

# Give Up To Go Up!

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*Father, this evening, we just come to You, Lord. We just want to thank You. We just want to praise You, Father, for one more day in the land of the living, one more day to serve You, one more day to listen to Your voice, one more day to obey You, one more day to bless Your holy name, one more day to glorify You and to bring honor to Your Name, Lord. Thank You. Thank You, Father. Even this evening, as we are here, Your children have come from school, from college, from workplace, from home but we all now sit at Your feet, Lord. We put aside everything else. You said in Your Word, "Sufficient unto the day are the evils thereof. Do not worry about tomorrow." We put aside everything, we just want to learn of You Lord. Teach us, Father. For in Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.*

We are looking at a very familiar portion for us. We have looked at it many times. It is from *Hebrews 12*,

## **Hebrews 12:1-2**

***<sup>1</sup> Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> 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 has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.***

All Scripture is breathed by God but all Scripture from *Genesis 1:1* to *Revelation 22:21* does not have the same importance in our life. Some Scriptures like this, we have to always keep it in front of You and keep meditating upon it over and over again. In *Hebrews 2*, the writer of Hebrews is writing to a Church at a point when there is persecution in one end, complacency in other ends, so, people are drifting away because of complacency or people are falling under the weight of persecution. So, this is a Scripture, which we need to keep on visiting over and over again so that we don't lose our focus in life. You see, in sporting events or in competitions in the world, you know always only one person or one team can win, all others have to return not having achieved their goals. Though they could be some of the best in the world; like winter Olympics just finished in South Korea and those teams and I used to get very irritated when I open the BBC portal because always they used to put there, not the teams at the top and the last would always be India 0, 0, 0. I don't know why they had to put at the bottom because they would show the top and the bottom and India always used to be at the bottom. If you had watched all through the competition, do you think the India athletes did not train? When we sent those athletes for the winter Olympics, they were the best this country could produce but they all came back with nothing. Understand that. That's the nature of the competition in this world. That's why Paul will say in *1 Corinthians 9:24*,

## **1 Corinthians 9:24**

***<sup>24</sup> Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.***

Even the best are considered losers if they don't get the prize in this world. The difference is in the Christian life, we all can be winners. That's what the *writer of Hebrews* is trying to tell us here. In the world, no, only one wins, only one gets the gold medal or if two gets it, both finish together saved. So, they are both considered one not two but in the Kingdom of God, God says, "All His children, if they want, can be winners." But there are rules laid out how one can win. So, the title for today's message is, "Give up to go up." If you want to go up, you have to give up certain things and you will see even in this world or in the Kingdom of God, if you really want to go up, there are many things you and I will have to give up and it is true. In the Kingdom of God and in this world, there are a lot of things which you and I will have to give up and those who have not given up and those who are not in the race will not understand those who have joined the race. They will say, "Why did you give that up? I thought you always liked it." The question is, it wasn't about liking or disliking, you have given up certain things in life because you are going up. So, know this. There are lot of things which you will have to give up, if you want to rise either in the world or in the Kingdom of God. You will have to say 'no' to a lot of things, while everyone around you seems to be doing it, when they are all saying 'yes', you choose to say no and the Bible calls it sacrifice but nobody likes the term sacrifice because it is always connected with killing and burning. So, nobody likes sacrifice but all athletes have

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made incredible sacrifices to achieve their goal. So, here you have the term race in *Hebrews 12* and here, the other place we are running a race with a very definite purpose – to win a prize. But let's look at it. Go back to *Hebrews 12* and look at it.

### **Hebrews 12:1**

***<sup>1</sup> Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses***

I know you have heard it so many times but what does it mean? In sports terms, it is called the 'home advantage'. Old days in cricket, they will say it is very difficult to beat India in India because Indian crowds are not sporting. They are not sporting; they will only root for India. In other place, you will see. Like we see those four brothers who had come from New York and they are basically Jamaicans, but when they were in my house, they are cricket crazy and they knew all the West Indies greats because they are all from the same vicinity. They would sit there till early morning watch India play South Africa because they were genuine sportsmen. They would root for any country that played well; we won't. So, what happens is, there is a home advantage if you are playing in India. Imagine India playing any other team in Kolkata, hundred, thousand mad men, all around screaming only for India and screaming against the other team. Most teams are nervous when they play in India. Indian teams are also nervous because they know what has happened in the past when we have lost. They always say sometimes that a crowd can change a match. So, everywhere in every country when it comes to those final matches, if two teams are playing and one team is playing in their home town, it's called a home advantage. Why? Because you have this crowd which is for you.

