

Focus On Your Race!

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Father, we thank You. We praise You. We worship You for Your goodness, Your kindness and Your mercy that You brought us together once again in the middle of this work week, to be present in Your house, to be able to listen to Your voice, to be able to worship You. Father, what a privilege! What an honor! We never ever want to take this lightly. Because we know Father in every meeting, O Lord, eternity is hanging in the balance. And I pray, Father, that You would give us the seriousness. Quicken us, O Father, in our inner man. Enable us to focus. Father, enable us to lay aside every distraction even now. Many of us have come from work. I pray, Lord, that You would enable all of us to be still in Your presence this evening and grant us, Lord, hearing ears, willing hearts, Father, to be able to hear, to be able to obey Your voice this evening. To that end, O Lord, You would anoint the speaking and the hearing of this word. Touch us. Cleanse us. And challenge us to walk in Your ways. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Some of the analogies that we use about the Church. The two ways you can look at the Church – you can look at the Church as a hospital where people come to get healed and it is a hospital every week. You might be going through some difficult situations and you might have got injured in your soul or your spirit. And you come. The Church is indeed a Church where you get your healing. There is another way you can look at the Church. I mean, look at Christian walk, just not the Church, is to look at it as a fitness center. There is a complete difference between a hospital and a fitness center. Well, a hospital might heal you, but fitness center will keep you healthy. I want to focus on that today, that aspect of our walk with the Lord, because we have been growing through this month and this year and you've been exhorted through several sermons to stay focused. And to stay focused, you can't be ill. You have to be healthy first and then, you have to work on some things in our lives. We have to specifically in two areas which I want to look at.

So, I titled today's message as "Focus on Your Race." Focus on whose race? Not your neighbor's. You can possibly help your neighbor in the process of helping yourself. So, just focus on your race. There is one part in Scripture in *1 Corinthians 9*, if I'm right, where it says that many run but only one gets the prize. Run that you may win. There, he is not saying that you are in competition with your other brothers. The person you are really in competition is with yourself. Okay? The guy who is going to give you the biggest amount of problem in your life is the guy you see in the mirror when you get up in the morning. So, that is the person you have to compete with, because we have competing desires in our heart always trying to get our attention. So, focus on your race. I want to look at one very familiar portion in Scripture. *Hebrews 12:1* onwards. Let's read that.

Hebrews 12:1-2

¹Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight (What is that?), and the sin (I like that. Specific! There is lay aside every weight and the sin.) which so easily ensnares us (traps us. We'll look at that later on.), and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking 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 has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We need to understand that there is a very clear distinction between weight and sin. They're not the same. Every weight is a sin for sure. But every weight need not be a sin. What is a weight? Other translations will use the word hindrance. Whatever slows you down, whatever grabs your time, your energy, your emotional energy, your will, your dreams, your time, and which is not useful for your walk in the Lord, that is a weight. And that need not necessarily be a sin. Yes. Sometimes, it could be the cause because of a sin. So, the first thing if you go to a fitness center and you want to get fit. The first thing the guy says is, "Sir, what's your weight?" One of the things my parents always keep telling me, "Sweetlu thinadam maaney! (Stop eating sweets.) Baaga laavuayinpotunnavu. (You're getting too fat.)" Watch your weight. It's very important. It's very interesting that in the Old Testament pattern there is this high priest – Eli, who is fat and whose eyes have gone blind, and he's so callous in his walk. He's a high priest. Think about it! He's a high priest. He's representing Christ and he's so careless. And then, once, somebody comes and says, "The ark of the Covenant is gone!" He just goes back and he dies. Watch your weight this year. Many of us have to keep a track on our BMI (Body Mass Index). How do we watch our weight, therefore? Some of the things that we know is that there is a lot of baggage that we carry from our past. Extra

weight from our past. First thing – watch your weight. Watch the baggage of your past failure and guilt, especially, you're still in the month of January. By the way, January comes from the word Janus. What is Janus? He's got two faces. What are the two faces doing? One face is looking forward and one face is looking back. So, you look back in January and you look at 2017 and you have I don't know many failures? I don't know. Mostly, we have few successes and many failures, if you're like me and you're in a special category then, maybe, you have more successes than failures. But there is one thing we don't want to do when we progress in this year is that – don't look at the failure and the guilt of your past. It will weigh you down, big time and you will waste a lot of time. And you will lose focus. It's very interesting. God allows failure in our lives by the way. I believe the most successful Christian is the guy who has failed the most. And I want to make this as a categorical statement. It takes a lot of crushing especially when you come to ministry. A lot of failures. It's not easy to be in the ministry and sometimes in the ministry young people have this romantic idea about ministry. It's a lot of failure. A lot of crushing. It takes a lot of time to make a man of God. It's not like a nano plant where you put in the raw material and all the things come out of the assembly line. No. No. No. There is a lot of crushing. There is a lot of breaking. There is a lot of humbling. Because we have this tendency to easily let success get into our heads. But having said that don't let sometimes failure, failures of the past, don't carry that this year. And God might have ordained several failures in your life. Look at what it says in *Luke's Gospel 22:31*. This is Simon. Simon.

