

Run Your Race!

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Father, this morning we come to You. We look to You Father. We know Father, the days are getting closer and closer and closer. If the ears of our spirits were to be opened we would hear the hoof beats of the horsemen approaching. Touch us, give us hearing ears. Let us not be lost in this tide of this world O Father. Help us to keep our eyes on You. For that day and that hour no one knows. Help us to keep our hearts stayed on You. For only You can keep their hearts safe. I commit everyone, online and offline everyone, into Your hands. I stand here and I confess that I need You. I need You more than I needed You yesterday and I will need You more tomorrow than today. And I confess what You said, to Yours disciples who walked with You for three and a half years, "You can do nothing without Me." And I confess that I can do nothing without You. There is only one dependency, Lord, that is right in Your eyes; we are dependent entirely on You. And I pray that each one will sit, wherever they are, here or at home and in far away nations, with the attitude - 'Lord, I am desperate for You. Not because of my problems, but because of the songs that we sang today. For the sum total of Salvation is Christ in me. Speak to us this morning. Even to me, speak Lord. You are the only Speaker, Spirit of God. For in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

I hope you listened to yesterday's message. If you did not, when you get time please listen. The title for yesterday's message was Faith to Freedom to Focus to Fortitude. Fortitude means endurance, courage. The mindset that never gives up. It all starts with faith.

We started all this few feels back at *Genesis 16:7-8*

Genesis 16:7-8

⁷Now the Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. ⁸And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai."

The question God asks, always remember in the Bible where angel is mention with a capital A - Angel, it is assumed to be Jesus. The Angel of the Lord.

So the question is asked - where are you going? Where are you coming from? In simple language the question I asked, wherever we are today, in whatever situation we are in today, how did we reach there? Somebody put in a prayer request - Lord, be with me during this season of wilderness.

Wilderness is not a bad place if you have been brought there by God. It is a bad place if you reach there by yourself. So the question is - is it self? Or is it the Spirit? How did you reach there, by sight or by faith? By flesh or the Spirit of God? That is the only question. And it is not to condemn us, but it is to help us. How did you reach here? And the solution is - go back and submit to your mistress. I will take care of you and your child, don't worry. 1000s of years later Hagar had no clue that her obedience would determine the destiny of billions of people; 40 nations that call itself Islamic. The future hangs of the thread, whether a slave girl would listen to what Jesus is saying.

So the obedience is not just connected to yourself. It is connected to the subsequent generations. So it can be iniquity or it can be a blessing. So you are not obeying God for yourself. You are also obeying God for your generations. David's obedience and all the subsequent generations most of them were disobedient. But God would still not destroy them because He said, "it is because of your father David." One man's obedience. So please remember, no man is an Island. No man lives for himself. Whether you know it or not everyone of us is living for others; we impact other's destiny. Even if you don't get married - *Let the barren woman sing.*

So how did you reach there? By God? Or by man? If it is by God it doesn't matter how terrible that situation is. Joseph is in the dungeon but the Spirit of God is with him. David is in the cave called Addulum but GOd is with him. Daniel is in the lions' den, but God is with him. And his three friends are in the fire, but God is with them. So it doesn't matter how you

reach your lowest point (physical speaking in worldly terms). It doesn't matter. Who brought you there is the only thing that matters. If it is God it doesn't matter, your deliverance will be just in an instant. All these are stories. These are not fictions. Bible is not fiction, it is history, true history. And the only thing we learn from history is history. You learn from it to be encouraged from God's history and you learn from other's history not to repeat it.

Few weeks back we have looked at Heaven and we wish that everyone makes it there, even your worst enemy, because there is no exit. You are so angry, you want revenge and you want your enemy to be in hell. And He goes to hell and then you change your mind and when you start feeling sorry for your enemy, how do you get him out? There is no exit there. So we wish that everyone would go to Heaven. But sadly many choose to go to Hell by not receiving the forgiveness and the mercy God so freely offers.

We saw Hell and it is a terrible, terrible place. Listen to it again because we need to get our head on our shoulders. Salvation is the beginning of our journey to Heaven. And so many of us, including me, I am one of it because my salvation was not radical. Thought something changed from that day itself it was not so radical. If your salvation can be radical, or at some point in your life you can turn radical. You will experience the full power of the Kingdom. We saw that, how salvation, the terms that God uses - *If any man is in Christ Jesus he is a new creation. Old things have passed away behold all things have become new.* That is the state of mind. It is very radical. And there are people in the Bible, you will see that they are so radical and God used them radically.

Or the other one we saw from *Galatians 5:6* - *in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision.* It doesn't matter whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, a Dalit or a Brahmin, it is irrelevant. The only thing that matters is a new creation. It is so radical. It is so, so radical.

Hebrews 12:1-2

¹Therefore 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, 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.

Let us stop there. ***Therefore, we also. Therefore*** - it is talking about chapter 11. We have names of so many people written over there. The chapter is the chapter of faith. Starting with Abel onwards and finally innumerable unnamed people. Champions of faith, we call them. Then chapter 12 begins by,

Hebrews 12:1-2

¹Therefore 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, 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.

Suddenly in life you see a different prism altogether. God uses different illustrations. Like the building, the foundation stone is God, Christ and 'any man who builds...' or He uses illustrations in term of a field or the garden like the sower and the vineyard. He uses different terms. But here He uses a different illustration of a race; life is a race and you have to win. And you need to realize - this is my destiny, this is why I was born. This is why I was chosen.

Like the greats used to say - there are only two days that are important in a man's life; the day you were born and the day you realize why. Most of the people are born but they never discover why.

So life is a race; it is an intense, intense race. And if you go to *2 Timothy 4:7* we have a stalwart, probably one of those brightest shiny stars when we reach eternity.

2 Timothy 4:7

⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

I have fought the good fight; so there is conflict, intense conflict in this race. ***I have finished the race;*** so you have to finish the race. It is not that you have participated in the race. Whether you like it or not everybody is participating. If you are saved you are in the race. Knowingly, unknowingly the Father put everyone into a race. You got the admission in the school, so whether you like it or not, whether you bunk class or not exams will come and go. And we do not realize that every child of God is going through God's grading continuously. That is why this Communion Table is put there so that if any man judges himself, he himself will not be judged by God and will not be judge with the world.

So those four parameters were put there when the church began. Apostles' Doctrine, fellowship, Lord's table and Prayer. And the Communion Table is put there so that we are constantly judging. In this race, in this life called race, which is compared to a race, how far have I progressed? Because we always say that self-judgment is the best. So that you don't have to say, 'That one condemned me. This one has annoyed me.' You condemn yourself, you get annoyed with yourself and that is the best judgment you can make. Of course it is good to ask others if you are a person who doesn't get offended.

But if you are a person who gets offended then first deal with it before you ask counsel from others as to how you look. Because one of the greatest danger in the Kingdom of God is offence. Once offence comes in you stop hearing the Word of God. It is a reality. You don't hear it, it won't get in any more. It stops outside your ears. That is why you have to guard your ears from offence. Be very careful.

In 1968, in the Summer Olympics there was a gentleman called John Stephen Akhwari if you talk about 1968 Olympics nobody in the world remembers that Olympic spirit. But there are instances which people remember. If I am right he was from Tanzania. During the marathon he fell and he injured himself severely. But he got up, he still tried to run, he is running. The marathon is over, the medals have been given, but he is still coming and finally he limped into the stadium and everybody stood up and applauded him. Then the news reporter asked him, 'Why did you run knowing that you are not going to get anything?' His answer was, 'My nation did not send me 5000 Km to start the race, they sent me to finish the race. That is a worldly race.'

Jesus did not die on the Cross for us to start the race. The price that was paid is for us to finish the race. And it will take enormous endurance because you have to keep fighting. Your and my worst enemy, you don't have to look around, is inside. The worst enemy is inside.

