



GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

11 – Running and Laboring

9/17 @6:30

Grace Group at
3513 Northpointe Dr

9/19 @6:00

Grace Group at
2070 Corley Dr

9/19 @6:30

Grace Group at
6645 Jack Rabbit Rd

ICE BREAKER: Do you like sports? If yes, what is your favorite, if no, why not?

REVIEW: Was there anything covered or said on Sunday that you had any questions or comments about?

READ: 2:14-18

Paul often used sports analogies in his writing. Later in Philippians he will say that we should “press on towards the goal”. In 1 Corinthians he says that we not only “run” but also “box” (9:26)! In Ephesians we “wrestle” (6:12). And in our passage we just read we find two more. He said that we need to hold fast to our faith so that he does not “run or labor in vain.” And today I would like to spend some time looking at these two, running and laboring. Why did Paul use both, do they mean something different, and how could he do those things “in vain”?

The first question, is there a reason that he used “running” AND “laboring”? The *technically correct* (the best kind of correct) is because God wanted him to. Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote exactly what words God wanted us to have. So then we can ask the *better* and more helpful question: WHY does Paul reference both running and laboring. Here we can look to what Matthew Henry says: “Running, denotes earnestness and vigor, continual pressing forward; laboring, denotes constancy, and close application.” So let's look at those in turn.

What does it mean that “running denotes earnestness and vigor”? Here it might be helpful to ask: why does anyone run (let's exclude running for exercise... that's a rather new invention)? It's because you want to get from point A to point B faster than you would by walking. Maybe it is a race; maybe there is danger, either that you are running to as some sort of hero, or away from for your safety; possibly you are running out of joy seeing someone that you have missed for some time. In any of these note that there is some sort of motivation, usually a strong one, that's the earnestness. What about the vigor? Well just think about running again (and here we could include exercise again!). One comment I often make when we are driving down Trivitz and see people running on the path is that “no one looks happy while they are running.” This is because it takes work and effort. It is hard. And this is how Paul approaches his calling. He has a strong motivation, and he throws himself into it: body, mind, heart and soul.

DISCUSS: What does it mean to follow Christ with “earnestness and vigor” in your life?

Laboring, on the other hand, “denotes constancy and close application.” “Labor” is more than just work. It is work that requires continual force and perseverance. The dictionary defines it as “work, especially hard physical work.” and this work requires a focused devotion - or constancy. And in particular *our* work is in following **every** command of God, that's the close application. Being a Christian is difficult for a whole host of reasons, but not the least of which is that the standard is not ever lowered. 1 Peter 1:16 lays out the standard “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

DISCUSS: Why are these two so difficult? (in other words, what makes constancy and close application “labor”?)

In the end we can ask: how could these (GOOD!) things ever be done “in vain”? And this is a more difficult question than we might first think. Because truly they can't. Paul already admitted this when he said “even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad...” Furthermore, It is God who is working and moving and it is up to him to do what we will with all the gifts that I bring to him. But on the other hand, there are certainly some people that Paul has ministered to that will not respond, who refuse to repent, whose lives are NOT a picture of the Fruit of the Spirit and instead will one day hear “depart from me, I never knew you.” and for Paul who loves these people, that is a painful thought and makes him fear his heartache and teaching; his earnestness and vigor; his constancy and close application of all that God has said will have fallen on deaf ears.

DISCUSS: What is the balance between seeing that God will use our gifts as he desires, but that is not always how we want? What is our ultimate comfort in this?