John 22:31

³¹ **And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.** (The KJV translation says, Simon! Simon! Satan has desired to have you." O boy! And he did have him and then what happens? What did Jesus say?) ³² **But I have prayed for you(Simon), that your(what? Read that. That your) faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."**

And you know the story of Simon, right? He is this guy who wanted to prove his loyalty to Jesus. Even at Gethsemane, he said, "Lord, even if everybody fails you, I will not fail. I will not forsake you." And then, he takes the sword almost, I mean, he takes the sword and chops that guy's ear off. He's showing off that, "Lord, I'm with You." And then, what happens? And you know the story. He denies Jesus three times. But it's interesting that God is a God who comes to restore. That's remarkable! Simon has a purpose. God spoke into Simon's life and when Simon said, when Peter said, "Lord, You are the Son of God! The Messiah!" Do you know what He said? "Upon this rock, upon this revelation. Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but My Father which is in heaven. And upon this rock, I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And to you, I will give you the keys of heaven." That has been spoken into his life. Thank God! God allows and gives leverage for failure in our lives. What does Simon do? It's interesting the way God pursues Simon. Look at what it says through an angel. This is *Mark 16: 6-7*. This is when the resurrection happens. He tells those people who have come. This is the angel who comes and tells the people who have come to the grave.

Mark 16:6-7

⁶ **But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. ⁷ But go, tell His disciples** (read the next part.)—**and Peter** (Wow! Okay Peter? Tell the disciples and Peter)—**that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you."**

Where will you find Him? You will find Him going before you to Galilee. I remember Galilee, right? That is where Simon got his first catch of fish. Simon is so discouraged with his failure. Absolutely discouraged and he says, "This Christian life is not for me. I want to give up." So, what does he do? In *John 21:1* onwards.

John 21:1-3

¹ **After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself:** ² **Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee** (that is John and James.), **and two others of His disciples were together. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing."** (Fishers of men? No, no, no. I want to go back to my old profession. That is fine. And then what happens?) **They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing.**

Wow! More failure! I'll tell you something, the perspective towards what happens in your life, you may see it as failure but I see it as success. Just imagine if Simon would have caught a big catch. He said, "O Boy! Thank You. Jesus! (Not thank You Jesus.) Thank God. This is very successful. I'll go about it." He didn't catch. And he caught nothing. Let me tell you

something. If you're a child of God, you failed Him and you say, "This is not for me," and you run away. And you say, "You know what happens? Let me find another profession and let me do it." You will go and you will catch nothing. Nothing. You will catch nothing.

John 15:5

⁵ "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

You can do nothing Simon! Even your fishing ultimately. Jesus had gone ahead of him by the way. He already fished nicely. Maybe, He just emptied all the fish in the tank. I don't know. He already fished nicely. Went into the corner. And He was watching Simon and these fellows taking the boat and going in to the middle of the waters and they have caught nothing. By this time, He made His breakfast and everything ready. Children! I like that word. Not friends, children! Did you catch anything? And the disciple whom Jesus loved said, "It's the Lord!" And Simon puts on his loin cloth and jumps into the water. And you know what happens. He's restored. You know the story. This is written in which Gospel? John's Gospel. The Apostle John is the apostle of love. The way he refers to himself in the Gospel according to John as the disciple whom Jesus loved. There is a story about John the Apostle. It is found in some of the Church history. It is not there in the Scripture. John the Apostle, the senior most apostle who outlived all the other apostles. Every apostle was martyred or they died. And this guy lived a long time. And during the course of one of his mission trips he comes across this young charismatic guy. Very very young guy. Very charismatic. Very gifted guy. He gives him the Gospel. He takes him under his wing and he's training him. But suddenly, what happens? John is called to another place for ministry. So, he goes to the local Church and he tells the bishop over there. He says, "Take this guy. Teach him. And after you have taught him, baptize him." The bishop says, "Okay." And then John leaves that place and after several months, he comes back to that place. He remembers that guy and goes straight to that bishop and he says, "Please return the deposit that I entrusted into your hands." The bishop is completely shocked. What deposit? What money did he give him? He said, "What deposit are you talking about?" "Remember that guy I entrusted into your hands? Please, can you return that boy to me?" The bishop looks at John and he says, "What? He's dead?" No. No. he's not dead that way. He's dead to God." And John says, "What happened?" "Well, after you left, he got into bad company. He got into a company of robbers and because of his real charismatic gifted nature, he has become the chief of all robbers and he has become a violent guy and they are in the mountains." John is completely shocked. Totally and completely shocked. He says, "Bring me a horse." He asks the bishop. Bishop says, "What do you want to do?" He says, "I want to go after this guy." "What are you going to go after this guy for? They are going to kill you." "Doesn't matter." John takes up the bishop's horse and goes to the mountains and when he goes to the mountains. He voluntarily gets caught. The robbers catch and they bind him and they take him to the chief of the robbers. And this guy he sees John. The moment he sees John, this guy who is the chief of the robbers runs for his life with tears in his eyes, he turns and starts running. And this is what John says. Look at what it says.