Hebrews 12:2

² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

If you read through the Bible and also see in life, you will see that many started, but why will very few finish? Because somewhere on the way they take their eyes off of Jesus. They lose focus, they take their eyes off Jesus. Both in faith and in love, remember the church is Ephesus in *Revelation 2*? They were fantastic in faith but they took their eyes off Jesus in love. We take our eyes off Jesus.

If you actually, statistically study Hebrews 11, it is a very scary book. Because in Genesis it is written that Adam had many sons and daughters. But only one son is mentioned; Abel. By the time you come to the second man, seven generations are over. These are people who finished. Enoch. And by the time you come to third person 3 generations are over. You come to Noah, then Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. So that line seems to have passed on. So if you look through there, how many people are mentioned?

How many millions, probably billions of people have come and gone and people are there, many of them are saved, lots of them are saved but nobody is finishing their race to get their eternal rewards. So the Bible says,

Hebrews 12:2

² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

So the Bible says, in both the verses 1 and 2, that there is one quality needed. That is endurance. Endurance, like we were speaking yesterday, all the virtues are neutral. It is valuable in the world. But in the world all these virtues are directed to self. In the Kingdom it is directed towards God. One thing, if you haven't learnt anything in all these years in GTC Hyderabad, is the Spirit of endurance to sit for the Word for 2 hours. That is endurance. Whether you listen or not is a different thing, but you will sit there. Most people cannot, I am telling you, they cannot. You go to another church, they cannot handle it. Because they never were taught how to endure listening to the Word of God. And the problem is that if you don't learn to endure in listening I can tell you very clearly how far you will study. There is a limit. Because the higher you go in the world, in academics, you need enormous endurance.

So when Pastor Vijay was doing his PhD Jacinth used to call me, saying, 'Pastor, I can't get through to Vijay.' Because we both come from the same stream of PhD, doing a research that is the way it is. If you want to finish your Thesis it will need enormous endurance. To get those two letter called 'Dr.' before your name the university gives you 5+3 years, 8 years. 5 years and then the extension of maximum 3 years. And at the end of 8th years if you have not submitted your Thesis and it doesn't approve and come back your 8 years is gone. You have to restart all over again on a different subject, reregister. It needs enormous endurance.

So it is a very good quality. If you are young, if you want to do academically well, if you want to reach the heights you will have to endure. But remember, that quality is so important in the last days. He who endures till the end shall be saved. Why? The book of Hebrews was specifically to people who were struggling in the first century, and therefore it to us as well, because the last days and the first days are almost similar. The danger of drifting, *Hebrews 2:1*,

Hebrews 2:1

¹Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

Drifting is so slow and so subtle you don't even realize it. To the harbor the boat is tied to that pillar. And by some chance the rope comes off the next day morning you come and see that it is somewhere deep in the ocean. How did it reach there? Gently it just drifted away. Do you know where you drift away? You drift away in your mind. When your mind goes your body follows. It could be just one step. Abraham goofed up, let us put the blame on the right person. Famine came, he panicked, went into Egypt, came back, put it right with God, but another young man went with him, Lot. He went in and came back and certain pictures were registered in his mind. Certain pictures are registered in all your minds. In everybody's minds pictures are registered, that is why you need to go.

Do you know what Jesus today His disciples who walked with Him for 3 and half years? They walked with Him, they are not even born again. The Spirit has not yet been released. But He made a statement in *John 15:3*. He looked at them and said, 'You know what? Your clean because of the Word.' These are practical things, the final lesson Jesus taught about washing our feet. Every day when you go into the world and come back you have to allow the Word to clean you, cleanse you. If the Word doesn't cleanse you do you know what remains inside? The world. Abraham went to the altar and cleaned his mind out. Lot didn't. And so many people haven't and the problem is that the day will come when you have the freedom, the money power to make your own choices where you are no longer accountable to somebody who says, 'Sit down' and you don't have to sit down anymore. And on that day that picture will come back and you will make your choices accordingly.

So one day Lot was given that freedom to choose. Immediately the mind went back to that picture and he made his choice accordingly and he drifted, he drifted and drifted. And he drifted and he drifted, doing well in the world, prospering and prospering and one day there was a knock on the door; Judgment day. He had drifted so far away that on that day it cost him the salvation of his whole family. It is very subtle, very, very subtle. That is why these warnings are given to stay in faith and continuously progress in faith is a fight, it is a battle. What happens? In *Hebrews 3:12* the warning is given over there.

Hebrews 3:12

¹² Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;

You depart from the living God. From drifting you depart. You think Demas left all of a sudden in one day? No way. He was drifting in his mind. See, two people could be going to the same cities. They are all going through gentile cities. One goes preaching and the other goes shopping. Everybody thinks I am funny but the fact of the matter is that I never go on a mission and go on a site-seeing. I do not go. It doesn't matter whether it is Singapore or Korea or Bangkok, or Dubai, or any other place, I simply don't go, because that is not what I went there for. And I will not allow myself to be distracted. So Demas must have gone. Paul is going and he is going with Paul. Paul goes to this Gentile city, that city and this city, but Demas' mindset is different, it is drifting away. And one day it is written – *Demas loved the world and left*.

So you have to guard your hearts and your minds. That is the way it works. That is where you need endurance. These three words that are used in the Bible; one is endurance, the other is patience and the other is perseverance. They are similar and yet they are different. Endure means to stay under the weight of it. We keep talking about Kota Rajasthan, thank God Anuraag came out of that safely. The number of suicides in that place. The parents put their children in Kota Rajasthan to get into IIT, 28 committed suicide this year. Think about it. What was the intention of putting their children over there? So that they would go through that intense coaching, crack the IIT entrance and go into an IIT university. But before they could go through the entrance the pressure got onto them and they killed themselves.

And so many people are struggling under the weight of life. It is because you were supposed to be building endurance. Endurance, stay under the weight of it, don't quit. Patience is more of a passive word, patience means when you are enduring it you are just quiet, and you are gentle. That is what Paul is writing to the people, from the prison, 'Let your gentle be known because the Lord is at hand.' Meaning deliverance is at hand, it will come, but just be quiet. Don't lose it. 'I endured it but I lost it' no. he says, 'Don't do that. Be quiet, be gentle. God will deliver you in His appointed time. Perseverance is not just enduring and being quiet; it is pushing forward. You are moving, maybe you are moving one inch at a time.

The war that going on between Ukraine and Russia over a year and Ukraine keeps on saying, 'We are progressing, but slowly.' Sometimes battles are won one inch at a time. We talk about the Second World War and finally the Nazis surrendered. But do you know, on D-day how many died? How many died in one day. And the Normandy landing, it was just to get a beachhead. For the whole battle that will go on for years you need one foothold to start. For that thousands died. It looked like their death was in vain. No it wasn't. That was the first step towards victory.

In the same way, on the negative context, it can also be the first step to defeat. *Do not let the sun go down on your anger. Do not give the devil a foothold.* That is the first step of your defeat. Something you are hold in your mind against somebody. You gave him a foot-hold. Now he is working on it. He's got a second foothold, a third foothold and a fourth foothold. God says, 'Deal with these things.' Because we are talking about eternity. Why people are not able to progress. So there is a positive side and there is a negative side. Children with their parents and spouses with one another, because ultimately it is the family.

The brothers of Joseph held something against him when he was actually innocent. He might have been a little ignorant by telling his dreams to them but he was innocent, he meant them no harm at all. But they held it in their heart. 20 years later when they were all bowing before him, you need to realize that they held something in their heart and they haven't progressed one inch in their spiritual life. They are where they exactly are and they actually regressed. They haven't progressed at all. While Joseph who held nothing in his heart is going places. Yes he went through slavery, through the dungeon but then there he is seated high and above. You have to see life as it is.