Now, imagine a different scenario. Just look at the first five people. You people are in the team. So, five, it has to be basketball, you can't have cricket. Five people are playing. Let's put it as cricket because I don't know basketball except for a few people like Michael Jordan and all. Imagine you five are playing in the Uppal Stadium, cricket, you are there and you look around in the crowd. Do you know who is sitting in the crowd, cheering you? Sachin, Ganguly, Rahul Dravid, Virat Koli; can you imagine how you will play. This is exactly what Scripture is talking about. The cloud of witnesses who is cheering us on are, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Daniel, all the saints. A cloud of witnesses. It's a reverse. It is not the crowd cheering the great players. It is the great players who have gone before us who says, "We are rooting for you. Look at us. You can do it." Not only are they cheering for us, God says, "You can learn from them, all of them." Their weaknesses, their strengths, you can learn from them. That's what the writer says, all those who are who-is-who in God's hall of fame are there. We are surrounded by an incredible cloud of witnesses. Therefore, God says, "Everyone can win in God," which is not like the competitions in the world. It is not like that. Can you imagine a class? Like exams are going on now, that's why there are few students, most are preparing for their exams. But imagine when the results are out and the teacher takes the answer scripts and suddenly, says, "Everyone is first this time." Does that happen? No, everyone is waiting to see who is first but imagine where Scripture says, "Everyone is first." It is possible. God is saying, "It is not reserved for one person. It is reserved for all who finish the race." Everyone can win the gold, can win the crown. That is the difference between competing in the world and what God has put us in. You see, if you look at sports, entertainment, all these industries, they are littered with names of unknown men and women who gave their best but never made it to the team. They gave their best, they struggled from morning till night, they gave their best, but their best was not enough to make it to the team. Even now, even today, even tomorrow, millions and millions of young men, teenagers and older young men will carry their cricket kit and go to the grounds and practice and practice for days, weeks, years hoping they can get into that eleven. They work hard, they slog hard, they practice hard, they sacrifice everything in life hoping to get in there but they never made it. Why? Because in this world, it is not giving your best that matters. You have to be the best. It is not enough to give your best. You have to be the best. So, the Indian Cricket board has a pool from which they will select eleven. All of them are not in the eleven. Some people are always there because it doesn't matter which country you go to, what is the nature of the pitch, what is the nature of the opposition, they are always there because they are the best. So, unless you are the best. It is not that you give your best but unless you are the best, you cannot make it in the world to the top. Of course, there are other factors like crooked deals and other hand deals but let's leave that aside but in the Kingdom of God, you need to realize it is not true. That is not the way it is. God wants you and me to give our best; we don't have to be the best. What are difference. Little grammar here changing but an incredible difference in life. Your teacher may only say, okay, this one came first and call them out. We'll never see the ones who really slogged but didn't come first. There is no A for effort. That's not how it is in the Kingdom of God because what I'm saying is, you see, many of you are students over here. Don't get discouraged because you don't get those marks because in this world only marks matter but not in God's kingdom. In God's Kingdom, more than the marks. It is the effort that matters. How you go through it, that matters. He is watching it, He is looking at that. He wants you and me to give our best, not to be the best. Because the minute we try

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to be the best, then we get into competition. Then, we look at everybody as a rival, not a fellow traveler on the same road to the same destination where there are many crowns. We look at each other as rivals. So, you know what? We live a public life which is false. That's what Jesus always would talk about – a private life; pray in secret, give in secret, fast in secret, do all these in secret, why? We are not competing with anybody, you are just trying to be the best you can be for God. That's what the *writer of Hebrews* is trying to tell us. Your goal is not to become the best Christian in this Church, no. Your goal is to be the best Christian that you can be and each one of us is different. We only need to be the best we can be and you cannot compare, there is no comparison. God will not compare any two of His children. When we finish our race and stand before God, God will look at our entire circumstances, where we came from, what framed us, what we had all that put together. That's why Scripture says about Jesus in the *Book of Isaiah*; "When He judge, He will not judge by what He hears or what He sees, He will judge with righteousness" Absolutely! So, you can be absolutely sure, if you have given your best, His judgment will be incredibly righteous. You will receive your crown. So, it is not being the best, it is becoming all that God wants you to be but that will require sacrifice. Don't ever think that does not require sacrifice, it will. You will have to give up if you want to go up. So, say, "I will have to give up, if I want to go up." That's what Scripture is talking about. Lay aside! Let us lay aside, throw away. NIV will say, "Throw away, let us put away, throw off, lay aside. So, the question is: what is that I have to give up to go up? What is that I have to give up? It may not be the same for everybody. It may differ from person to person when it comes to the first thing but read the first verse closely.

### Hebrews 12:1

<sup>1</sup> ***Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses***

Not so large, so great. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Wednesday sessions are purely for believers who know what they are in for. It is not an evangelistic meeting. We have to choose when we lay aside. We are putting away something for something else. Believers have to often choose the great over the good. I will explain it to you. Often in life, to move to the next level with God, you don't have to choose between good and even because that is easy. Everybody knows that is good, this is evil and we struggle with evil but we know we have to choose good nobody has to tell us because there is a voice inside telling, "Don't do that, do this, don't do this." It is not about good and evil. Often, the choice of finishing the race as God wants us to be is choosing between good and great. That is what Paul will say in *1 Corinthians 6:12*,

### 1 Corinthians 6:12

<sup>12</sup> ***All things are lawful for me, (Meaning, all things are good) but all things are not helpful. (They are not helpful in me becoming what God wants me to be. It is not helpful) All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.***

They are good, they are lawful, there is no law against it but they are not helpful. He will say this again in *1 Corinthians 10:23*,

### 1 Corinthians 10:23

<sup>23</sup> ***All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.***

Meaning – there can be lot of things in our lives which are legal, which are lawful, which God doesn't disapprove but it doesn't edify you, it doesn't build you up, it doesn't take you to the next level. So, believers who are consciously are in this process, in this race have to learn to distinguish between what is good and what is great in God's sight and they are really tough choices, painful choices sometimes. Sometimes, we have to give up the good to go up to God's best.

