

GRACE for the RACE

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John Baker was too short and not built to be a runner for his high school track team but he loved to run. His best friend was tall and had the perfect build to be a runner but wanted nothing to do with the sport. So John went to the track coach to convince him to let John on the team under the premise that his best friend would follow. John Baker became a runner. The team's first race was a 1.7

mile cross country run through the hills of Albuquerque. The reigning state champ Lloyd Goff was running the race and so all eyes were on him.

Lloyd led the pack as they disappeared over the hills. The spectators waited and then they saw a lone silhouette of a figure running toward them and assumed it was Lloyd Goff. Instead it was John Baker who blew away the field of runners and set a new meet record. When asked how he was able to win, John said he asked himself a simple question, "Am I doing my best?" Still unsure if he was, he fixed his eyes on the runner ahead of him until he passed him and then the next and the next until there was no one left. He committed that nothing was going to distract from giving his best- not pain, fatigue or anything.

Another cross country runner shared this story:

I ran cross country in high school. We'd go out to these golf courses and really rather desolate places and run a couple of miles sometimes across creeks and through wooded areas. If the course was not well marked and if you were like me and got far behind from the other runners, there was a chance of getting off the course and never really getting to the finish line.

We must realize today that some Christians get distracted running the race of life. They start off following the goals and path that God has for them but something leads them astray. Others seem to give up the race too soon. They throw in the towel when the race isn't over yet.

This New Year we want to discover how God wants us to run the race and get through the race that He has for us in our Christian lives.

We need God's grace to win the race of the Christian life.

This truth is revealed in three ways.

1. We need to stay in the race.

There are several pictures in the Bible that depict how Christians are in a race. The Bible teaches that Christians need to remain committed to the race of the Christian life. The race metaphors in the Bible mean that God has a plan and goal for our lives that we must be engaged in. We must be involved in living out the Christian life like a runner is engaged in running and is headed toward the finish line. This means we must maintain our spiritual stamina and concentrate on the things God wants us to do and how He wants us to live as we move toward the finish line.

Hebrews 12:1

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about (surrounded) with so great a cloud of witnesses (the runners of the past – they are witnesses to us – Hebrews 11), let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience (perseverance) the race that is set before us (the runners of present – you and me).

The "great cloud [assembly, mass] of witnesses" was introduced to us in Hebrews 11. They are the heroes of the faith who believed in God and experienced His amazing power to help them through life. It is not suggested here by the cloud of witnesses that these men and women are now in heaven watching us as we run the race, like people seated in a stadium. The word "witnesses" does not mean

“spectators.” The saints are not sitting in the grandstands of Heaven watching us run the race. They have more important things to do!

The word “witnesses” is referring to a spiritual witness or lesson that their lives send to us today who are looking back at how they won the race. What this means that those who have gone on before (the martyrs of Hebrews 11) bear witness to us of a great spiritual truth and it’s this: God can see us through whatever obstacles we face in the Christian race. God can enable us to pass through the toughest times we could every face in life, even martyrdom. This is what their faith and lives are teaching us today. Their lives actually become a spiritual witness to us how God can take care of us if we will only believe in His power and sufficiency.

Those who have competed in the race within the past and won (the runners of Hebrews 11) are an inspiration to us to keep running by faith today as we trust in God’s power and sufficiency for our lives. So we see from the Biblical imagery that Christians are involved in a race – the race of the Christian life. Living the Christian life is like a race. We are compared to a runner who is engaged in a contest and who is focused on winning the contest by discipline, stamina, training, and possessing a proper focus.

The Christian race involves winning at living the Christian life and it is not a race against one another as Christians but a race against the world, the flesh, and the devil. We know this is the case for the writer of Hebrews talks about those things that weigh us down (impede our progress in the Christian race) and the sin that so easily besets us, which is the specific sin of not believing or possessing faith in God’s power, sufficiency, and grace to get us through the race, like the previous runners did in Hebrews 11.

Those who have gone before us, as outlined in Hebrews 11, possessed great faith or belief in God’s power to help them win the race. Let’s read some examples of those who ran effectively and because of their perseverance they stayed in the race and were winners! In Hebrews 11 we discover that Abel was a winner (11:4), Noah was a winner (11:7), Abraham was a winner (11:8), Moses was a winner (11:24-28), the Jews were winners (11:29), Rahab was a winner (11:31), and untold numbers

of Old Testament believers were winners (11:32-40). The question is this: “Have you stayed in the race and are you winning?”