People are so angry. But if you are saved you cannot be angry. I can understand the unsaved being angry. But how can the saved be angry? Because if you are saved it means that you are the elect. And if you are elect then everything that happened in your life was ordained by God, including your parents, your home, everything. And even if some of them were terrible things and your own sins and mistakes, if you continue to choose to love God, God will work it all around for you good. So believers do not have the liberty of being angry. Or jealous, or envious, or any of these things. Do you know why? It is because we have got a Father in Heaven who is working out our salvation. He is working it all out for our good. And that is what God is talking about. You have to endure, otherwise you will drift away. And then you may depart.

And then this is one of the scariest verses in the Bible, for me personally, because I have broken my head over it. I have tried reading up so many commentaries on it in these last 30 years so that I could give hope to my hearers.

Hebrews 6:4-6

⁴For it is impossible (this word 'impossible' if it were written 'difficult' I would have taken it with much, much, comfort) ***for those who were once enlightened*** (their eyes were opened), ***and have tasted the heavenly gift*** (the Holy Spirit), ***and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit,*** **⁵and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,** (they have gone through it all) **⁶if they fall away,** (so even after all this you can fall away) ***to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.***

You cannot take them back to class 1, that is where salvation begins; repentance unto God and faith towards God. It is impossible, it says. But I still want to believe that this verse just means that it is not that they are not saved, but they will never be rewarded in Heaven. Because they will just come through with the foundation stone alone and no construction at all. ***Since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.*** I still do not know, I am just trying to comfort you. But if it is not true it is not a true comfort.

The book of Hebrews is of exhortations and warnings. People who depart, people to drift and people who fall away. Now this is not talking to unbelievers. This is talking to believers. So God says, 'Hang in there.' And I am telling you still, 1983 December, at the beaches of Kovalam, Veli lake, at the youth hostel over there, the third day of the youth camp. That night, when there was a call for committing your life for ministry, I was a fresh believer, that night I put my hand up. I looked around that mine was the only hand up. Till today my hand is up and I pray to God that it will never come down. I put my hand up without knowing what I was getting into. Over the years I am still discovering because you surrender only by faith and you will discover on the way.

When I look at all those people who started with me, you know, most of them have fallen away. From 1983 I have my WhatsApp groups of my college people. I can read their posts and I know that none of them are in the Lord. All gone.

So the question is – will you run? Will you finish? There is a race marked out for each of us. Though it is kind of similar yet it is different. Because each one's life is different. If it is similar then we would start competing with each other. And there is no competition in the Kingdom of God. We only complement each other. That was the first law in the book of Genesis. Husband and wife are to complement each other, not compete with each other. After the fall, the world turned it around into competition. They are not supposed to compete with each other at all, neither at home, nor at the Church. And believers even in the workplace you are not in competition. For your exaltation comes from God and should only come from God.

So please remember, we are running our personal, individual race. Once you know that, it is very easy to help one another. And not push one another, devour and bite one another. That is what Apostle Paul says.

2 Timothy 2:5

⁵And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

He is talking about life as a race. He says, if you run, the problem, the major issue, which you understand in the world is that you have to run according to the rules. Do you see 9 AM to 12 noon on Sundays as sacrosanct? Think about it. Why is that both the parents and the children will be so agitated tomorrow to reach school on time or your workplace on time? But you don't think 9 AM on a Sunday morning is sacrosanct. So you are not playing by the rules. Why don't you think we can worship the first 30 minutes of worship? That means you are not playing by the rules. Why is that when the prayer request are read out, especially some of the serious ones, you are not noting it down in your journal? That means you are not playing by the rules. Why is that when the Word is preached your mind is all over the place? That means you are not competing according to the rules. I am talking about a 3-hour period in 7 days, for an average Christian. That is all he will reluctantly give God. And even those three hours we do not play by the rules.

Now do you understand the depths of God's patience, and perseverance and endurance that He doesn't give up on us? Even when we give up on ourselves He doesn't give up on us. Think! Think! That is why God gave us brains. Animals don't think. So you have to run the race by the rules.

Psalm 119:32

³² ***I will run the course of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart.***

So this is the rule book. *I will run the course of Your commandments. That is an awesome rendition, right?* Meaning, life is a race and the Word of God is the course. Do you know why that guy finished? I was always fascinated by David. Because the others were all like sacrosanct people – Joseph and Daniel. Like I said, for every category of people we have examples. If you are young, all the young ones are asked to look to Joseph and Daniel, these are young people who ran well and started very early in their youth. So these are the cloud of witnesses. Look to them.

If you are around middle age and goofed up, all messed up, look at Jacob and look to David how they finished so well. If you are pretty old and discouraged and depressed, look to Moses and Aaron and all who were called only in their 80s and they finished very well. Moses will be buried by God and Aaron will stand in the middle of the dead and the living and literally like Jesus he will stand there and stop the wrath of God. They finished well. The only thing about Aaron is about making the golden calf, we don't talk about him standing in the middle of the plague. He finished well.

So you have this cloud of witnesses, but if you are young, start well. And here is David – 'Your commandments, Your Word is the course I will use, the rule book is the Word of God. I will run according to that.' Yet this (Bible) is the most printed and the most neglected Book in the world. Yet this is life. The last days sign is lawlessness. Lawlessness will increase. The last days will be like the last verse in the book of Judges.

Judges 21:25

²⁵ ***In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.***

That is lawless. We will say, 'I am not lawless.' Do you know what lawless means? You submit to no one, you are accountable to nobody, and you are responsible for nothing, not even your own life. That is lawlessness. You don't have to go break a bank window or throw stones. That is not what it means. You may do nothing of this sort where the police doesn't even have your name in the system. But you are lawless. The simple question to ask is that – who do you submit to? Are you under authority? Under authority and then under authority. First you learn to be under the visible authority, and after that you have learnt to be under authority whether visible or invisible.

Now brother John Wesley and sis. Tabitha, they came a year, a year and a half. I didn't actually know them, I didn't know them. But the first thing I notice was that the day he came, this was a strange church, he has never been here before, when the service was over he was already helping out to put away the things. Did anybody tell him? Would I ever ask him? No. he is a senior person, I would never ask him. But that the was first thing I noticed. It doesn't matter. Remember Yohan who came from Bangalore? He came here for the first time and the next thing you see he is up here setting up the church and putting away the things. Why? because you know what you are under, nobody has to tell you. Because I am under, I am responsible. It is as simple as that – I am responsible.

On the opposite of that is lawlessness. Submit to no one, accountable to no one, responsible for nothing. That is a very dangerous place to be. Because after a point in life you don't have to be told. If you have to be told every time what the right thing to do is, then you will never ever prosper or grow in the Kingdom of God. Never. Understand that. Even Jesus who is the Son of God learnt obedience by what He suffered. And after He is perfect in obedience He became the servant of all. And God did not show another way for Him. That is why Jesus says, "I am the way."

But when He leads me, He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. When He is on the race His commandments are His course and His paths of righteousness. We all know.

Psalm 23:3

³ ***He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.***

Isaiah 35:8

⁸ A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray.

So there is paths of righteousness. There is Highway of Holiness in this race and the Bible asks us to go on the Highway of Holiness. You don't need education; your education quality is irrelevant. Even if you are a fool, if you are on that road you cannot go astray. Let me ask you this question – how can a 17 years old Hebrews shepherd boy with no education become the governor of Egypt? It is because he stuck to that Highway. So he couldn't go astray. And when Pharaoh needed somebody he said, 'You are that person, because I see the Spirit of God in you.'

So two paths marked out – righteousness and holiness. This is a very powerful verse, *Isaiah 35:8. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray*, even if you are uneducated, illiterate. In the Kingdom of God illiteracy is very good, considering what modern education has become.