On Sunday, Pastor Vijay was trying to teach us on that. See, good things can become a weight that can impede greatness. Now, please don't misunderstand when I use the term 'great'. We are not trying to become great like Akbar The Great and all that. No. Because anything that finishes its course as God has ordained is great because God is great. Because God is great. It has not got to do with the person. It has got to do with God. All His plans are great. Because He is a great God. It's not trying to become somebody great. Look at what pastor Vijay was trying to tell on Sunday. In *Genesis 12*, in today's light,

### Genesis 12:2

<sup>2</sup> ***I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.***

The call of Abraham was to greatness. It was not an ordinary god who called him. It was not the gods of this world who called him. The god who called him was the great God, the only living and all powerful god. He says, "I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great." But if you want to be great Abraham, what do you have to do?

**Genesis 12:1**

**<sup>1</sup>Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, (You have to leave a lot of stuff which is good.)To a land that I will show you.**

Terah is not a bad man. Your family is not a bad family. The unbelievers around you are not bad people. Some of them are better than us. But some of the good people God will ask you to leave, and if you don't leave, you will never become great. You will never fulfill God's purpose. Because our God is great. The call of God is great. The purpose of God is great. The call of Rebekah is great. It's not an ordinary call. There's only one man in God's eye through whom the nations will be blessed. It's a man called Isaac. The call of Rebekah is to be Isaac's bride. It's not an ordinary call. It's not just to be a good wife. Anybody can be a good wife. But God says, "Only one woman can be a great wife, because he is a great man." Therefore, when she is asked, "Will you go with this man?" She says, "I will." "When?" "Tomorrow." Because the call is so great, she is willing to leave Laban, her father, her mother, her brother, her entire town and never come back, because the call of God is so great. So, please don't misunderstand when God calls, He's asking you to leave the bad, the evil, the wicked. No. Not with believers. When we got saved, we already decided that I always have to leave that. You're conscious about that struggle. Struggle is in leaving the good. You see, when the US president started his election, his campaign and then, he won. He surrounded himself with a set of people who were loyal to him – loyalists. But if you know in one year, almost all those who came with him to the White House, almost everybody has left. Today, Gary Cohen, Chief Economic Advisor also left. You know why? You can start with a set of people, but you cannot finish with a set of people if you look at your slogan. What is your slogan? "Make America great again." You want to make America great? It's not enough to surround yourself with good people, you will have to surround yourself with great people. Otherwise, your nation will not be great again. He picked a slogan without realizing the impact the slogan would have on a nation and the history of this world. So, you will see churning after churning going on, because nobody wants around the world, everybody wants America to be good. Nobody wants America to be great. When we have cyclones and tsunamis, please be good. When you become great, industries may shut down and may open up there. We don't want you to be great. We only want you to be good. When we cry, "help!", send us money. Send us food. Send us relief. Don't be great. You understand how terms can change history. So, realize, God also uses words. If you want to become a winner, it is not enough to have a good program, a good coach, a good game plan, no. You'll need the best plan, the best coach, the best diet, and the best program. You will realize at the top, good is not good enough. You will have to let go of even the good if you want to become great. Remember what Jesus said?

**Matthew 11:11**

**<sup>11</sup> "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.**

Potential. He says, "Of all born of woman, the greatest is John the Baptist. But another generation will arise." I will look at it briefly later. But if you read *John 14* Jesus will distinguish the difference between the anointed men of the Old Testament and the new testament. When He is talking to His disciples He says, "The Holy Spirit is with you. The world cannot receive Him because they do not know Him. The Holy Spirit is with you and He will be in you." The entire Old Testament people, the Holy Spirit was with them, but with us He's in us. It's dramatic shift. For those who are even in the least in the Kingdom of God have the Spirit of God in them. Inside of them. And they have the potential to become greater than anybody in the Kingdom of God. Jesus is not talking about what you call moral goodness. Okay? Distinguish that. He's not talking about that. He's talking about greatness in the terms of those who will finish well. Finish well. Finish well. So, how does one become a great Christian? First thing, God says, "Lay aside every weight." Some weights are good weights, but they stand in the way of you fulfilling God's promise. So, father Abraham has to let go of daddy Terah, nephew Lot, son Ishmael and ultimately, even tie his son Isaac on the altar. Because before he can become a great nation. All that he is letting go off are good. They are not bad. Ishmael is not bad. Lot is not bad. God calls him good. Isaac was definitely not bad. But he was willing to let go of everything that was good in his life so that he could achieve the greatness to which God had called him.

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Second thing, if you go back to *Hebrews 12*, what does it say? Lay aside every weight. That's why the distinguishment between weight and sin. Because these weights are good things and not bad things.