"Fair son! Why do you flee from your father? Why do you flee from an old, old unarmed man? Have pity on yourself. Have no fear. For you can still have the hope of life. Fair son, stay!"

I love that. And that man, he looks at John and he starts weeping. This is from Church history. John takes him and embraces him. I'm not looking at that boy. I'm looking at John. Remember when he goes to Samaria and the Samaritans don't allow him? He says, "Lord, get fire down from heaven. Please consume them." What has happened to John now? He has become a father. And that is the reason why he says, "I write to you, fathers. I write to you." Because you have known him from the beginning. The heart of God is that every failure come back home. Was 2017 a year of failure for you? Thank God. And when you failed you tried something and you failed? Thank God you failed! Thank God! If you would have succeeded in that it would have confirmed you in your path of rebellion and of running away from God. Fair son! I like that. Fair son! Why do you flee from your father? Why do you flee from your old man who is unarmed? I like that. Maybe this guy didn't have a father and then, he heard that word, "Fair Son." And he just stopped in his tracks and he said, "He is calling me son."

You know the story of the prodigal, but I thought this was even more fantastic. It's there in one of the Church histories. Come back this year. Take away, God says, "Come to Me to all that are heavy laden, I will give you rest." Put your weight there of your sin, confess your sins, don't carry the guilt of the past. Come back and confess your sins; If you failed, "Lord, I failed You, Lord", get back to God this year. Don't carry the weight of the failure, guilt. Let it not weigh you down this year.

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We come to this later one. How do we ensure? Why did God allow failure in your life? One of the reasons why God allows failure in our lives that we will not trust in ourselves. You know there is very interesting verse in the Bible, where Paul is telling the Corinthian Church, he is writing to the Corinthian Church, and he says, what? "You are hard pressed on every side", look at,

2 Corinthians 1: 8-9

⁸ ***For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength*** (we do not know what ever that burden was?) ***so that we despaired even of life.*** ⁹ ***Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not*** (what?) ***trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead,***

Thank God for these promises. Don't trust in your own strength to follow this way of God. No way. It is impossible. You will fail. So, what do you do? Very simple answer. Look onto Jesus. That's what Jesus told Nicodemus. "Nicodemus, Nicodemus, *that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* You don't see that wind from where it comes and where it goes; that's exactly how a man who is again born of Spirit. *I tell you earthly things, and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?* Except the Son of Man be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent, no one can enter into the Kingdom of God. Look unto that serpent, he has taken your sins, he has taken your guilt." Thank God, you don't understand how? What a wonderful and fantastic promise that, look at what it says in *Isaiah 45*,

Isaiah 45:22

²² ***Look to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for*** (what?) ***I am God, there is no other,*** (this is verse 22, and look at what it says in verse 24, it's a promise) ***he shall say, surely in the LORD is the righteousness and the strength;*** (surely where?)

In the LORD, I have righteousness and strength. and to him, the righteous come, and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against him, In the LORD shall all the descendants of Israel be justified, and shall glory.

Doesn't matter what your sin is, in 2017, don't have to wallow in that, guilt and shame. Don't carry that weight of past failure this year. Watch the weight of guilt.

There is another weight, we call it head weight. What weight? Head weight! Very big problem. What you call the baggage of success. This is what is happen to Uzziah, head weight came; how did head weight come?

2 Chronicles 26:15

¹⁵ This is Uzziah- ***And he made devices in Jerusalem, invented by skilful men, to be on the towers and the corners, to shoot arrows and great stones. And his fame spread far and wide...***

You know, I like what Sunder Krishnan keeps telling this, "Ask God for the blessing of obscurity. Let no one know you before you are ready." Really. I take that as fantastic preservative, okay? Because, in all of us, especially what people are driven; you all come and see our table tennis matches, like we want to kill ourselves, kill each other, see that is the reason why, this comes into our heads. So, what happens?

...Fame spread abroad, he was marvellously grew/marvellously helped.

He doesn't have his own strength, marvellously helped, till he became strong. And then, what happened? Then comes head weight. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction. So, he transgressed against the Lord, his God by entering the Temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar.

You know, one of the ways you know that success gone into your head, you become too familiar with God, you begin to hop nob with God. God becomes your buddy, buddy. The success gone into your head. You see, what happened? He is becoming familiar with God, there is no sense of the fear, the awesomeness of God anymore in his heart.