One of the best ways to develop endurance and encouragement is to get to know the godly men and women of the Old Testament who ran the race and won! They provide an example for us of those who endured by faith in God’s power and promises! They remind us that we too can by God’s grace win the race! We need to possess great faith (belief) and spiritual stamina like the previous runners did! We cannot allow the sin of unbelief to take us off the race course. When we lose our faith in God’s power and sufficiency, His sustaining grace, to get us through the race, we will find ourselves no longer running and losing the race.

The expression “weights” (Heb. 12:1) involve all those things that bog us down from running effectively and fulfilling God’s plan and purpose for our lives. They might include our schedules (they are too full and God takes the back seat), they might include our job, family, friends who oppose us, our hobbies, sports, our petty addictions, distractions, and misplaced loyalties. Anything that keeps us from remaining committed to God’s service and sanctifying purposes for our lives and staying in the race is a weight to us. Add to this our sin of unbelief (doubting God’s power and sufficiency) and we have a recipe for getting us off the track and even losing the race in the end. As a result of our weights that bog us down and our unbelief in God’s power and sufficiency, we can get off course in life and no longer remain in the race, running and winning the battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and fulfilling God’s goals and sanctifying purposes for our lives.

We can begin to lose. In fact, we can lose in a big way. The sad thing is that some Christians don’t realize that they are losing the race for they have been bogged down in sin and disobedience for so long. As a runner, we must run to win! This is our next point. We must be ready to follow God’s truth, be obedient to His Word, the plan He has for our life, stick to what we know is right, so that we maintain our spiritual stamina against our enemies and foes, stay on course, and remain in the race.

- ✓ What weights are keeping you from running the race effectively?
- ✓ How far off course are you in running the race?

- ✓ Where did you get off track?
- ✓ How far back are you in the race?
- ✓ If necessary, are you ready to reenter the race again?
- ✓ How can you improve your running skills?
- ✓ What can you do this year to better your perseverance?
- ✓ What things must you change to stay the course?

Paul exclaimed in 2 Timothy 4:7-8:

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

You will notice that Paul said He finished his course – He finished the race! He won in the end for he had remained faithful to God and therefore would receive a prize (reward) for staying in the race, running properly, and winning!

I started this study talking about John Baker. Let me finish the story about him. After graduating, John turned his sights to the 1972 Olympics. In order to have time to train and make a living, he took a job as a track coach at Aspen Elementary in Albuquerque where he had the opportunity to do what he had always wanted- work with kids. Within a few months, he became known as the coach who cared as he invested a great deal of time and effort in working with the kids individually. Not critical but always demanding the best, the kids responded and learned from John.

In May of 1969 just before his 25th birthday, John noticed he was tiring prematurely in his workouts. Two weeks later, he developed chest pains and then awoke one morning with a swollen groin. A doctor’s visit revealed that John had an advanced form of testicular cancer. The only chance was to undergo surgery which revealed the worst, that the cancer had spread. The doctors gave him six months to live and a second surgery was required.

Just before the second operation, John drove to the mountains and intended to end his life by driving off a cliff. He didn’t want his family to have to endure his pain and suffering. But just before he did, he recalled the faces of his students and wondered

if they would think that this was the best he could do. That was not the legacy he wanted to live behind. At that moment, he dedicated his life to his kids and decided to give his very best effort in the days which lay ahead.

After a summer of surgery and treatments, he returned to school and started a program for handicapped kids to be the equipment managers and coach's timekeeper. Everyone that wanted to was included. John created a whole list of awards for students he felt deserved recognition, using his own trophies by replating them and purchasing fabric with his own money and created blue ribbons at night to give as rewards. All the while John refused pain medication because he feared it would impair his ability to work with the kids. John was asked to work with a small track club called the Duke City Dashers. Several months later, they were a team to contend with. John predicted they would make it to the AAU Finals.

By now John was undergoing chemo and he struggled to keep any food down, his health deteriorated and it became increasingly difficult to make it to practices. Then one day, one of the runners came to John to share the good news: they were going to make it to the AAU Finals. John's last wish was to be there for it. Unfortunately, it was not to be. A few weeks later on Thanksgiving Day at the age of 26, John died - 18 months after his first doctor's visit. He had beaten the odds. Two days later, the Duke City Dashers won the AAU Championship.