### **Hebrews 12:1**

***<sup>1</sup>Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us...***

Get rid of sin. What does it mean? God says, "You are in a race. If you are in a race, you have to play by the rules. You can't cheat." There are two things from Olympics, I mean from sports, we'll remember from recent past. One is Marian Jones. And the other is Lance Armstrong. Marian Jones was the first lady woman to win five Olympic medals. First lady in Olympic history to get five medals in the same Olympics. Lance Armstrong was a legend, cycling legend. Seven times, he won the greatest cycling event which is called, Tour de France. Seven times. Both were finally disqualified and stripped off their medals for doping. Lance Armstrong one year after another, year after year after year. Finally, he was caught. It was all stripped off. They were the greatest in the field. But they lost their medals. They were banned from that sport. In English, we say, from cheers to jeers. Jeer means to scorn or mock. From cheers of the crowd, now, they were hiding their faces. Paul will tell this to Timothy, "Timothy, you're in a race. If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules." We are in a race. So, He says, (One) "Beware of the good stopping you from the great." Second – "Be careful about sin." Very easily ensnares. God says, "You have to play by the rules. There are rules God has set that determine our relationship with God, determine our relationship with one another and determine our relationship with the world." There is a rule book for this race. And if we violate these rules and continue to violate their rules without making corrections, one day, all our accomplishments will be stripped away. That's what Paul is talking about – "After having preached, I don't want to be disqualified. In *Matthew 5:19*, this is how Jesus says.

### **Matthew 5:19**

***<sup>19</sup> Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called (not the great) least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.***

He says, "There's a rule book. If you want to end up great in the Kingdom of God, do not even neglect the least of God's rules." They matter. Some of these people when they are caught for doping in sports, in their blood test or urine test, it will only be like 0.005% but that's enough. You're out. Banned substance. It's body enhancing, adrenaline enhancing, strength enhancing. It's an unfair competition. Others are running in their strength. You have enhanced your ability. So, you're disqualified. Are you getting it? I mean, you know, kids who are all writing their exams. Suddenly, the special squad comes in and one fellow is found not with tattoo, but a modern tattoo – all answer is over there. Suddenly, he is picked up and he's gone. Why? It didn't matter what he wrote on his hand – because we used to catch kids like that – was there in the question paper or not. You are disqualified. You're gone. A lot of kids. A lot of kids will say, "Sir, it didn't come for the exam." It doesn't matter. You came with the intent to cheat. It doesn't matter. The invigilator who came from outside is not going to look at the question paper and tally with his hand and say, "Ah! It's not there. You can go." Are you getting it? You have to play by the rules. There are rules which God has. One thing I'll tell you. You can never choose great unless you have chosen good first. That's the difference in God's Kingdom. In the world, you can choose great undercutting good. But one day, you'll be caught. Many have never been caught. We call all of them great. In cricketing, there is no doping test. So, we don't know anything about our great cricketers, how they came in and played; what injection they took; what banned substance; we have no clue. We don't know. If we have clout, think about Sachin Tendulkar, if there was a test and the doctor who was conducting it, is he going to make it public? The country will come down. You go. That's India. We want our national fame, not national shame. It doesn't work in the Kingdom of God. You can never go think about greatness by skirting goodness. You have to always choose good first before you can choose greatness. And we saw one of the most powerful rules a few times in the past few weeks. Most powerful rules which God puts in His Kingdom. In *1 Corinthians 13:1-3*

### **1 Corinthians 13:1-3**

***<sup>1</sup>Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels...***

Incredible! Those who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit and know how to continuously pray in tongues can do incredible things unlike others, because they are not shaken. Inside they're very strong. They can face troubles and trials

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and testings like others cannot. Why? Because they know in their spirit how to communicate with Heaven and receive strength. That's what Paul will says in *1 Corinthians 14*, he who prays in tongues edifies – edifies is the word from English from which we get edifice. Edification means a building, strong. He can but Scripture says

**...but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith...**

In the second one, everything that every preacher, pastor, believer is longing for-- prophecy, gifts, power, ministry, knowledge, faith. Everything in the Kingdom of God is achieved through this. But Scripture says,

**...so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.**(On that day, all your medals will be stripped off. What did you do? God says, "Nothing.") <sup>3</sup> **And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned,**(Sacrificial giving and disciplined in your body. Absolutely,) **but have not love, (God says,) it profits me nothing.**

It profits you nothing. So, this is the toughest rule in the rule book. That's why Jesus sends the first man out on mission, asks him a question, "Peter, do you love Me? Peter, do you know how to preach? You learnt how to cast out demons? If you don't love Me, don't even go. Pointless." You may be very successful in the ministry, but disqualified in heaven. That's why we say, "Deal with sin. Admit it. Forsake it. Forget it and move on to greatness." So many champions, visible champions in Christendom, will be stripped off their honor on that day, simply because they really never loved people. They are in ministry. But they have no capacity to love people. It's very strange. Pastor Vijay and I, we talk every day. And one of the things is that, if we don't love our sheep, we should quit. What's the point in being pastors without loving your sheep? There are a lot of pastors who are superstars. They are like a speck far away. They have congregations whom they do not know, who they do not care about. They don't love but they are popular. They have big names. But judgment is not here. Judgment is on that day. The race is decided not here, the race, how we finished that race is decided there. That's why God says, "Love God with all your heart. That's my worship. Love the family of God. That's my fellowship. That's my kinship. And love the lost in the world, that is our burden." All three. We need to have our worship. We need to have our fellowship. We need to have a burden for the lost. So God says, "Lay aside every weight, every sin which easily entangles. Lay aside." To lay aside these two, we need help. See, when we grow older. There's just a few of us who are older here. When we grow older, when we reach middle age and older you look back at life and lot of times me and my wife, like parrots, will sit at night and say, "If only..". If only. Just go to the beginning of the Bible, and start reading page by page. If only Adam and Eve hadn't eaten from that tree. If only Adam and Eve admitted they ate from that tree. If only Cain had listened to God saying, "If you do right, will you also not be accepted?" and just done it. Right? If only after that incredible six hundred years and that six months, Noah had not planted a vineyard, Noah had not planted a vineyard, an orange orchard would have changed history. Nobody ever got drunk on orange. If only. Why choose grapes? Why not oranges? If only Abraham had left Terah when God told him. If only he had not gone to Egypt. If only he had not listened to Sarah's advice. If only he hadn't taken Lot along. See – 'if onlys'. That's why God says, "You've got this whole cloud of witnesses." You look into their lives and they say, he already chose – if only I am not going that way. That's what great cricketers do. Great cricketers are great cricketers that when they go out on a silly shot, they go back and they watched that replay over and over and over. Then, they get the best bowler in their team and say, "You bowl that shot. I want to practice that one because next time that fellow releases, I will not get out; I will hit it for a four." That's a great cricketer. Others are not like that. They finish the game. They go straight to the bar. That is Kamble. Great ones, they will look at their mistake and say, "You know what? I need to learn. There is a cloud of witnesses. That's why *Hebrews 10:24-25* will say.