2 Chronicles 26:18

¹⁸ So, **Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him eighty priests of the LORD, who were valiant men and they withstood King Uzziah and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD,**

And I believe, you know what? He would have responded with humility; he would have been saved. And thank God for people who confront you in your lives, who will bring your ears to halt, and say, "You know what? Is it getting into your head? Observe yourself." Don't get too familiar with God.

Jesus was weary of this. He knew that He was God, yes; but God in flesh, but He would never allow head weight to come into His own life and also into the lives of His disciples, because He knew their hearts very well. They all are looking for cabinet position – one on the right and one on the left. Okay, Judas said, "I can be the treasurer"; Mathew said, "I will keep the accounts" – home or whatever. They all run for fighting for positions for authority and power. And then, what happened?

Matthew 14:22. You know this very well, this is very well-known place. This is the feeding of the 5000; an incredible miracle happened,

Matthew 14:22

²² **And those who ate were about five thousand men** (okay? 5000 men that means 5000 families) **besides women and children.** (five thousand men are fed) and **Immediately Jesus** (what did He do?) **made the disciples get into the boat**
Another translation;

Immediately after this, Jesus insisted get into the boat and please go on to the other side. **And he went into mountain to pray**

Why? Why did He insisted that those people should get themselves into the boat and get out of the place? I will tell you why; you see a clue in *John's Gospel 6*, where this is mentioned, the same parable of feeding of five thousand, look at what it says.

John 6:13

¹³ **Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Therefore, when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."** (and then, what happened?) **When Jesus therefore perceived that they were about to make him as king forcibly.**

The disciples are also watching. He said, "Hello, come here. Get into the boat and get out of the other side. Otherwise, this will get into your head. I can see you, I know your hearts." Watch out for head weight, saints!

No, how do you know that success not gone into your heads? Do you fear God more? Today? In 2018? Other than 2017? Barron 2017? Do you have more reverence? Do you have more understanding of your sin and the holiness of God?

You see, that is how Paul grew up in his walk with the Lord. You know when he started, he said, "I am the least of the Apostles", at least, I am equal to the Apostles. And he progresses a little and that is when he writes to *Corinthians*; and he writes the *Ephesians*, you know what "I am least of the saints"; and when he comes at the end of his life and he says, "You know what? I am the chief of all sinners." From apostles to saints -to sinner. That is his appraisal about himself. That is why how we know, we don't take God too familiar with God. This year? Ask yourself – "God, don't let success get into my head. Keep me humble, Lord. Keep me, preserve me, protect me with people with consent my pride." *Philippians 3:13*, Paul says,

Philippians 3:13

¹³ **I count not myself to have** (achieved anything) **apprehended** (that's what it means) **But one thing I do; forgetting those things** (my successes and my failures, because everything has brought by my God, not by myself). I press on.

Otherwise, you know what people do? When success comes, they begin to build for themselves monuments. *Racha banda medha nee vigraham*. You have your statue. Okay. That's exactly that one guy did, after successful in his own eyes, but not of God. God sends this fellow, "Saul, go and kill all these people there, kill Agog, kill Amalekites. Don't leave anybody. The

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animals and everything, you find, devote to destruction.” But, what does Saul do? You know what he does? Does he obey? No, but does he get success? Apparently so. So, what does he do?

1 Samuel 15:10

¹⁰ The word of the LORD came to Samuel: “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.”

This is the appraisal from heaven, that is the reason why you know, we tell in our church, that quoted from the Psalms: “Promotion does not come from the east or from the west. From where does it come? God”. Let Him give you the appraisal.

¹¹ And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night. (And the next day what has happened? He goes) ¹² Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul; and it was told Samuel, saying, “Saul came to Carmel, and indeed/ behold, he set up a monument for himself,

You know the funny thing about monument? I don’t know if you have seen? I have seen a very old Telugu movie, quite some time back; and this politician, at the end of the movie, he is a very wicked politician. Somehow, he does good; at least, the story says, and he does good and he dies. And once he died, they put what? Monument. And something very interesting happens, one crow comes and does some droppings! I thought it was very interesting. How do people look at? That’s not a crow; it was actually a dove; a dove come and does some droppings! White droppings on a black statue. Okay, and then, they started laughing. I thought it was interesting! When I was reminded of this analogy, it’s like this, you know – men think you are great and setup a monument; you know what happens? One dove comes from heaven, he puts some droppings and goes. This is what it says. This is my vantage point from heaven. This all it sees. It is interesting. People create monument for themselves. That’s what happened to so many Churches; they bear monuments for Wesley to Luther to every other person and they say, “Baba, don’t make monuments for us.” This is exactly what happens to Paul and Barnabas, if I am right. They come to this place, they said, this fellow is Jewish and this fellow is Apollyon (I don’t know what?). He speaks; they call him Jewish, he speaks, Paul does this, he tears his clothes and you know what he says, “We are just men like you. Don’t make us gods. Don’t build monuments for us please.” Let’s ask God this year, that when we are successful or we will go to our secret place and pray and we will weep.