Matthew 7:13-14

¹³ "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴ Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Look at the way it is used – wide and narrow; broad and difficult. There are many, many, many ways to hell. But only one way to Heaven. and the way is a Person and His life. In *John 14:3*, after talking about Heaven saying that He is going to His Father's house, there are many rooms to prepare for you, and that He will come back, this is the question that is asked,

John 14:3-6

³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴ And where I go you know, and the way you know." ⁵ Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

So we need to ask – what is the race? Life is the race. What is the way? Jesus is the way. What is the reward? Jesus is the reward.

Let me ask you this question – tomorrow night, by around 8-9 PM will Tej and Tanmey be looking at the gifts or looking at each other? Did they wait 10 years for those gifts? What are they going to look at? Do you know why the elders and everyone took their crowns and put them at His feet? Because they did not run their race for the crown, they ran for Him. Christ is the way. Life is the race. Christ is the prize. That is why Paul will be a stalwart – forgetting everything that behind, I press towards for what he took hold of me, I want to take hold of Him. Get it right!

1 Corinthians 9:24-25

²⁴ 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.

Rather I should ask – do you know? Do you know that you are in a race? And if we are in a race, are we running to win? We are in a race, are we running to win?

²⁵ And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

So the Bible puts two things across – perishable, imperishable. Temporal, eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:18 (one of my favorite verses in the Bible)

¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Some things are very temporary, some things may last a little longer. When we reached Ranchi, we came out waiting for our luggage. We waited, we waited, we waited. And finally like a trophy our box comes. The top is broken into pieces.

Thank God the lining kept everything inside. It didn't spill. The wheel is in one place, the whole thing is broken into pieces. Of course you are mad, you want to be made, but you don't. by now you learn not to get mad because he said, 'Be gentle, don't be mad.' The poor lady was all hassled, 'Sir we know it is completely broken, it is our fault,' bla, bla, bla. But the Spirit of God is telling me something else, 'It is not her fault. It is not the airlines' fault.' I was wondering, 'How can it be? It is the airlines fault, they must have thrown it and broken it.' He said, 'No. Learn one thing. When you don't travel, don't take your suitcases which are made of acrylic and store it in the loft on the top floor, because the summer in Hyderabad is 42-45 degree. Because it was sitting there all summer it became brittle and when they threw it it broke. Next time put it down.' That is the first thing I told my wife, this year onwards put it down.

Otherwise you will get angry and you get angry with the wrong people. You should be angry with yourself. You should have used your common sense. And I keep telling the young people, don't park your car, don't park your bike in the sun, move it to the shade because it will last longer. It is so simple. Sitting in the airport God says, 'Don't be angry with them, be angry with yourself. You are at fault.' Sometimes we are angry with the wrong people, we should be angry at ourselves. Be angry and get mad at yourself. 'Why am I in this mess? because of me.' it is so simple right? Every time He speaks like that I understand the Scripture – he will never leave you. He will never forsake you, He will be with you in the waiting corridor also.

So the Bible says, there is something that is temporary. Everything that you see is temporal. Everybody look at each other. Look at each other and if you believe say, 'You are eternal.' The only thing that is eternal is people whom God saved. All things are temporary. We love things and use people. God says, 'Love people and use things.' Everything you see, even what you are going through now is temporary. It is called growing up pains. Anisha, your labour pain will be temporary. I never heard of someone going through labour pains for 2 months. It never happens. So that is also temporary. These things will all pass away. But the child in your womb is eternal. By your faith and your husband's faith the child has already been set apart. We sang that song, 'Holy, holy, holy, holy.' The actually word 'holy' means that you are actually set apart from the rest of creation; He is the Creator. He is absolutely set apart. And the Bible says that by faith positionally we are set apart for the Holy One. And by the faith of the parents the baby has already been set apart in the Kingdom. Think about it.

That one song that was going on in my mind, 'Set apart! Set Apart! Set apart!' do people really know what it means. He is so holy and lifted up and set apart and we are set apart for Him. And He says, 'You are set apart for Me. Now run your race. So that on that day I can set a certain people apart and tell them reign with Me in eternity.'

1 Corinthians 9:26

²⁶ Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.

Run with certainty. Be sure. Let me tell you something. In this world there are no guarantees. After all your struggles, you go for an interview if it favoritism, nepotism and we use the line, 'It is not what you know, but who you know that matters.' But the problem is what happens to the person who doesn't know anybody? Understand reality, that is how it works. Nothing is going to change in this world. When Jesus comes there will be rewards. So be very, very certain – 'I am not running for a perishable crown. I am running for an imperishable crown.' For the imperishable crown the standards are high. But He doesn't leave you alone, He is with you all the way.

The ones who have seen Charan's videos where he was playing football. You can see, when he runs, the voice behind screaming, 'Charan! Charan!' who is that? That is the mother. Adopted mother, screaming her guts out. 'Yes! You are running, I am with you in the spirit all the way.' You are not running alone. Though you seem to be running alone you are not running alone. Somebody is running with you who wants you to win every step of the way. He is for you, He is not against you. But if you are against Him then He will walk contrary to you. He says, 'You don't realize what I saved you for.'

Hebrews 12:1

¹Therefore 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,

Therefore we also... are you getting it? These are all witnesses of what? They are witnesses of faith. Because we preach for 2 hours don't get intellectual. Faith is not an intellectual thing; it is a living thing. The problem is that if we preach too much they become very intellectual. They know the Word of God in their head but you hardly see it in their life. Faith is to be lived out. There is no quiz questions in Heaven. Monday morning wake up, 'Who was Abraham's fifth son?' what difference does it make? The only question should be – am I walking like Abraham and walking blameless in His sight?

This isn't about knowledge, this is about the knowledge of God, how God lives, how God thinks, how God walks and He puts across His Son who became a human being, and said, 'Walk before Us. I am the way.' So the Bible is saying, let us run, but run in faith. If ever you bring sight in it will not be counted. If you were there yesterday and many other times I have said this,

2 Peter 1:5

⁵ But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge,

Virtue can stand on its own. Like I said, the world also loves virtue. It is not connected to faith. Ps. Vijay endured and finished his PhD, now he just takes that endurance and applies it in the Kingdom of God. So he had endurance on the other side and now he has endurance on this side. Patience, endurance, perseverance, honesty, righteousness, integrity, these are all virtues that the mafia also want. It is towards them, not towards God. Faithfulness. In China if you are faithful to the communist party you will rise up, but if you are faithful towards God you will die. So the Bible is talking about – *Add to your faith virtue.*

Be careful. We are witnesses of faith. And faith is the most beautiful gift that God has given us. It is not just an equalizer. It is more than an equalizer. What Modi, Putin, Biden and Xi together cannot do, anyone here can do by faith, you overcome the world. By faith we overcome the world. Think about it. God is awesome. The reason is, most people right from the beginning till today, in this world are poor. Riches and power are accumulated in the hands of the few and ultimately it will be all accumulated in the hands of one man and under him a few; he is called the Anti-Christ.

So even if you succeed generally, you are still bound to fail. So don't run after success in the world because it will not last. Something has been set in *Romans 8* God puts it like this. When sin came in something happened,

Romans 8:20-21

²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; ²¹ because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Creation is subject to futility. If you run your race outside of God, even if you are Solomon and achieved all your heart's purposes at the end it will taste like dust. Empty! Empty! Empty! Vanity! Vanity! Vanity! An entire book called Ecclesiastes was simply written for people for every age to tell them – don't waste your time on earth. It is useless. And all you young men your dreams will die, unless it is given by God.