### **Hebrews 10:24-25**

**<sup>24</sup> Let us consider one another in order stir up love and good at works <sup>25</sup> not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as is the manner of some, but exalting one another so much more as you see that Day.**

That Day is approaching. You don't have all the time in the world to finish the race. One day, God says, "Time up." You know, examination hall, "Five more minutes." I have said this before. My students used to be so funny. Finally, when we pull the paper, they will leave a line hoping that will bring some sympathy that, "The fault is not mine. I could have finished but the teacher snatched the page." It won't work with God. God says, "I have given you all enough time." So, God says, "Consider one another in order to stir up love and good works," because you will be judged on this and you will be judged

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on this. Stir up; not works first. Stir up on love first; and what is that? And you exalt each other, you don't tell Peter, "Peter, you did a great job." It's not what you say. "Peter, you know, what you are not very loving the way you did it because you see, the priority in God's Kingdom is different." Whatever you do it has to be done because you love; not that you do an excellent work with a grumpy face. That's why we have the Sunday school song – 'There are no grumpy faces in Heaven'. In the Kingdom of God, there are no grumpy faces. So, here, you know what? You have to stir each other. What does it mean? We need people who will speak to us. One of the amazing things about this "if only" is others see in us but we don't see. Others see our blind spots. We never see our blind spots, but we don't want anybody to be honest with us. Otherwise, we will go and ask and that person will say, "If only you talked a little less, you would be so great." "Ah!" Instead, we will get offended. "What did you say?" We need people who will speak those things "if only" into our lives. Genuine friends. That's why Scripture says, "The wounds of a righteous man." But we don't want. We want flatterers in life. They always will say, "How great thou art," we don't need those people because it doesn't make any difference if God doesn't say, "well done, My good and faithful servant"; we need people who will say, "If only you made a little correction over here, you will be good". That's why if you look at these great sportsmen, we are using illustrations, you will see about I think it's Nadal or Federer or somebody who said about, it was some guy at restaurant who told him, "You know, you should have played this shot." And he took that correction. Think about if you are Roger Federer; you go to have dinner and the fellow who is serving you and he says, "Sir, you know, that shot you played, this is the way you should have played." And you look at him, "Who are you? Who am I?" "Good. I take that correction. I will practice it next time." See, because he is so open to know that this waiter is probably open to see his blind spot which he didn't see. Are you able to see? That's what God is talking about. We need good and honest people who lovingly point out the blind spots in our life, yet will love us unconditionally. To lay aside every weight, every sin, we need faithful people who will speak to our lives. Some of those people who are truly great in God's Kingdom struggled in reaching their greatness because they didn't have true friends.

One of those really great men of God was David. You see, after Jonathan, he really never had a good friend. He never had a real good friend. I don't know what was wrong with Prophet Samuel is but I think Samuel never got over Saul. You know Samuel really loved King Saul. He really loved Saul and it broke his heart that God told him, "I have overlooked Saul and you are going to anoint the next," but because he was an incredibly obedient man, that he loved God with all his heart and he loved Saul as only himself that he was willing to obey God and overlooked Saul. But he grieves. Scripture says, "He grieved over Saul all the days of his life." I think that was a mental block he didn't mentor this young guy. So, he never had a mentor and he never had a close friend after Jonathan. So, he made lot of goof-ups in his life. So, you will see, finally, the person who really speaks into his life, who comes later is Nathan. It's Nathan, and Nathan is the voice that will speak into David, after that, "You are that man." And he says, "I am that man. He saw my blind spot," and he is willing to change. We need people like Nathan. We need friends like Nathan who, what I call is the prophetic voice. We need a prophetic voice in our life. The prophetic voice is different from priestly voice. The prophetic voice will always show our blind spots. The priestly voice will direct us for greatness.