I remember my mentor; I just always learn from these peoples. He preaches so many sermons in our Bible Study in those days, but I don’t remember many of the sermons. In fact, I don’t remember most of the sermons. But we were having a camp, you know a youth camp for our university; and Shibu was the only speaker and we have fantastic camp in Mussoorie, okay, beautiful campus of one of our ex-professor from IIT; So, we were there and he was sharing the word and you know, powerful people are convicted, we are having a fantastic time, fellowshiping and then we listen to the word and we use to sleep, fall asleep. One room where we all of us slept and Shibu use to sleep in the other room. I just caught him once when I was going to the washroom; I just passed by Shibu’s room after the meeting was over and I looked at Shibu and saw him flat on his face and he had started crying out and saying, “Lord! It’s not me. It’s You, Lord.” I didn’t let him know that I was there. He was crying out to God, “Lord, it’s not me; it’s You, Lord.” I looked at that and said, “This man is awesome.” He would never let success get into his head. You’ll not find Shibu in a place like that. He is absolutely conspicuous by his absence in places where people praise him, he will never be there. Don’t build monuments for yourself. Ask God because God knows our heart. Today, we may not be very successful, but don’t ever think that success will not get into your head one day, if you indeed become successful. Head weight – be careful about that. Watch out your weight, saints, this year. Let this be your attitude.

Luke 17:9-10

⁹ And does the master thank the servant for doing what he was told to do? Of course not. ¹⁰ In the same way, when you obey me you should say, ‘We are unworthy servants who have simply done our duty.’”

Keep that in your heart this year – watch and wait.

1 Peter 5:6

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,

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That exaltation not necessarily has to be in this life; next life. What should I watch in my wait? Something else also, I should watch. I should also not watch my baggage of the failure of the past, neither the baggage of the success of the past. Even as I progress in my walk with the Lord, I should ensure that I don't accumulate, what? Baggage.

I remember Sameer and Reni recently shifted their home from old place to new place and said, "Pastor, we used to stay here for five years. So much of stuff, we've accumulated." That's exactly what happens to us also – we accumulate so much of unnecessary stuff in our homes, and God has allowed to shift our homes at least five times in the last ten years. Every time you shift, you throw out all your excess baggage. Don't accumulate excess baggage this year, but how does this excess baggage come? What is this excess baggage? Let us see.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

²⁴ Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

Let me tell you something – have this attitude – play to win; don't play to participate. Like pastor says, "There is no participation certificate. Play to win finish your race, in other words." What you have started, ask God to give grace to finish it. Otherwise, we have this famous saying in Telugu, especially for people from Andhra – 'andhrudu arambhasurudu;' means –he will start with great noise and then, it's gone after few days. Don't just begin races; finish them and play to win. Ask God for that grace. Play to win. Don't give up in the middle and run away when the going gets tough. Run that you may obtain but how do you obtain?

²⁵ And every man that striveth for the mastery...

You know the word in Greek for excellence is 'agonismo' from where we get the word 'agonize'. The disciples were keeping on asking this question, "Lord, will many be saved?" What did Jesus say? "*Strive to enter through the narrow gate because many will seek to enter but few strive.*" But what about these people who strive? What is the characteristic of these people?

...is temperate in all things (discretion). Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. ²⁶ I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: ²⁷ But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

What is he talking about? There is so much of unnecessary stuff which will not be needed when you walk with the Lord; may not look like sins. In 2018, so many people are asking for your retention, and for your time, and for your energy, and for your money. Look at what Paul says in,

1 Corinthians 6:12

¹² All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

He is saying, "Some things have the capacity to make me their slave and I want to be wary of them. I want to be really wary of them." They may not be looking like sins but they, suddenly, become weights. I don't want to accumulate that in my walk with the Lord in 2018. You say, "Can you tell me what are these weights? I'll write down the list and I want to get rid of them." Let me tell you – what is weight for me need not be weight for you and what is weight for you is not weight for me. For some people, movie is not a weight. They just watch and just say, "It's a relaxation." For me, it's a weight, big time weight because I analyze every scene, look at the sequence of thoughts and I say, "This is non-linear storytelling; this is linear storytelling." Why? And what has happened? By that time, I have wasted one day several hours. Do you know why? Because movie is weight for me and need not be weight for you.