A few days after his funeral, students at Aspen Elementary began calling their school, John Baker. A movement began and a name change request was sent to the school board. 520 families in the District voted unanimously for the name change. Today John Baker Elementary stands as a testimony to a courageous young man who believed in giving his best effort right down to the very end.

Five years before he was diagnosed with cancer, John wrote this poem:

“Many thoughts race through my mind
As I step up to the starting line.
Butterflies thru my stomach fly
As I free that last deep sigh.
I feel that death is drawing near

But the end of the race I do not fear,
For when the string comes across my breast
I know it's time for eternal rest.
The gun goes off, the race is run
Only God knows if I've won.
My family and friends and many more
Can't understand what it is was for,
But this race to death is a final test
And I am not afraid, for I've done my very best."

- How are you doing in the race of the Christian life?
- Are you going to finish well?
- Where are you at right now?
- How far back are you in the race?
- Have you stopped running?
- Will Jesus find you running and winning when He returns?
- Are you going to finish your course?

2. We need to run to win.

Corinth was the site of the Isthmian games, a great athletic festival that was very similar to the Olympic games. Contestants in the Isthmian games endured ten months of mandatory training. Anyone who failed to complete this training was barred from competing in the games. The highlight of the Isthmian games was a great endurance race. It was this race that Paul used as an illustration to depict the faithful Christian life.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul once again paints the picture of Christians running in a race to win a prize. We are spiritual athletes! Paul reminds us that we must possess a real desire to win the race that is related to the Christian life. Without the desire to discipline our lives, we cannot win the race and receive the reward that God wants to give to us.

What does it take to be a champion in a given sport? Well, it is necessary to have a dedication to succeed no matter what the cost. We are to have a passion for the game, a single-minded determination to accomplish the task at hand. We need to

be willing to train incessantly and possess a burning desire for the trophy or prize awarded to the winner. This same analogy must be applied to the Christian who is in a spiritual race to win a reward. Our race involves the discipline our lives and bodies, the overwhelming desire to win a reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ because we stayed the course and did not become distracted during the race.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 mentions the need for discipline, denial, and the desire to win the race that is set before us: “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain (the desire to win). And every man that striveth for the mastery (who enters the contest and with great zeal and labor strives to win) is temperate in all things (the discipline of winning). Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible (the reward of winning). I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air (not waiving our hands aimlessly): But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection (the self-denial of winning): lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (a loser – one who is disapproved).

The Greek word translated “race” is *stadion*, which is the word used to describe the standard 600-foot Greek race. Paul is comparing the Christian life to running a marathon. When Paul says, “So run, that ye may obtain” it means that we should run to win! We should strive to win a crown or reward for staying in the race and finishing it. The Christian life is like a race. It requires self-discipline. It calls for strenuous effort. It demands striving to reach definite goal and of purpose. Of course, this verse does not suggest that in the Christian race only one can win the prize. It simply teaches that we should all run in order to be winners.

In the Christian race we do not compete with one another for the prize (2 Cor. 10:12). We compete with ourselves. In a foot race only one person is the winner, but in the Christian race all who keep the rules and run hard will receive a reward. In other words, all God’s people can be winners if they stay in the race, on the race course, seeking to live for Jesus Christ, disciplining their lives, and putting Him first in their lives. We should all practice the same kind of self-denial that the Apostle Paul himself practiced.

We need to have an intense desire to win! We do this by constantly disciplining our bodies. Paul talks about the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life. He speaks about “temperance” (self-control) and bringing our bodies into “subjection” which speaks of our spirit ruling our bodies and not our bodies ruling our spirit. We need to possess the will to win and this comes through the new nature which gives to us new drives, incentives, and determination to live for God. Where there is a will, there is way! Then too when we avail ourselves to the Holy Spirit’s power which also enables us to discipline our lives. Discipline results in living faithfully, giving sacrificially, and serving and living victoriously for the Lord. There are many spiritual disciplines we need to remain committed to in life, if we want to win.

Folks, if we don’t learn the secret of discipline, we will eventually get behind in the race and can lose the race. The result is that we will be a “castaway” or a Christian who is disappointed of reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ, reward which they otherwise could have gained had they been more committed and faithful to God.