So, you will see, even though Abiathar goes on to the other side with Adonijah, Nathan never leaves David. He never departs from David. He remains loyal to David all the days of his life. So, you know what? When Adonijah is crowning himself as king, the priest has gone, Nathan comes and tells, "Lord, do you know what has happened? This is the guy who is trying to be the king; this is the guy who should be the king." So, he says, "Call Zadok." That's the order that should be in our life. "Lord, I want the prophetic blessing in my life before I receive the priestly blessing." Zadok is the one who will anoint Solomon as king; but before Solomon can be anointed as king, you need a Nathan who will point great from good. What is happening today is everybody is after that priestly blessing, "Anoint me," God says, "You are not distinguishing between what is good and bad, but what is good and great." Distinguish it and then, the priestly blessing will make you endure. So, we need people in our lives and our ears should be opened. First say, "Lord, make me a person who will hear the prophetic voice when you speak through anybody. I will hear You are speaking to me and I am willing to take the correction because Your aim for me is to be great in Your Kingdom; not to be least, to be great."

Let's go back to *verse 1* again. So,

### **Hebrews 12:1**

<sup>1</sup> ***...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us...***

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For this, we all need help. Therefore, we gather; not just gather for teaching because through that, God will speak, we fellowship, get close-knit one another in the Kingdom of God so that we are able to spur one another to love and to good works and then?

### Hebrews 12:12

<sup>12</sup> *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run...*

I know we have read through this so many times, preached through this so many times; but let's stop there; you know something about to run? To run, you have to enter the race. God's race is not like sports. In sports, you will have one set of players and the rest are onlookers. But with God, we all got to play. See, why I am trying to tell you is this, it's possible to be a good athlete and have never compete. Imagine you are on your treadmill every day for thirty minutes. You used the weights, you work out, you are careful about your diet, you are very careful about what you eat, you exercise, you are absolutely contend with fitness but you never compete in anything. You are fit but you never competed in anything. So many Christians are content in being just Christians. They are content that their sins are forgiven. They are content with attending Church. They are content with sitting on side-lines while others play but they are never in the race. They look at their fitness and mistake they are competing. Are you getting the picture? You look at your fitness, "Yes, I was in the treadmill for thirty minutes and worked out hard. I did my weight and everything. I checked my calories. I checked my food; this much is everything that I am wanting and that is of importance. I have done it all. I am fit." But your fitness doesn't mean anything if you are not competing. It's good for you but it's not good for God's Kingdom. It's not going to get you any crown or any medal or even a ribbon. You need to compete.

You have to enter the race; not the dragon but enter the race. Let us run. Very few are running in the Kingdom of God. I am talking in numbers. Few are really running this race to enter and there is another problem when I look here. When I am preaching; I have a clock over there. So, I know 8:10, I got another 20 minutes more, I looked. If you are playing basketball, you know 45-45 minutes; you know your time. In football, you know; everybody knows. In any sport, you are in, you know. If you don't know, the coach will send somebody and say, "Take a tea break. Only 5 over left. Go slow. Don't lose a wicket. We will start all over again tomorrow."

Everybody is playing in their race because they know their time. We don't know our time. Today could be your last day. Have you entered the race? We don't know. No man knows the hour. It's not enough to be fit. The question is: are we competing in this race? We are not competing with one another. Have we entered the race? That is why Scripture says through John that many Christians will be ashamed when they suddenly reach the judge's presence and realize, "Oh my gosh! I thought I would get a crown," and the judge says, "You are not even in the race. You were never in the race." "You are in." What does Scripture say? Many will come in the Kingdom of God as escaping through the fire. We just got it but we were never in the race. So, with the time that is left, God says, "Enter the race. Run!" Let us run. Don't let fear stop you. Lots of people are afraid. Lot of people don't enter because they are afraid, "I can't run like him or her. I will make a fool of myself." But in the Kingdom of God, there is no fear of losing. That is why he was telling, "What is this Joshua? Fear not. I have told you do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged." Why? "I put you in this race. I am with you. I will never leave you or forsake you. Every step the sole of your foot takes you are going to win. Get in! Don't be afraid."

Fear can block people from entering the race. No one in history has ever won a race where they haven't run. Let us imagine five people here. One, two, three, four and five; five people enter the race. Disqualified, disqualified, disqualified, disqualified and disqualified. Does the committee give the sixth one a certificate because these five were disqualified? No! Nobody gets because she did not even enter. There have been others who got the gold because the gold and the silver were disqualified so the bronze fellow got the gold but because he entered. So, don't be afraid. Yes, there is fear.

First time during 25 years ago, when my pastor called me and said, "James, I am going to Singapore. Next Sunday, you are preaching." That's when I realized Scripture was true. I was fearfully and wonderfully made! I have never preached in my life and suddenly, I was preaching to a congregation much bigger than that all senior men of God in the city. Heading OM and Heading YWAM, heading World with a vision, they were all in that Church then, senior people, he didn't ask any one of them to preach. He said, "James, you are preaching," and he left. He was not even there to beside me to give moral support. He just left. Fear should not stop you. Now, Reni will know because next Sunday, Sameer has to preach in a Church



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in Kerala. The pastor asked. So, he has been texting me, Whatsapping me to know what should he preach. So, you realize you are fearfully made but we are not afraid because this is not performance. Any other place, you can speak. Classroom, you can speak; lecture hall, you can speak and in public. All that is different and this is different. Do not be afraid.