For some people, music could be a relaxation. For some people, music could be a weight. For some people, books are necessary. For some people, books are weight. Weights depend upon kind of person you are, and what your specific weakness is. So, understand what your weaknesses are. They may not be sins but what is taking of your time? He was talking to me and Praveen after 1st Jan, "You look at Paul. Paul has this ambition – to have to go to other places and preach the Gospel." He thought that was his primary focus but Paul said, "You know what? That is not my primary focus." "Your

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primary focus is to write the thirteen epistles. In order to achieve that, I will put you in prison. Otherwise, you will keep running. You thought that was weight for you. All the chains were there but that is not the weight; that is essential. Otherwise, you keep running left, right and center and forget about writing, and have you got the brains?" Think about it; if Paul wouldn't have written, Romans wouldn't have been there; we wouldn't have had Romans Bible study. I can't imagine life without Romans Bible study. It's your primary call. You just completely gone out of that.

I remember when Pastor James told me when I came into full time ministry; sister also used to tell, "Can you teach the children at GSS?" That was a weight, I used to sit with one kid for ten hours a day. Pastor called me that day and said, "Vijay, you didn't leave your job to do tuitions." It is a weight. Is it sin? No. In fact, I was enjoying myself and Pastor said, "You are enjoying too much. It has become a weight." See, weights are different for different people. What is your weight? I don't know. You know it. Your weight could be having friends. Having a shoulder to cry on is your weight. I keep hearing this; I'm not pointing to anybody. "I want a shoulder to cry on. Somebody!" That's a weight because instead of spending time with the Lord, you waste your emotional energy, pouring out your heart to a friend who can't save you. At the most, they empathize with you or sometimes, they get irritated with you. "What is this fellow? I've got more problems than him!" What is your weight? Take care of your weight, saints. Why? Why is this important? Because sometimes, it may not be a weight for you; it could be a weight for somebody else.

1 Corinthians 10:23

²³ All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

Nor other people. This is in another translation, in NIV. It captures it beautifully.

²³ "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive.

No one should seek their own good but the good of others. I remember, a few years back, we used to have worship practice in Hrishi's home in Shankar Enclave and after the worship practice is over, we used to sit around the table and when boys come together to sit around the table, what will happen? "Peter – movies." Yohan is there. Somebody else is there. All the young children are there and I started discussion Quentin Tarantinos – pulp fiction. It's a ridiculously demonic movie. Don't watch it. My goodness! Why did I even say it? We started discussing it. And after that, Hrishi called me and said, "Anna, you started discussing pulp fiction? Who is watching you? Yohan is seeing. The other young people are watching you. It may not affect you but it will become a stumbling block for them." Watch your weights, saints. You know why? Because there is a new generation which is coming. Let it not be said about that generation – they grew up without knowing the God of their forefathers. So, what should we do? Learn to say 'no'. Seriously, ask God. "Lord, if this is not beneficial, give me the grace to say 'no'. It may look superb and a lot of good might come through it but it is a weight.

Titus 2:11-12

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,

Temperate, discreet lives. To do things with discretion. Let this be the year of doing things with discretion, things which will edify you, which will refresh you and which will release you to the ministry so that you will be used of God more mightily. Pastor made this fantastic statement. He said, "2018 is the year of destiny for many of us." How many of you believe it? You don't have to show your hands. If you really believe it, learn to say 'no'.

That's the weight part. So, we will have the other part. What is the other part? Let's look at the other part. Sin. I like the word – definite article – 'the sin'.

Hebrews 12:1

¹ ...the sin which so easily ensnares us...

Let us look at several translations to get a better picture of what he is trying to say over here. This is the NIV,

¹ *...the sin that so easily entangles...*

That is NIV.

¹ *...the sin that so trips us up...*

And everybody has a different sin, by the way. You know it. I like this, the ESV. This is the Aramaic Study Bible. “Sin which is always ready for us.” It’s there. It’s right there. O boy! This is not sins. It is the sin. It’s not that you commit sins. It is a fellow there. He’s got a personality. That’s what happens, right?

Romans 5:12

¹² *Therefore, just as through one man* (Who entered into the world?) *sin entered the world* (Asarkomai, that’s the word in greek. Asarkomai—enter the dragon! Sin entered into the world and who came? Along with sin? Death entered through sin), *and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned*

And then, it goes onto say, and the law entered so that what may abound? Sin may abound. That’s another word—parasarkomai. What is it? To come alongside of. Sin came. Alongside, law came to magnify your sin. That fellow is there. He’s a force. He’s right there next to you, lurking in the shadows if you will. Crouching tiger, hidden dragon! *Genesis 4:7*. This is talking to Cain.

Genesis 4:7

⁷ *If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door* (He’s right there, ready for you at the door. He’s right there). *And unto thee shall be his* (I like that word. His desire. He’s got a personality,) *desire, and thou shalt rule over him.* (KJV)

So, just keep that in mind. So, what is my besetting sin? You need to know your own specific besetting sin by the way. And it’s there ready. You just put your guard down and he will pounce on you, if you’re not on your guard. Look at what David prays in *Psalms 18:23-24*. This is David’s psalm by the way.