Therefore God says, 'Run for the eternal, run for faith,' because faith is what changes the dynamics. Look at *James 2:5*, another of my favorite verses,

James 2:5

⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

He has chosen them to be rich in faith, not that they have it. It is easy for them to grow in faith. First blessing in the new Covenant, *Matthew 5:3*,

Matthew 5:3

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Why? because they will quietly sit at His feet. From the beginning till the end David was a poor man. For a season he became rich and he fell; he fell very badly because he stopped that poverty of the spirit and became rich. So Nathan was sent to him and the illustration was given to him about a rich man and a poor man. And he asked, 'Who is that?' Nathan said, 'You are that rich man.' You were poor, when you cried I saved you from all your troubles. Right? Now you have become rich. And you took a poor man's lamb. Don't ever grow rich in the spirit, stay poor, because God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith. The rich will become rich in knowledge and very poor in faith.

So the Bible says, run your race in faith. I don't want to repeat the things which I thought yesterday. It is all there available in the public domain. 'Faith has to work out in love – *Galatians 5:6*, otherwise if you read *1 Corinthians 13:1-3* it will be counted as nothing. It is not enough that you be a giant of faith. It has to work out in love. And you take the entire Old Testament, you can find only a handful of people who ran like that. In the entire book of Genesis the only loving person I find in that is Joseph. Not Abraham, not Isaac. Abraham didn't even really love his wife. The only one you can find who had kindness and compassion and longsuffering, all connected with love, is Joseph. After that you have to wait 500 years to find Moses, who would rather die than let his people perish who wanted to kill him. Then you have to search through the Scripture to find a David. After that there is nobody. They were all stalwarts of faith. They are recorded in *Hebrews 11*. That is why there are no overcomers who will get the crown in the Kingdom from the Old Covenant. They are all New Covenant people. Get this.

Again remember what I told you, love cannot stand alone, it is very dangerous. And that is the problem with so many of Heroines and Heros who are looking at me. Your love is Sodium, explosive. It got attached to the wrong one, it didn't get attached to Chlorine and become salt. Otherwise you would have been the salt in your class, the salt in your college, the salt in your office. Instead you are Sodium and you are exploding or soon you will explode. And some of you are Chlorine; very legalistic, you stink. You are the only saved one in your office but nobody wants to come anywhere near you. They close their nose when you are around because you are like Chlorine. That is why God, who is the inventor of science, called man as salt which is sodium and chlorine put together. They have to go together. In humor I am telling you the truth. Don't laugh, think about it while you are laughing – am I sodium or chlorine?

Man was created only to love God first and foremost and then only man. if Adam had loved God with all his heart, all his mind and all his strength, when Eve gave him that fruit he would have said, 'Honey, no. God said, no.' she would have died and taken away, another rib would have been taken and another woman would have been made all over again. And it would have been a different story. Not your wife first, not your children first, it will become bondage, not your husband first. No. submit to your husband, yes, but that first place of love is reserved only for God. That is the only way you will become powerful and useful and it doesn't destroy you. Otherwise you will end up like Jacob, work 14 years for a woman who doesn't love you and who is sitting on her father's idols.

Jacob loved Rachel. But Rachel didn't love Jacob. In our old days we used to say, 'This man is after one-way traffic.' In our college days this is what was told, 'This fellow is wasting his time, the girl has no eyes for him, he is wasting his time, one-way traffic.' And finally that traffic is closed; the girl also died. Rachel is gone, she is gone. Now he is vicariously loving Rachel through Joseph and Benjamin. And God said, 'I have a plan with Joseph. If he stays with you he will never finish his race. So I will take him out and sell him as a slave.' *Therefore God sent a man before them.*

If you love your children more than God He will take them out. If they have a plan and a purpose in their lives. He will take them out of your hands because you will become a stumbling block. Understand how it works. That is why when you wake up in the morning the first thing you do is surrender your family to God, 'Lord, they are Yours. I am at the altar and I belong to You and they belong to You. Let Your will be done.'

Hebrews 12:1

¹Therefore 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,

Let us lay aside every weight. We have heard it so many times. My weight may not be your weight, literally and otherwise. One man's weight may be very light for somebody else. Like some of us here, when you say that we are

fasting today, we will be like, 'Okay! That's fine. We are used to that.' But some people when they hear that you are have fast today they feel like they are going to die. The weight.

I actually did the calculation, since we all have calculators on our phones. Our phone is no longer a phone, it is a multipurpose gadget. This happened sometime back, in athletics, when the athletes ran Nike or somebody made that shoe specifically for them which was just 200 gms, very light right? The next model was 160 gms. How many grams did they take off? 40 gms. Is 40 gms anything for us? Nah! We don't even consider that. But when the marathon runner runs 40,000 steps he has put aside a weight of 1.7 tons. Think! Think for a moment. Because 40 gms were put away and the shoe became lighter but your steps are 40,000 feet or more and you are running your marathon, do you know the actual weight you put away? 1.7 tons.

And God is saying, 'In Your race called life, put away things.' And you don't realize that when you are young when you put away things what you have actually put away, another man of your own age who took that same weight and refused to put away, by the time you both finish your race, this fellow has carried 1.7 tons of unnecessary weight and he is not able to go anywhere. You have reached there and this fellow of the same age is still stuck here. Do you know why? It is because he didn't put away some things. That is why you have to look at eternity, you have to look at the goal, you have to look at the unbelievable rewards that are offered. Read the letters to the seven churches in *Revelations*, what each church is offered. It is mind-boggling. And then the other letters; the crown of life, the crown of righteousness, the crown of glory. God is offering rewards left right and center, 'Just finish and finish well. I want to give it all to you.' Think about it.

So what do you do with weights?

1 Peter 5:7

⁷ casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

It means burden, the weight on our soul, the weight on your mind. When the weight gets on your mind it starts affecting your thoughts, it starts affecting your emotions and it starts affecting your decision making and you are carrying it. What does the Bible say? What should you do every day? honestly, cast them all on Him. You can do it because He cares for you. These things have to be spoken out. If you don't speak the right thing you will end up speaking the wrong thing. You will not be silent. If you do not do the right thing in the morning; you wake up and say, 'Lord, here I am, I surrender.' Look at one very common passage for us.

Luke 10:38-42

³⁸ Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving, Are you distracted with serving? We are called to serve, but we are also called to hear the Word. Your serving should not distract you from the Word. If your serving is distracting you from the Word the issue is that you haven't learnt to cast your burdens onto Jesus and allow Him to discipline your time and how to do things. That one thing I will not be distracted, I will not be distracted from the Word. Martha was distracted. and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." ⁴¹ And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. ⁴² But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

Mary knew how to cast her burdens at Jesus' feet. That is where she is literally sitting. Martha carried it and ultimately it affected her walk. Now she is accusing Jesus of not caring. What if she had the habit of waking up every morning and say, 'Lord, whatever that comes my way today I trust You. I want to cast my cares upon You and I want to put You first.' And God has magnified His Word above all His name. (it is all in the Old Covenant, they should be knowing) Lord as Your Word comes I want to listen, I want to hear. Lord, speak to me.' she should be praying, 'Lord, speak to me.' and of all people Jesus walks into the village, she would be like, 'Oh! Jesus the Rabbi has come. Please, please come to my house.' And He starts teaching and she is not listening.

That is what I said, get your priorities right in life. We need to value what is valuable in eternity. Heaven and earth will pass away but not even a dot of God's Word will pass away. So we need to value things that God values. The problem is that if our value system is warped it is difficult. It is not that it is not important, but you need to know which order you

have to rightly put it in. yes food is important, but if you put food for your body above the food for your soul. What is written about Israel? Martha should know what it is written about the first generation – *He gave them what they asked but He sent leanness into their souls*. You see, she is absolutely lean in her soul. This is what happens. Our food for the soul is the Word. So Jesus says, Mary is doing the right thing. You’ve got worries, she’s got worries. You both live in the same house. I came to the same house. The difference between her and you is that she is doing the right thing. She cast her burden unto Me and she realized that right now food is not priority, the Word is priority.

