

Running with Purpose

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Prayer Points for Prayer Time:

- Pray to live with eternal purpose
- Pray for boldness to reach others
- Ask God to show you someone who needs encouragement

Scripture Reading:

There will be no scripture reading this week.

A. Introduction.

(1 Corinthians 9:24-26)

Isn't it good to be together today? In just a little bit, we will be celebrating more stories like this! That's why we call it *Story Sunday*: because we are celebrating how God transformed our stories...

What I love is this isn't new ... for 30 years Brookwood has had stories/fruit like this... and we want to keep running so we can share more stories like this...

Ministry Plan

We are celebrating these stories today, and I also want you to see our ministry plan. The ministry plan is really just our annual budget. And you might ask, why did you connect those two?

Because here's what I really want people to see.

Sometimes, even if you give, you have that disconnect from stories and impact.

And I just couldn't be more grateful. So many of you have stepped up, and stories like this are possible because of the generosity of the church.

Just think about this: most of you aren't even aware of the ways that people's lives are being transformed.

And yet the Bible says that when you give, you are investing in eternity.

So, I unapologetically invite you to invest in eternity, and in the stories and lives of the people who are being changed.

The ministry plan is at your seat; if not, you can grab it on your way out...

I invite you to do two things. First, pray for every dollar of that budget.

We are praying that God would have more stories like this of people who Jesus is transforming.

And then I also unapologetically, as your pastor, invite you to invest in eternity, to contribute to what really has eternal and lasting significance.

From the bottom of my heart, for those of you who are giving faithfully, I could not be more grateful that people's eternities and destinies have been changed because of your generosity.

Hearing from God. Growing stronger together in community. Reaching the hurting and lost... (Barbara is here because of someone here ... someone who is by themselves... who is sitting by themselves)

So let me ask you two questions that help you live for the right thing... so that we are running after the right thing...

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

1 Corinthians 9:24 (NIV)

I want you to notice that Paul says only one person in a race or a competition can get the prize...

Only one person can win a race like this...

Only one person can win a Super Bowl like this... I give Philly credit...

Only one person can get a foul ball like this... It doesn't matter if you have to take it from a child, am I right?

But Paul is doing something here... at least 12 times, Paul makes a reference to arena competitions and sporting games... because it was a big deal in that culture.

In Paul's day, there was a huge event called the Isthmian Games. It was the biggest event in the ancient world, drawing the empire's best talent. It'd be comparable to the modern-day Olympics. These games were in honor of the Greek God Poseidon. Athletes would compete in footraces, wrestling, boxing, throwing the discus and javelin, the long jump, chariot racing, poetry and singing.

Whoever won the race got... wait for it... a crown of wild celery. They would do a victory lap

with their celery crown, and everyone would cheer and chant their name. Statues would be erected in their honor.

It was such a big deal that if people lost, they felt so bad that many would commit suicide. People are giving and taking their lives for this race.

- The epitaph of a boxer named Agathos Daimon found on a funerary monument at Olympia in Greece said:

Here he died boxing in the stadium.

Having prayed to Zeus for a wreath or death.

Age 35. Farewell.

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.

1 Corinthians 9:25-26 (NIV)

Here's what he's saying... It won't last. That wreath is going to wither and wilt. Those statues are going to come crumbling down one day. That fame will pass. Your strength, your great looks... time will change that.

Now, on most Valentine's Days, I buy my wife two dozen roses. This isn't because I'm romantic, but rather because I buy everything from Costco, and everything there comes in bulk.

But years ago, I was at Costco... and saw something I had to have: a popcorn maker... this was no weak, feeble popcorn maker. It was the alpha and omega of popcorn makers. Now, at the time, my wife didn't share my enthusiasm. I tried to convince her how much better our life would be because of this machine. Then, finally, my wife saw the light. I remember the night before I picked it up, I was so excited I had trouble sleeping... now I got it, and here's the thing... the popcorn I made was nothing like the movie theatre, it was terrible. It was a nightmare to clean up... it was so big that we ended up putting it in our storage room. When we sold our house, we just gave it to the next owner.

When we were moving, I had forgotten all about it, but I saw it in the closet... and remember thinking, *I can't believe I spent time, effort, and money on this thing. I can't believe I lost sleep over this thing.*

And here's the thing: We all have things in front of us that seem so important. You can't believe you have spent so much time running after those things. We focus on and lose sleep over it, but if we aren't careful, we can get to the end of our lives and go, *That's it? That's what I spent my time, money and energy on...*

So let me ask you two questions that help you live for the right thing... so that we are running after the right thing...

B. Running with Purpose

1.) Who are you running WITH?

This is why I say so often... you will walk or run like who you walk or run with...

Meaning if you surround yourself with worldly, negative, jaded people, then you're going to become a negative worldly person. But if you surround yourself with Godly people, then you'll become a Godly person.

In fact, let me show you why it's so important to be around a Godly community. Here are some stats of what happens when people are connected to Godly people. Sometimes, the church and Christian community can get a bad rap... but let me show you this...

Ministry plan- hearing from God, running with Godly people.

Church stats... people who are connected/running with Godly people... (why running with Godly people matters)

- Christian community affects your joy.
- Christian community affects your city.
 - Adoption slide
 - Giving 2-3 times more generous with the poor in time and money.
- Christian community affects your children.
- Christians in community have the best sex lives.
 - Did he say that? Yes... I did... look at this... and all God's people said amen.
- Christians in community have the best mental health in America.
 - This is not political. Conservative means how closely you follow the bible.

2.) Who are you running TOWARD?

I want to tell you about one of the most impactful people you've probably never heard of... in the early 1900s there a man named Mordecai Ham... he would preach at tent revival meetings... in 1934 he was preaching a tent revival in Charlotte, North Carolina... as he was preaching two fourteen year old boys walked by and heard him so they walked in... but they couldn't find a seat so they walked in and were getting ready to walk out when an usher grabbed them and found them two seats... to this day no one knows the usher's name... but these two boys heard about the grace of God and they surrendered their life to Christ that day... one boy was Billy Graham... one of the most powerful and faithful preachers to ever live... he preached the gospel to more people than anyone in the history of the world... tens of millions of people... the other was a man named Grady Wilson, who helped Billy Graham organize and do all his crusades... God used them radically.

God used this man to change the world... not Billy Graham, not Grady Wilson, not Mordecai Ham... but an usher that no one even knows his name... but Heaven does, church, Heaven does...

He was faithful to see two people, two teenage boys that needed the love of Jesus... Just be faithful...

You don't have to change the whole world, but God has called you to change someone's world...

God has placed you exactly where He's called you to be, but we have to be faithful to run towards those who are hurting...

I want you to hear one story about someone running towards someone. Almost all the baptisms happening today are because someone invited someone.

Share story...

There are 40 stories of God changing someone's life, 34 of which happen when friends bring their friends to Jesus' feet. This means people aren't just going to run into church; we need to be running after them!