Psalms 18:23-24

²³ *I was also blameless before Him, And I kept myself from my iniquity.* (My sin. That is the reason why it is your race and not somebody else’s race.) ²⁴ *Therefore the LORD has recompensed me according to my righteousness, According to the cleanness of my hands in His sight.*

Do you know your besetting sin? Are you aware of it? Do you know it? Or are you just, by this time you should know if you’re in the Church for a long time. You should know what is that sin who is always ready for you? What is that sin who is always ready for you? Always? Ready for you? We have two definitions we know from our Bible studies. There is what we call as sin of commission and what is the other? The sin of omission. See that. Those definitions.

1 John 3:4

⁴ *Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact,* (Look at this. I like this. Everyone sins. Sin, it’s not plural, its singular.) *sin is lawlessness.*

Everyone who sins breaks the law and sin is lawlessness. That is what we call as the sin of commission.

James 4:17

¹⁷ *If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.*

What we call as sin of omission. Now, let me tell you something. There is sin of commission, sin of omission and there is besetting sin. Okay? What happens when you do not do what you’re supposed to do, which is what we call as committing the sin of omission, you automatically—in some cases, I believe so—and this is characterized in one person’s life. Who is that person? Anybody? Any guesses? Yeah? Look at this.

2 Samuel 11:1-2

¹In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. (He was supposed to be at war, but he remained. What is that? Sin of omission. But what is there, lurking behind? What happens?)²**One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw** (That's all. And you know the story,) **a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful**

Something happened to him. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, by the way, he wrote a book called temptation. I just came across one of the books when I was listening to one of the sermons by Chuck Swindle. I just looked it up. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, beautiful book, very expensive on kindle. If you want to buy it, you can buy. The title is 'temptation'. Look at what he has to say. Just follow me carefully.

In our members, there is a slumbering inclination towards desire which is both sudden and fierce. (I want to listen to this guy who is a martyr. I want to listen to him. Listen to him carefully,) with irresistible power, desire seizes mastery of the flesh. At once, a secret smoldering fire is kindled. The flesh burns and is in flames. It makes no difference whether it is a sexual desire or ambition or vanity or revenge, our love for fame and power or our greed for money. It doesn't matter. (He goes on to say,) At this moment, God is quite unreal to us (and He is says, in brackets,) remember these words. (He says, "You know what? God is unreal." And then, he makes a fantastic statement.) He loses all reality and only desire for the creature is real anymore now. The only reality is the devil. (Look at what he says.) Satan does not here fill us with hatred for God but with forgetfulness of God. (That's exactly what happened to David. "David, do you hate God?" No, David. You love God. I know you love God. But at that very moment, the reality of the creature has overwhelmed. Suddenly, you're consumed. It is lurking in the shadows. It's very ready for you. Then this is what he goes on to say,) the lust thus aroused envelopes the mind and the will of a man in deepest darkness. (He is absolutely just consumed by that for that moment and his will is taken captive. You know what it says in *1 Timothy 2*? He says, "You've been taken captive by the devil to do his will." That's exactly what happens here. And then what happens? Next.) The powers of clear discrimination and decision are taken from us. (Is that not true with David? David enquires, "Who is this lady?" "Is that not Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah?" "Oh! Uriah! One of my loyal mighty men." "The Hittite?" He's gone. He's not even thinking logically. "How can I do this to my friend who is loyal to me?" Think about this guy. He writes his death warrant and gives it to Uriah and Uriah just takes it from his king, puts it in his pocket and he says, "King, I'm going to Joab." He's going to do that to him. "David, what happened to your sense of discretion and decision?" It's gone. Taken from you. Watch out, saints, for those sins which are lurking and you know what it is each one of us for sure. I know what is mine and I tremble. I tremble.) The questions present themselves as is what the flesh desires is really sin in this case? "He's Hittite, baba! He's not even an Israelite. I can take his wife." You come out with justifications to cover up your sin. Is it not really permitted me? Yes, expected of me now, here in my particular situation to appease my desire? It is here that everything within me rises up against the work of God. (So, what should I do? Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, fantastic) Therefore, the Bible teaches us in the times of temptations and the flesh; there is one command. What is that? Run for your life. Flee fornication. Flee idolatry. Flee youthful lusts. Flee the lust of the world. There is no resistance to Satan in lust other than flight. Every struggle against lust in one's own strength is doomed to failure." That is Dietrich Bonhoeffer on temptation. Chuck Swindle, he sums it up beautifully, he says, "It's impossible to lust and run at the same time. So, run." Flee. Mutually exclusive. What is your besetting sin? What is that which traps you. One of the things that will keep you from sinning is rehearse the consequences of your action. Rehearse the consequence of your action. But the problem is – at that moment, your sense of rationality is completely taken away. Don't even take a chance there, but to rehearse. Because when you rehearse your consequences, when you're not sinning. Rehearse. You run the race, but the preparation is not the race. Preparation is somewhere else. You prepare off season.