Again look,

### **Hebrews 12:12**

<sup>12</sup> ***...let us run with endurance, the race that is set before us.***

Second thing about that –what is that? Run your race; not someone else’s. Don’t run somebody else’s race. In running, you have sprinting, long distance, huddles and you will see that the ones who are running are different. The sprinter and long distance won’t do the same. So, God says, “Your race is different, your race is different, your race is different...” Everybody’s race is different. There is a specific kind of race God has tailored for each one of us. God has a plan and a purpose which is absolutely unique to each one of us. This is what brings meaning to life. So many Christians just go through the motions of Christianity without understanding the very purpose you were redeemed because they have not found what their race is. More people in Christendom fail because of lack of purpose than lack of talent. Look at the people over here. All are talented but do all of you have purpose? Have you understood your divine purpose? See, this famous novel by Lewis Carroll called Alice in wonderland. So, Alice is talking to the cat. Alice walked and she doesn’t know which way to go so she asks the cat, “Would you tell me which way I ought to go?” The cat says, “Depends a good deal on where you want to go.” Alice says, “I don’t care.” then the cat says, “It doesn’t matter which way you go.” So many people are like Alice in wonderland. They don’t know where they are going. So, it doesn’t matter where they go. Every day is just another day. There is no purpose. There is no excitement. That is not what God told Joshua. He said, “Keep a distance between you and the ark. Keep your eyes on the ark. Keep your eyes on the priest that are carrying it because you don’t know where you are going. Nobody has gone that way before. It’s going to be incredibly exciting. Sanctify yourself.” Your God is doing amazing things before you and for years everyday was exciting for Israel because they had purpose. For purpose, they had to keep their eyes on the one who had called them. Sad thing is that we drift through life without purpose. Don’t go through life without purpose. Because that purpose when you discover it you will realize that it’s bigger than yourself.

Let’s look at the Kingdom of God like a map. For me, the map of Bhutan comes easier than India. It’s like this, Kingdom of God as a map and there is one little chunk. That’s you. That’s yours and that is your purpose. If you have discovered your purpose, it’s bigger than you. It’s bigger than anything in life for you. That’s what David is saying. David came; Goliath comes out; everybody is trembling and he is asking, “Who is this uncircumcised man that he dares defies the armies of the Living God? What will the king do the one who is willing to fight him?” His brothers got mad, “You proud fellow! You left those sheep and came over here.” He turns and says, “Is there not a cause? Don’t you realize what is happening? This is not a battle; this is bigger than a battle. This is about the destiny of a nation. It’s bigger than you and me. Is there not a cause?” Do we see life as bigger than us, bigger than a job, bigger than getting married, bigger than buying a car, bigger than having a family, a house, having a pension and retiring and dying one side? Life is bigger than that because God is giving you and me a chunk of the Kingdom and is saying, “That is your purpose.” It is much bigger than you and me. It is huge. That is greatness. That’s why He says, “Run with endurance.” Simple word – ‘endurance’, for children sitting over here is – please run without quitting. Don’t quit because the temptation to quit in this race is huge. Because the rewards are not now. It’s not tangible. In your companies and all. Strangely, today, I asked my wife, “Where is my watch?” She had put it away and I found it. When I was in Class 5, we had a board exam. My parents were teachers. My Dad was the principle and my Mum was the teacher. Because of that, I never got the first in any subject because they said, “People will say...” because they corrected the answer paper. “They will say that because it’s your son, you are giving.” So, my Dad and my mother told me, “Don’t worry. Board exam is there. You can prove that you are better.” And she promised me something – she had a gold chain watch. I know – HMT Sona. She said, “If you top in all the subjects except the national language, Zonka, this is yours.” The board exam came, the results came; it was mine. I got it. Many days, I walked like this – my hand wouldn’t come down because I was the only boy with a watch in the town. In the world, results are tangible. Results are given, target is given, benefits are given, bonuses are given. You can aim for it. In the Kingdom, it’s on the other side. You may not see anything. You may see loss and opposition and hatred and envy and jealousy and you have to work through it the work of God in love. It’s an incredible battle. It’s not an easy battle; it’s an incredible battle. What is that we have to endure? Endure. What is that we have to endure? Verse 3 will tell us about Jesus.

**Hebrews 12:3**

**<sup>3</sup> For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself,**

We have to endure the hostility of sinners. It's not easy. Suddenly, one year, two years, five years, ten years, things have changed in India. It's not. This is the age of social media. Nothing is hidden anymore. Every day, you get messages – one Church; another Church burnt; another Church, others have entered and put their flag. Today, a new one came; the police have entered into a big Church and took the offering box away. And if you are thinking, "I can always go to the Northeast and settle, it is Christian majority," they are gone. Suddenly, you realize – you are living in fearsome times in this world and you are called to run your race without quitting, without compromising. Do you see? Times are no longer the same. How do you reconcile to the fact, "Oh Lord, the times are so difficult! Why?" God would say, "Did I make any accident? If I put you in this time, that's because I chose you for this time. You cannot fail if you are with Me." We have the saying in English, "Tough times do not last but tough people do." You have to look at the goodness of God when people say, "God is good all the time," that means that every hardship he is going through has come from the hands of a good God to prepare you for hard times knowing that He has prepared you, "I have called you; I have chosen you for a time like this." It's not an accident. So many people will become romantic and say, "I wish I was born fifty years earlier." You would have never run your race because you were not meant for that age; you are meant for this age." Run without quitting because you have to endure hostility. We will endure hostility.