The Greek word for “castaway” means to be disqualified or “disapproved after testing.” The word castaway is a technical word familiar to those who knew the Greek games. It means disapproved or disqualified. At the Greek games, there was a herald who announced the rules of the contest, the names of the contestants, and the names and cities of the winners. He would also announce the names of any contestants who were disqualified.

Although some have cited this verse as evidence that Christians can lose their salvation, this clause has nothing to do with the loss of our salvation but loss of reward. The free gift of justification cannot be the result of good works (Rom. 4:1–8). It is free (Rom. 3:24). However, the prize or crown is the reward for endurance and staying committed to Christ and His cause (1 Cor. 9:27). I don’t want to be disqualified in the end. I don’t want to lose reward for not disciplining my body and living victoriously, faithfully, and consistently for Jesus Christ. There is much to gain and much to lose at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe wrote:

“Christians have rediscovered the importance of personal discipline and the relationship between a disciplined body and a Spirit-filled life. We must, of course,

avoid extremes. On the one hand, religious asceticism is unhealthy and of no value spiritually (Col. 2:18–23). But on the other hand, there is something to be said for disciplined eating, exercising, and resting, and a Spirit-directed balanced life. We smugly congratulate ourselves that we do not smoke or use alcohol, but what about our overeating and overweight? And many Christians cannot discipline their time so as to have a consistent devotional life or Bible-study program.”

There are many disciplines related to the Christian life so that we do not become sidetracked by other things of no value, whatever they might be, and so we might not allow other things to keep us from staying on the right course. Yes, we must possess a deepening desire to win the race set before us! This involves real discipline and commitment.

Pablo Casals was considered the greatest cellist to ever live. When he was 95 years old he was asked why he continued to practice 6 hours a day. He answered, “Because I think I’m making progress.”

- ❖ Have you been allowing your body to control your life?
- ❖ What areas are in need of discipline?
- ❖ How are certain things affecting your commitment to spiritual living and Christ’s cause?
- ❖ What kind of improvements do you need to make?
- ❖ Are you committed to make some real change in your life?

At age nineteen, these resolutions were adopted by Dr. James Clement Furman who became the first president of Furman University:

- Resolved, never to speak ill of an individual but to call to mind my own sins and imperfections and be silent.
- Resolved, when my heart feels cold and languid, to strive earnestly in prayer to God for deliverance from such a state and for the abiding influence of His Holy Spirit; and to inquire into the causes which have produced this effect upon me and to guard against them in the future.

- Resolved, never to go to bed without having endeavored to learn something more of God as He is revealed in the Holy Scriptures than I knew when I rose in the morning.
- Resolved, to keep in mind during the business of the day the good resolutions which I may have formed for my assistance so that if I neglect them, I may humble myself and in my retirement earnestly seek pardon from God.
- Resolved, to say nothing to irritate the feelings of anyone and especially of my relations and friends.
- Resolved, to leave as soon as possible any company which might draw off my thoughts from the things of eternity.
- Resolved, never to neglect to devote a certain portion of every twenty-four hours to secret meditation and prayer.
- Resolved, never to halt in doing anything of which I am convinced that it is duty.

“I am resolved no longer to linger,
 Charmed by the world’s delight,
 Things that are higher, things that are nobler,
 These have allured my sight.”

3. We need grace for the race.

Grace speaks of God’s kindness and favor being extended to our lives as His people. Someone said that “GRACE IS EVERYTHING FOR NOTHING TO THOSE WHO DON’T DESERVE ANYTHING.” This year, like every other year, we need God’s grace to stay in the race of the Christian life, living victoriously over the world, the flesh, and the devil, and fulfilling God’s purposes for us that are related to living the Christian life.

If we are going to keep winning, winning, and winning, as our president says, then we must learn to avail ourselves to God’s life-changing and sustaining grace. Of course we are not necessarily winning financially but winning spiritually! If we are going to win, we will need grace for the race! We will need God’s ever-present strengthening and sustaining grace to maintain our spiritual disciplines and win the race.

1 Corinthians 15:10

“But by the grace of God I am what I am (transforming grace): and his grace which *was bestowed* upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all (serving grace to fulfill our spiritual obligations): yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (strengthening and enabling grace).

