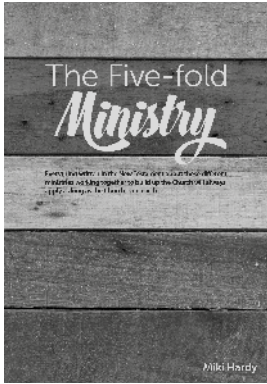
If you want to make peace with God today and no longer be separated from Him by your sin, then let the following prayer help you to speak to Him personally:

*“Dear God, I come before you just as I am. I admit that I am a sinner and that my sin separates me from You. I believe that Jesus is Your Son who came down to earth and was crucified on the cross for my sins. I believe He died for me, that He rose again and is alive today. I ask You to forgive me of my past life. From this day forward, I give you my life and want to follow You. Come into my heart, Lord. Thank you, Jesus, for the free gift of eternal life.”*

May God bless you!

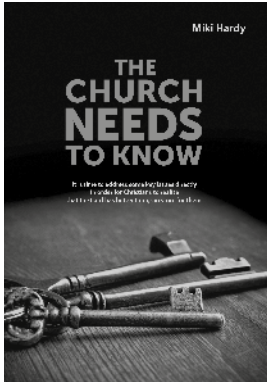
Do not hesitate to contact us if you would like us to help you know and serve Jesus better.

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### **The Five-fold Ministry**

Everything written in the New Testament about these different ministries working together to build up the Church will always apply as long as the Church is on earth.



### **The Church Needs to Know**

It is time to address some key issues directly in order for Christians to realise that the Lord has better things in store for them!

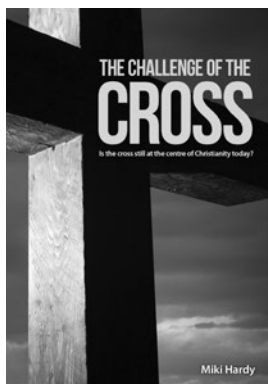


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# The Race

Why do so many Christians fall by the wayside and give up on the race of faith? Why have so many left the Church disillusioned and discouraged?

Pastor Miki Hardy examines some of the obstacles that every Christian faces and defines how to understand and prepare for these challenges. He outlines God's plan for those who have given up and brings encouragement and sound scriptural advice to show every believer the way to live a victorious life and finish the race.

The Race

Miki Hardy



Church Team Ministries International (CTMI) is a Christian network, formed in 2001 by a team of leaders from various African countries who are united by the message of the cross and the work of God in their lives.

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