The Christians in India are the softest target. If you look at it, less than 2% of the population but most of India has been educated by us, have been treated by us; the orphans have been fed by us, the Old Age Homes have been run by us – a small percentage taking care of so much but hostility because we preach Christ and if you beat them, they don't do anything. If you burn their Churches, they stand there and watch. They don't do anything because that's our God. They think our God is weak but they don't realize that our God is great. But unless you know the truth and you are strong in the truth, you will not endure hostility. Enduring hostility does not mean you grit your teeth and stand there; you continue to serve in love. Otherwise, you have not endured. That's why you have to run by the rule book. That's how Jesus did it. He endured such hostility but He is our model. He says, "Don't,"

***...lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.***

The only way possible is by coming together as a set of common people, with individual races but common purpose – the Gospel, the Kingdom of God and we encourage each other and say, "Everything is on the altar and I'm not running this race alone. I need to look at my blind spots. I'm running on the race. On the other side, eyes haven't seen nor ears heard for what is prepared for those whom God loves." One day, this will all end. The Kingdom of God will be established on earth. The knowledge of God will cover the earth like the waters. We know it all. We are one set of people alone who have read the end of the Book.

The Pastor, I forgot his name, who preached in Times Square Church last Sunday. I love him. He is so funny. Tim Dilena. You have to listen to his message. Maybe, third Saturday, we will listen. He was so funny. He says, "One line." When he was reading about the record of Kings about Josiah; he says, it struck his mind – "They found the Book of the Lord in the House of the Lord." He said, "It stuck." Where do you expect the Book of the Lord to be lost? In the house of the Lord. They found the Book of the Law that was lost in the house of the Lord. He said, "It is like saying that your lunch is lost in the kitchen." Think. It's finding your car which was lost in the garage. Think. Doesn't it sound ridiculous? But that's what is happening. The Book of the Law has been lost in the house of the Lord. It is not going to be lost in the world. It has not been lost in the world because the world never had it. It has been lost in the house of the Lord and unless we find it, rediscover the Book of the Law in the house of the law; that is what we are called. What are we called? The house of the Lord. Unless we rediscover that, "This is the Book and I have seen the end, O Lord; I have seen the beginning, O Lord and You have seen my end, I'm going to let this Book and Your Spirit define my life. I am in this race." I'm running this race and I'm going to endure because He endured. I'm going to consider Him. After looking at all the cloud of witnesses, some great champions – some who lost, some who won, in whichever way you want to look at it – *Hebrews 11* – the whole list, finally, I'm going to consider Him, who endured such hostility. Because unlike anybody else, not even Paul, no other saint, this is one Man who should never have faced hostility because He never sinned and He forever blessed. He never armed a fly; He only blessed but He faced such hostility of sinners against Himself and God says, "Look at Him. Learn from Him. Don't get weary. Don't get discouraged in your souls." Put it all on the altar. Everything has to find its purpose in God. Young children sitting over

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here, even your studies, your career, your future – everything; if it is not found in God, you will be just another good person. The world is full of good people. The overcomers are all great people. They are not just good; they are great people because they understood the greatness of the Living God. They were all average, simple, ordinary people who got hold of God's purpose and ended up as great. Average. Very average. Most of the people in the Old Testament, if you put them here today, they won't pass one of your class tests. Not even Peter or Paul. They won't pass. But they were divinely equipped because they found their purpose.

So, tonight, as we are here; I'm closing here now. As we are here, think on these two verses. Meditate upon these two verses – 'lay aside the weight and the sin. Enter the race'. Run the race. Don't live just another Christian life. There are plenty here. Enter the race and finish the race. Crown is only for those who finish the race. There is nothing in Heaven for those who entered the race and did not finish. Everything in Heaven is reserved for those who finished the race. Enter the race. Run the race. Finish the race and we shall meet there that day and see who are the champions. Nobody knows who are the champions. That's why Scripture says in *Romans*, "The whole of creation groan for the sons of God to be revealed because nobody knows who is going to rule this world for a thousand years. Nobody knows." Not even the angels have any clue. Only God knows. I cannot even compare Hebsibah's race with Deepika's because they are not running the same race. It's different. So, nobody can judge anybody's race. Only God can because each race is unique. What is common is – put aside every weight but the weights are different and the sins are different. So, we are running a race. Amen? Shall we pray?

### Closing Prayer:

*Father, we just thank You for this evening, Lord. Thank You for bringing us safely. Thank You for speaking to us. We continue to pray, Father, that we will both the prophetic and the priestly voices speaking in our lives, O Lord. We need that prophetic voice so that we see our blind spots and we take correction. We need the priestly blessings, O Lord, so that we can reign in life, O Father, because that Your purpose for Your people – that we reign over every sin, over the flesh, over the world, over the devil – we reign, O Lord. For that, we need both these voices in our life, O Father. I pray we continue to meditate upon Your Word, O Father, that we will be willing to give up to go up, O Lord – every one of us here, Lord. Thank You, Lord. Thank You for each one who are here. I pray, especially for the young ones, Lord, who are having their exams, I pray You would continue to bless them. As they go into their examination halls tomorrow, Lord, they will write integrity, Lord; not taking help or helping others and they will do their best, O Lord, and You will give them honour according to Your plan and Your purpose for them, Lord. We thank You, Father. We praise You. We worship You. We glorify You, Lord. For in Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.*