And I am challenging anybody here, it doesn’t matter what you are going through, you make the hearing of the Word your priority, listen believe and obey you will realize that your problems are hardly anything. They are hardly anything. You can handle anything because that is the power of faith; it overcomes the world. Cast your burdens onto Jesus. And you need to be practical, speak it out to Jesus, not to man. speak it out to Jesus.

Mark 9:23-24

²³ Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”

That is the way you should be. Don’t pretend before God, it is not going to help you. He is rich and you are poor. If you want something, go before God and say, ‘Lord, this is what I am. I struggle with unbelief. I struggle with anxiety. I struggle with worry. I struggle with fear. But You said, ‘come to Me,’ so I am coming to You. And you know what, Lord I am casting it at Your feet.’ Where people go wrong is that they don’t confess. They don’t speak. Like I said, if you don’t speak the right thing, you will speak the wrong thing, because we can’t be silent. We were created by God to speak.

Matthew 11:29-30

²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Second thing you do, I am speaking especially to the little ones and the parents too, the problem is that you cannot discipline a child when they are small if you are indisciplined, because they don’t listen, they watch. One of the reasons that it is so easy to speak to children is that by nature, usually, they are gentle and lowly, they are meek. Basically every child is a slave. The parents are the masters, they know if you say, ‘Sit up,’ they sit up. ‘sit down’ they sit down. ‘Go there’ they go there. ‘Go to sleep’ they go to sleep. So by habit they are meek. So when they come and you teach them they listen.

So God say, ‘First thing you have to learn is I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. How? By taking My yoke upon you. And My yoke is easy and My burden is light.’ The only yoke that is easy, which makes the burden light is the yoke of Jesus. No other yoke, every other yoke is terrible. The other well-known verse for young people is *Lamentations 3:27*, and when I look at the young people I lament.

Lamentations 3:27

²⁷ It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth.

When you are young you should carry your yoke. Yoke is basically discipline. So when you are young it is very easy to learn new disciplines. (That was the old word for Subjects. What discipline are you taking? Humanities?) lot of things are disciplines and it is easy, very easy to do it when you are young. That is why you have the sayings in English – you cannot teach an old dog new tricks. Because the older you are you become more and more harder and resistant and not only that but your mind and your body doesn’t work. Sachin might still be one of the best cricketers in the world, but that is in his mind. Now if he gets onto the field and he swings the bat the wickets will go, because his body doesn’t work like his mind anymore. That is why when you see older people who have learnt driving in at an older stage they sit at the edge of the seat and drive. It is called panic-driven. Because they learnt it very late.

So an older man like me, when he is taken by these young ones I am sitting at the edge of the seat because they are relaxing, talking on the phone and driving with one hand. They are confident, I am not, because I am judging them by my driving skills. So I tell Eric, ‘Slow down! Down slow Eric, slow down. I want to reach the church without palpitations. They

should see and wonder why this pastor has come from Hyderabad and he is so agitated. And you should not be the reason.'

So you should bear the yoke when you are young. It is a discipline. I am telling you. There are two kinds of people I will use the word 'young' one is those who are actually, physically by age young. And the second is, even if you are older when you are born again, even at 80 you are young. When you are born again, your spirit is very young, ready to soak in God's Word and the Spirit's discipline. At that time give it your 100%.

1 Corinthians 9:27

²⁷ But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

So there is something called disqualification in Heaven too. You are disqualified. Not that you have lost your salvation. I am not talking about that. If you are truly saved it is very difficult to lose your salvation, unless you willfully walk away. But it is saying that you could be disqualified from every reward. And the problem inside is the body. The old man and the new man both are sitting in the same body. And the Bible says that the old man is used to controlling, he is used to having his way, the new man is supposed to rule. So that is the prophecy of Rebecca's womb – there are two nations within you but the older shall serve the younger. How can you say that even before the child is born, as the Old Covenant prophet says, 'Esau I have hated and Jacob I have loved.' How can that be possible? The child is not even born, how can God hate him? It is neither talking about Esau nor Jacob nor anybody; it is talking about the new man. The old man is that fellow who has no discipline at all, 'I am hungry, I am going to die. Take my birthright, to heck with it. Just give me your dal, or sambar.' That is the old man, no discipline at all. But the problem is that the new man has to learn to control.

Both of them are in one container. It is like this – both Facebook and the Book are in the same phone. The question is – what will you watch? Both are in the same phone. YouTube and the Bible are in the same phone. But what will you watch? Discipline your body.

This is what Paul tells the young man, Timothy.

1 Timothy 4:7-8

⁷ But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. ⁸ For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

Godliness is an exercise. So he says that if you exercise in godliness it profits you now and in the age to come. Bodily exercise is also good, it profits you now it won't make much of a difference then because you are going to get a new body. You waste 50 hours every week and you spend through your nose to go to the gym to build muscles, when you reach there you don't even have that body. Are you getting what God is saying? God is very practical. He is very, very practical. Don't think gym and all that started now. During Paul's age it was called the gymnasium. It is a Greek and Spartan phenomena.

So God says, exercise yourselves in godly disciplines. What are godly disciplines? Listen, read, and meditate on the Word of God. By the time you have come to the last book of the Bible and the Canon is being closed the Bible says – *Blessed is the one who reads*. And everybody sitting here, almost everybody sitting here, except the little ones, they can read. Jane is 3 years old and I was carrying her up and I was making her read and she read. Even she can read. Listening, hearing, reading, meditating, these are disciplines.

Luke 2:46

⁴⁶ Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions.

Listening, that is where it starts. Are you struggling with listening? The entire warnings in the book of Revelations is – *those who have ears let them hear what the Spirit is saying*. That means you have to be so absolutely silent. Not to be

agitated at all. Your suitcase comes down with the whole thing broken in pieces, and that is the big one with all the stuff in it. Just be still. If you really believe that there is Somebody in control He will tell you what happened. Just be still, otherwise you will get angry, you will lose your temper, and then you cannot go back and meet those people and your mission is just starting and you don't want to start on a wrong foot having lost it. It is the same thing which I tell my driver, one day somebody bumped into the car and scratched it, he got out to fight. I said, 'Get in!' and I told him in Hindi, 'Mera Parmeshwar, loog kelia marah, samaan kelia nahi.' That is the difference between your god and my God. I didn't talk about his god. I told him about my God. My God died for people, not for things. Things will come, things will go, it is people that matter.

You have to get these things, you have to learn to listen. It is a discipline. When we went to EFLU 30 years ago, in the ELT class the first things they were teaching us, this is the discipline – L,S,R,W the first skill is listening. Everybody who listens well, when they come to speak they can speak well. And you look at anybody who speaks you will know the one who listens and the one who doesn't listen. Those who don't listen don't know how to speak. There is no depth in what they are saying because they have never listened. I am not talking about speaking with the teleprompter like Modi. I am not talking about that. I am talking about being able to speak because you have listened, you have read, you've got substance. You have inculcated that discipline which is a very difficult discipline.

I was telling my wife, we have all these young people and we have more books in our church library and in my library than probably any church in the city but nobody picked a book and read. Now another generation is rising and they come and say, 'Grandpa I want this book, I want that book.' Another generation is rising who are reading and I look forward to that generation. Because if you went to school, got an education and you don't read, what did that do to you? Nothing. It didn't do you anything. And the problem is that a day when you have to speak comes, you have nothing to say.