That's exactly what happened to Dmitrov by the way. I just came, watched the Australian Open. New guy came, McKenzie McDonald. Five setter in a second round match. Five setter in a second round match and the five sets goes to eight-six. A rookie comes and almost gives him a run for his money. You know why? I believe he got a little complacent after he got the ATP world tour. Some people are looking at me like the lights' out. It's okay. Don't worry. That is Dmitrov. Don't get complacent about your sin. Rehearse the consequences because the Bible is full of examples. I remember Chuck Swindle. He is the one who had this incredible experience, when he was in Canada and he was there for a conference. He was a main speaker for the conference. And after the talk is over, in the evening, he comes back to his hotel room and he goes to the TV area. He wants to watch some football. But nothing is coming on television. So, he says, "Let me just go home and rest and take some time off and prepare myself for tomorrow." He enters into the lift. He's quite middle aged and elderly guy,

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fifty years old approximately. The moment he enters into the lift, two young women enter along with him into the lift. And the lift door closes. And he goes and he presses the sixth floor. And the girls don't respond. He says, "Ladies, which floor?" and they say, "Six is fine." And you know what he says? "Suddenly, I thought I was Tom Cruise. But the moment that thought came to my mind, one verse my mother taught me when I was a kid, I just completely blacked out and this verse came into my mind—God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man sows, that also will he reap." Pow! Again, brightness. He looks at them and he says, "No. thank you, ladies. I have sufficient trouble at home." And he comes out of the lift. Close calls. Sin ready for us. Besetting sin and it will lurk behind every door. Think about our generation! You don't even have to go to a club anymore. It is there right in your computer one click away. So, rehearse the consequences of your actions saints. It will keep you from sinning. Look at what it says;

Proverbs 7:24-26

²⁴ Now therefore, listen to me, my children; Pay attention to the words of my mouth: ²⁵ Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, Do not stray into her paths; ²⁶ For she has cast down many wounded, And all who were slain by her were strong men.

Isn't it interesting? Isn't it ironic that when David hears the word that Saul and Jonathan have been killed? He says, "How the mighty have fallen!" Does he not say that? He says, "How the mighty have fallen! How the mighty have fallen! How the mighty have fallen!" Three times. And this mighty man was felled by a beautiful woman. That is the reason why Scripture warns us in,

1 Corinthians 10:12

¹² Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Watch out for your sin this year. If 2018 is a year of destiny, your sin will trouble you. Conquer it. Be warned.

1 Peter 4. How do we get rid of this? The answer is again looking unto Jesus, right?

1 Peter 4:1-2

¹ Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same (method of thinking) mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. ² that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

What did Christ do? How did Christ suffer?

Hebrews 5:7

⁷ who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear

He said, "Lord, I'm weak. I'm weak." We don't say I'm weak. We say, "Lord, lead me not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one, Lord. Deliver us from the evil one." Lead me not into temptation. I'm not strong. I don't even want to take chances with it. Finally, let us run with endurance. Okay? It's a long obedience in one single direction. O it's doing the same thing over and over and over again. And ask God that you will never get bored with Him. Ask God for that grace this year.

Matthew 24:12-13

¹² And because iniquity shall abound (What will happen?), the love of many shall wax cold. ¹³ But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved(KJV).

It is a matter of the heart getting cold towards God. Guard your heart. How will you guard your heart? I will tell you how you guard your heart. Scripture gives us a very interesting answer.

Psalms 119:32

³² I will run the course of Your commandments (Why?), For You shall enlarge my heart.

Remember that verse in *Romans 5*. We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works patience or endurance, patience works genuine character or proven character and character develops and brings about hope and hope shall never

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be put to shame. Because the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Ask God to enlarge your heart this year. Enlarge our heart. He can enlarge it. You will run your race. Look unto Jesus. Ask God for a large heart saints. What do you mean a large heart? Every commandment you need a large heart. "O Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother? Seven times?" Large heart; seventy times seven. "How much should I give to the Church? Ten percent?" Large heart! Just giving examples. Large heart. It's a matter of your heart, saints.

Another prayer I want to pray for all of us this year. May the Lord direct our hearts to love God and for the patient waiting of Christ. *2 Thessalonians 3:5*. Let's pray.

Closing prayer:

Father, we thank You. We praise You. We worship You. So many things have been said, Lord. But I believe the Word that You have implanted into our hearts, I pray, Father, we will receive it with meekness, the implanted word and let it bear a fruit in our lives. We will watch every weight. Grant us grace to that end and we will watch the sin that so easily ensnares us. And we will run with endurance the race that You've specifically and uniquely marked for each one of us. And we will encourage one another in the path. Grant us large hearts. To that end, we pray. We thank You. We praise You. In Jesus' name, Amen.