The secret to winning the race is God’s grace. We need Grace for the Race! God not only saves us by His grace (Eph. 2:8-9) but He also transforms us by His sanctifying grace and enables us to serve Him faithfully and finish the course that God has for our lives by His strengthening grace. We need God’s grace operating in our hearts and lives if we are going to change! We need to experience once again a fresh manifestation of God’s grace in our lives! It’s grace that changes us, empowers us, and enables us to discipline our lives so we can win, win, and win! When Paul mentions about “the grace of God which was with me,” he was reminding us of the importance of God’s grace operating in our lives on a daily basis. Grace is to be our constant companion. Without grace I will freeze up in my Christian living.

Romans 6:14-15

“For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law (as a system that condemns and enslaves us to sin), but under grace (as a system that frees and liberates us from sin). What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.”

In this context, God’s grace is seen operating in our lives through our New Testament union with Christ (Rom. 6:1-3). As His life is experienced in ours, we can possess victory and live a life that honors God. We need this inward work of grace in our hearts and lives if we are going to win the race. We need God’s sanctifying grace for the race! We won’t make it to the end of the race without this grace.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9 Paul speaks of something similar:

“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

How do we live the Christian life and stay in the race? We allow God's grace to strengthen us and enable us to go on in life, instead of being overcome with self-pity, defeat, and misery. We allow God's strengthening and sustaining grace to provide our every spiritual need in life so that we are not defeated by our predicaments in life and begin living a defeated life. Sometimes we must find the grace that we never knew or experienced before.

Philippians 2:13

"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure."

Yes, we need GRACE for the RACE! If we want to maintain our spiritual disciplines, live for the glory of God, and win the Christian race, then we will need to experience the inward working of God's gracious power, perseverance, and stability. John 1:16 reveals the new dynamic for Christian living under the New Covenant when he states: "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." When Jesus died on the cross, the full expression of God's grace was seen, unlike the grace witnessed under the shadows of Mosaic sacrifices. In fact, this grace is experienced in the lives of God's people in a new and dynamic way. It not only provides New Testament believers with complete forgiveness and acquittal before God forever but also complete empowerment to live the Christian life. God's grace is evidenced as a new dynamic force operating in our lives under the New Covenant.

We are reminded here that Christ's abundant supply of grace enables us to live the Christian life and go on in life. It will never be exhausted or diminished. Grace is experienced at salvation but it does not stop here. One expression of grace will continually follow another expression of grace in a limitless, never-ending flow! Like the ever-flowing and breaking waves upon the seashore, so God's grace will constantly be flowing into our lives and providing us with the spiritual energy, discipline, and victory we need to win the race. God keeps pouring out His inexhaustible grace on the believer through Jesus Christ. The Christian life is the constant reception of one evidence of God's grace replacing another.

"He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;
To added affliction He addeth His mercy,

To multiplied trials His multiplied peace.
His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,
His pow'r has no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again."

James 4:6

"But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."

- ✓ Have you been trying to get through life on your own power instead of relying on God's grace?
- ✓ Has there been more defeats than victories in your life?
- ✓ What areas in your life are in need of God's liberating grace?
- ✓ Are you ready to rely on God's grace to finally begin to make some changes in your life and take you in a new direction?

2 Peter 3:18

"But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen."

Someone said:

"The Christian life is like riding a bicycle. Unless you keep moving, you fall off!"

God is reaching out to us in His kindness and benevolence. This is what grace is all about. And this is how we grow! We grow by grace. The method of all spiritual growth is "grace" which means that our spiritual growth occurs through God's favor and blessing being lavishly poured out and experienced in our lives in some special way). One thing is certain, I can't grow by law (legalism – personal effort) for it provides me with no power and assistance from God to live victoriously. I can only grow by grace.

The term "grace" when applied to spiritual growth in Second Peter (2 Pet. 3:18 with 2 Peter 1:2, 3, 8) speaks of God's divine enablement, His sanctifying power, supernatural transformation, endless spiritual resource and supply, and complete

blessing and fulfillment that He showers upon our lives (compare John 1:16; Rom. 16:24; 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 12:9; Phil. 4:23; 1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Thess. 5:28; 2 Tim. 2:1; James 4:6; 1 Pet. 3:7; 4:10; 5:5, 10). In relationship to New Testament believers, grace (God's special favor and blessing) is portrayed as His sanctifying power, divine enablement, and the complete supply that He gives to live the Christian life. We can't make it without His grace! Without God's sustaining, empowering, and life-transforming grace being communicated to us, we will live in defeat and become stagnate in our spiritual walk and growth. God's grace has a newer, higher, and nobler motivation for holiness than the shallow, hypocritical, self-righteousness, and fear that seems to motivate so many religious people today. When grace moves in our hearts and motivates our lives, we will allow grace to change us. And we will never be the same!