Morning by morning You have awakened Me and You gave Me the tongue of the learned. Why? Because I listened and therefore now when I speak I have a Word to speak to the weary. You need to listen, it is a discipline. Your entire life's ministry has been short-circuited by your self because you never learnt disciplines. You have a ministry lying ahead and it is part of your race, you have to complete that ministry otherwise you will not get anything in Heaven. But there are disciplines which have to be inculcated and one of the disciplines is learn to listen and learn to read. That is how we were told. L is for listening. If you have the discipline of listening, which is difficult, the skill of speaking will come, it won't be very difficult.

That is what I realized. I had never spoken in my life and the first day when I had to stand before my class as a rookie I was trembling because I was a nervous wreck. Public speaking was my number 1 scare. I prayed and went into the class and I was like, 'Lord help me. Lord help me. I have never spoken. I have never spoken in my life. Lord I have never spoken in my life.' But I read and I read and I read and read. I read more than anybody else. Then when I started speaking I realized that I could speak. In 1993 when my pastor told me, 'I am going to Singapore. Next Sunday you are preaching.' I was like, 'My God! What are you saying? I am preaching?' and among all the people around me I was a rookie and I was about 29 years old. And I have never preached in my life and the pastor is giving me this church which was full of big names. At that time one of them was the OM head, another one was World Vision head. All senior people sitting there and he says, 'You are the one who is going to preach.' And he left, he wasn't even there to encourage me from the back.' It was like, 'Moses is dead. Rise up!' and all of them were EFLU classmates, all PhDs and I preached from Genesis 3 and I am still preaching from Genesis 3 30 years later. When I finished all the EFLU mates came running and hugged me, 'Oh brother! We never knew that you could preach so well.' I said, 'I didn't know too.' Surprise! Surprise! But do you know why it happened? Because I listened.

I listened and listened and listened. Even when I was an unbeliever I listened. Even if I were the only one with multicolored clothes sitting in an IPC church, all of them in white, I sat there in the middle and listened. Something was growing. Do you listen? Do you read God's Word? The solution to all of life's problems. In the beginning God, in the beginning the Word. Can you sit and listen? Can you come prepared? That is what I told in Ranchi and Jharkhand. It has been 30 years I have been in the ministry, whether I am sitting down and listening or whether I am standing and preaching, in 30 years it didn't matter how long the meetings were I never once taken a toilet break. I will not, I come prepared. I only drink according to how much I sweat. Once it is over it is fine. I will not disrespect the Word of God,

because when I go maybe that is when God had something for me. I come, 'Lord, I want to hear from You.' Until you see the Word of God as Life, you will not change.

Remember that slogan that got first prize in BBC? 'If you don't eat food as your medicine, you will end up eating medicine as your food.' That is what the Word of God is, you have to take the Word of God as medicine, this is my medicine for my soul. Listen! Disciplines. The thing is that if you listen you become more and more effective in what God wants you to be. Numbers and all mean nothing to God. We think of a person whose got 20,000 people, 40,000 people. I am not boasting, but every time I go out and pastors come to me and say, 'You know what, how many big ones have come to this city and nobody speaks like you.' I am not boasting, but it is a discipline – how to spend time with the Word. Listening and listening, listening. And listening to a wide spectrum of people, never judging them. From the Methodist to the Lutheran, from the Baptist to the Charismatic, to the Pentecostal, to the Foursquare, everybody I listen to. Because I know that God has not given the Truth to one man. He has given to everyone a slice of Truth. 'Lord, I want every slice I can eat.' I will not put a doctrinal frame in my head, I will allow You to decide the doctrine according to our Word. Therefore I will humble myself before the Baptist, the Lutheran, the Methodist, everyone. I listen to them and see what they have to say about this particular passage.

And you realize that God gives revelation to everybody. The Holy Spirit cannot be put in a box. He jumps out. Ask yourself, because we are running a race. It has got to do with something that is eternal. And I love these little children, I was surprised when they came to me and asked, 'Grandpa, do you have 'Gates of Splendor'? I was like, 'Wow! You know about 'Gates of Splendor'? Okay I will search for that for you.' They are talking about book and books that matter. You still have the opportunity to change your mind, it becomes difficult now, because your mind is already bent in the other direction so it will cost you now to turn around. Think!

The very word that is used as race in *Hebrews 12* comes from the Greek word 'Agon' from where we get the English word 'agony'. He says you have to agonize to finish this race. Admission is free He paid the price, but rewards are not. You have to earn it and God is there for you and with you, but you should be willing to pay the price. That is why He said, 'Sit down and count the cost.' Make your calculations – if I go this way where will I reach in the world? If I go that way where will I reach in the Kingdom? Be smart, be wise, make eternal judgments; the way I am going now, if this is the price I am willing to pay for eternal things where will I be in eternity? Resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

Old Testament saints who did not have the Spirit of God in them, who were not born of the Spirit would give most Christians of the 21st century a run for their money, by their love and dedication. And that is what God is talking about. Get off FaceBook, get your face in this Book (Bible). It is life. Jesus said that the flesh profits nothing from My Word. It is Spirit and life. Humble yourself, learn from Me. I am meek and lowly. Get on your knees. If you are in so much trouble like the church in China is in trouble, see how they read their Bible. They don't sit or stand and read, they bend on their knees and they read their Bible and wet the pages with their tears and therefore they are standing in the midst of persecution.

The more you are driven by the system you go on your knees before God and pour your soul into the Word and you will see that the Word can sustain your soul, it has the power, because it is time-tested. One of the things we were taught in literature is that a Classic is tested not by people, but it is tested by time. So all these new writers will come and go but Shakespeare will still be there. But one greater than Shakespeare was there and is there. The Word of God will last mankind too. This is the classic of all time, time-tested Book. Think about it! Think seriously about it. Put it right today. This week is Independence Day, what is the point of independence without liberty? 75 years later people still do not have liberty in this country. We are independent but not free and liberties are being taken away.

Let me ask you – how long has it been since you are saved? Are you free? Discipline is listening and reading. The discipline of God's Word. It is not easy, you have to beat your body to shape, that is what Paul is saying. You can't just sit down. Sometimes I have to get Ps. Vijay up from his office and say, 'Go home! You have been sitting from morning till evening. Now go home!' can you sit down and forget everything and focus on Jesus? That is what God is saying, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried about too many things. Look at Mary, she is not worried. She has done the right thing, she has learnt how to sit down and listen. I see something of My Spirit in her, that is how I began. I listened.'

Daniel 6:10

¹⁰ Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

Do you have a discipline of prayer? Your children may not be truly born again. It doesn't matter, get them into the discipline of praying. I wasn't saved, my parents were not saved. But every night we knelt down and stretched out our hands and pray at home. This is how we were taught to pray, the catholic way. When you got saved you understood what that meant, now you don't sit like that, but you pray. These are disciplines.

Exercise Timothy godliness. It is an exercise. Discipline yourself in prayer. Here is a man, three times a day. And you think you are busy, this man is in-charge of 126 regions. One Hebrew in charge of all the gentile regions. And everybody is out to get him. And they searched him with this MRI scanner, his whole life and they found that he has got one fault (in our eyes) he prays to his God, so let us get on him. The entire law of the nation was changed for one man; to get one man. he said, 'You can make the change law and put the signet seal of the king but I will still pray. That is my discipline. And he went on his knees in his 90s.

Can you go on your knees at your 90s? How can you go when you don't go on your knees at 9? At 10? At 11? At 90 you think suddenly you will have a new habit? Habits are learnt, right? That is what God is talking about – godly disciplines. Learn now, change now, start now.

Daniel 1:8

⁸ But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

Do you know what we call it in other words? He went on a fast. First day in Babylon, first day in the hostel mess he went on a fast. 'I only want vegetables.' Do you have the discipline of fasting? These things will go out only with fasting and prayer, Jesus said. And the last days will be so demonic and infected that you cannot walk in your deliverance unless you have the discipline of fasting and praying and meditating upon the Word of God. Let me tell you, by the promise of God's Word, the devil is so angry he has come out with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short. And Jesus says that if He hadn't shortened these days even the elect wouldn't be saved.

So what does the elect need? Spiritual disciplines. Can you fast? I could have asked that yesterday too, because I know many of them feast, they can't fast. It is a spiritual discipline. Fasting and prayer go together. Can you fast? You have problems, yes, but ask yourself – did you fast and pray? Did you pray about it? Think these things. Meditate upon these things. God, today is the 13th of August, and two little ones completed one year in their baptism, you are one year old now. At the age of three He will come to check for fruit. So you've got two years to go and He should find you fruitful. By then have these disciplines. The discipline of mediating upon the Word of God, the discipline of prayer and the discipline of fasting. The fourth discipline (we will not get into today) is the discipline of giving.

Three things Jesus Himself said, be very careful – pray in secret, My Father who sees you in secret will reward you in public. Fast in secret and give in secret. But basically it is the discipline of giving, because that is the only way you will break the power of mammon over your life, because sadly most Christians are not serving God. They believe in God, they are saved by God but they don't serve God, they serve mammon. That is the truth. I ask that question everywhere. There on the mission trip I asked, yesterday also I asked – you've got so many problem. If a text comes into your phone now before the service is over and you realize that somebody dropped a Crore into your account. Are all your problems gone? Were you worried and anxious and fearful about all these problems? So all these years you were serving mammon. Mammon came and problem is solved. So you were serving mammon, you were not serving God.

I am not saying that you don't need money, but you don't serve money. You never serve money. You never serve money and you never serve for money. You serve God. If you serve God the only way you can break the power of mammon is by giving. God does not have any short supply in Heaven. But the question is – can He trust you? Can He trust you that

you will give it away? Welcome to Egypt, you work under the pharaoh. You work and work and work but it is never enough.

Are you faithful with your tithes? I don't know, I don't ask, it doesn't even bother me. If you don't give your tithes God can never bless you because tithes didn't begin with the Law, it began before the Law. Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek, so it is before the Law. Abraham was declared righteous before circumcision otherwise gentiles cannot be righteous. The uncircumcised cannot be righteous because if he was declared righteous after circumcision then only the circumcision could become righteous. But the Bible very clearly, in the book of Genesis and the book of Galatians says, that he was circumcised after he was declared righteous. In the same way tithes was not in the Law, it was before the Law. Do you give God what is His? It doesn't matter if you are making only 500 rupees. Do you give that to Him? If you don't give your tithes to God do you know what God calls it? He says, 'You stole from Me.' and which thief does God bless?

We are giving you a discipline of life – how you want to walk with God. You keep giving and saying, 'Lord, this is Yours. Lord, this is Yours. Thank You Lord that You gave me an opportunity. This is Yours, this is Yours, this is Yours. And those who have that discipline never stop with 10. They realize, 'I can give and give and give. And there is always provision.' God says, 'I see your hands. I can trust you.' These are disciplines. I didn't say this. Jesus said it. How to break loose from the bondage we are living in this world.

So as we go into communion and as the elders come, repent. That is where it begins today, in your mind – repent. Repent and say, 'Lord, today I will start this discipline. One day at a time. Daniel prayed three times; help me to pray at least three times a day. I will start fasting. Tonight I will start fasting. Don't keep it for tomorrow, start. Start!

Think on these things. Meditate upon these things, 'Lord, why am I where I am? Did You bring me here? Or did I bring myself here? Hagar! Hagar! Where are you coming from? Where are you going? Did I pray? Did I meditate upon God's words so that when I ask God for an answer the Holy Spirit can bring to my remembrance the Scripture? Do I fast? Am I like God, a little like God because God is a Giver? God gave His Son. Do I give anything? Or am I just a taker like the devil. he takes and he takes and he takes and he takes. He only gives to take more. Don't do that.

Communion prayer

Father this morning we just thank You Lord. Once again we thank You. We wouldn't even be in this race, Father, if You had not given us Your Son. Now that You have given and we have believed. You have given us these emblems for us to remember Your death until Your coming. The emblems of Your body and the Blood that was shed for the remission of our sins, the Salvation that was purchased on the Cross. Draw us nearer, nearer to Thee O Lord. Nearer each day, Father, not farther and farther away, drifting little by little by little. No Lord. But with intentional faith drawing closer and closer and closer in faith and in love towards You. That is our prayer Father. So prepare us to partake from Your table. For in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Let us sing that song again. 'Nearer my God to Thee' Let that be our prayer, all of us, starting with me. We draw closer to God inwardly, in faith, in love, in discipline, in fasting, in prayer, in giving, in serving, all the ways that God has given us as to how we can draw closer and closer to Him so that we are prepared for that Day which is called Eternal Judgment.

SONG: Nearer my God to Thee, nearer to Thee...

Closing prayer

Father this morning I just come to You Lord. I pray Father that the desire would be every heart's desire - Lord, I want to draw nearer to Thee. Like Mary, we too have been delivered from the power of sin, from the penalty of sin, from demonic oppression. We too were once full of demons, only we didn't know. But we too were like Mary. We are grateful, grateful, grateful, grateful Father. And every moment of every day our prayer is that Lord help us to draw nearer to You, Lord. All of eternity that is all we want to do, draw nearer and nearer to Thee O Lord, and to serve You forever. For Your Word says – they shall see His face and serve Him. Touch Lord, touch the young ones Lord, touch the older ones, Lord. Let there be a radical shift in their lives O Lord. Seven months and thirteen days are up. Today Lord, not tomorrow, today I pray let there be a shift in their lives O Lord that they will say, 'I surrender. I surrender Lord. I want to be radical in my faith. I

don't want to be lukewarm that You spew me out in these last days O Father. I want to be radical, I want to be a voice in this generation O Lord. They don't have to see my face, I don't have to have stars behind my name. I don't have to be on FaceBook, or on Twitter, or have followers. I just want to be a voice in the wilderness O Lord, pointing to Him who took the sins of the world. I don't want to go out into the world and say, 'Look at me!' I want to go out into the world and say, 'Look at Him who took the sins of the world.' O Father I pray, with the young ones O Lord, I pray that there will be a radical shift. You have opened doors for them where nobody else can go, colleges and offices, universities. They meet people whom no other will meet O God, and I pray Father that they will be so radical in their devotion that they will be a witness O God. That Your light would shine through them O Lord. Teach them and help all of us to discipline ourselves into hearing Your Word so that we may have a voice for the weary, in season and out of season. A discipline of prayer and fasting and of giving and of serving O God. It doesn't matter how late we have come into the Kingdom, we can end well. As Paul says, 'I am the least of the Apostles, but by the grace of God I served, labored more than all of them, O God,' O Father, we don't have to be least and be the least; we can end the first O God, because that is what You are looking for O Father, for men, women and children who are sold out to You O Father. If men can run and give up everything for a perishable crown, how much more can God's people for a crown that is incorruptible, unfading and imperishable, reserved for those who love Christ.

Touch Lord, we have loved so many things, yet it never satisfied us. Now teach us to love You Lord, for You will satisfy every depth of our being. Touch, touch O Lord, touch. I bless Your people in Your name. May Your hand rest upon every soul, especially touch Tanmey Lord, she is Your child and our child O Father. Touch her and touch Tej. I speak peace into her heart and into her home. There will be salvation in her household O God. She will be that witness. Tej will be that witness and they will see that light and the life of Christ in them, O God. We believe therefore we speak.

Thank You Father, thank You Lord. Be with us, go before us O Lord. Go before us, we haven't gone this way before. Go before us. Our eyes are on You. Thank You Lord. For in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest and abide with each one of us. Amen.