At the Bible college where I attended, I remember my personal evangelism teacher standing up one day and giving his personal testimony. At one point he broke down and shared in three words what grace had done for his life. He said, "Never the same." It's true, when grace gets hold of our heart and life we can never again be the same. When grace is operating in our lives, we can never go back to the old ways of defiance. In one sense, we are never the same!

Titus 2:11-12 declares:

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation (saving grace) hath appeared to all men, Teaching us (sanctifying grace) that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."

We see once again that it's grace that changes us. We don't need the touch of an angel; we need the touch of grace! The message of God's grace, when at work in our hearts, will not only save us but sanctify our lives. The basic message of grace (Christ dying on the cross and being judged for our sins) should teach us to hate sin and ungodly ways. This means that if we are not living as God wants us to live, then we are not appreciating grace the way we should. It means that if we are unfaithful to God in some areas of life, then we have lost sight of what God has done for us and the price that Jesus paid because of our sins. We are not appreciating the message of God's grace, responding to it, and allowing it to change our hearts and lives.

When I live the way I want to live, in defiance against God, I'm essentially saying to God, "Well God, I know Jesus died for my sins and shortcomings, my unfaithfulness to You, but I'm going to keep doing what I want to do anyway." That is spitting God and His grace in the face! It's not allowing grace to sanctify us and transform our lives for His glory. When we remember what Jesus did for us, when we remember about God's amazing grace, it's then we will respond out of gratitude and faithfully obey God instead of following our own ungodly ways and selfish patterns of living.

2 Corinthians 9:8 gives us this wonderful promise:

"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

To live the Christian life without the grace of God would be like trying to catch a feather in a hurricane. It would be impossible. In light of the supply and life-changing nature of God's grace, it's time for us to change. It's time to get back in the race. But we cannot do it without God's grace operating in our hearts and lives. Maybe you are four laps behind in the race. You have slowed down. If this is the case, get moving again! Become more committed to Christ and His sanctifying purpose for your life. Begin to discipline your life once again in a greater way so that you might follow God's will and not be sidetracked by the weights and the sin of unbelief in God's power and sufficiency. Let's look back to the winners of the past who won the race! But most of all, let's keep looking unto Jesus, finding our inspiration and empowering grace in His life (Gal. 2:20), who is the ultimate winner of the race that the Father had planned for Him.

Hebrews 12:2

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

We need grace to stay in the race and grace to win the race! I cannot advance my spiritual life and gain reward without God's grace operating in my heart and life on a daily basis. I cannot win without grace. It's impossible. This means we must review our lives and begin to once again obey God as we depend upon His transforming grace and guidance for our lives. It means we must readjust our lives to God's grace

which is supplied to us on a daily and moment-by-moment basis. It means we must remember that Jesus hung on a cross for us, groaning in great agony with the weight of our sins upon Himself. And for this reason, we must respond to grace in this way: "I love You Jesus and will live the way You want me to live. I repent of my sin and will once again put You first in my life. I will follow you faithfully. I will obey Your Word and stop being rebellious. I will serve Thee because O love Thee."

"I love You Lord Jesus with all of my heart,
I love You Lord Jesus with all of my heart,
For dying on Calvary for giving me victory,
I love You Lord Jesus with all of my heart."

We need a grace awakening for the New Year. God's grace will motivate us, change us, and enable us to go on in life and live in victory and blessing. Yes, we need GRACE for the RACE!

For the unsaved, let me share this:

"Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe!
You who are longing to see His face,
Will you this moment His grace receive?"

For those of us who are already Christians, let me conclude with this challenge to our hearts.

"Come, Thou Fount of every blessing
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace.
Streams of mercy, never ceasing
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet
Sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount, I'm fixed upon it
Mount of Thy redeeming love.

Oh, to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be.
Let that goodness like a fetter
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it
Prone to leave the God I love.
Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it
Seal it for Thy courts above."