

“REACH YOUR STRIDE #8: PACING TO THE FINISH”

(Hebrews 12:1-2a)

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[PROPS NEEDED: (1) Derek Redmond Video; (2) STRIDE Bookmark; (3) “The Race” Video]
[East Cobb U.M.C.; 10-31-10]

–I–

1. **[BOTH Services:]** Read Text (9:30 MSG, 11 NRSV): Hebrews 12:1-2a and Pray.
2. **[WATCH VIDEO of Derek Redmond at 1992 Barcelona Olympics (Time: 2:30 – from www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDgVske63cY)]**

A–Since the first part of September, we’ve been sharing in a sermon series exploring six principles (found on our bookmark) **[SHOW BOOKMARK]** that can help us “*Reach [Our] STRIDE*” in the “race” called “life.”

B–We’ve talked about the importance of how our Spiritual Gifts, our Talents, our Resources, our Individuality, our Dreams, and our Experiences can all work together to help us achieve our fullest potential as men, women, children and youth for God.

3. But as we wrap up today, I want to talk about one final concept. It’s not one of the six STRIDE principles, but it *is* a concept that we need to practice if we’re to successfully “*Pace to the Finish*” and achieve our goals in life – it’s the importance of **PERSEVERANCE**.

A–Now, the dictionary defines “perseverance” as “*going on resolutely or stubbornly in spite of opposition, discouragement, or difficulty*” (www.mirriam-webster.com).

B–And we saw an example of this vividly illustrated in our opening video, where British track star Derek Redmond overcame the intense pain of a pulled hamstring in order to finish his race in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

C–In fact, throughout history we often find that the great events and great people of our world are the result of their own perseverance and persistence in the face of great challenges.

D–**[ONE TRUE STORY OF PERSEVERANCE]**

Take, for example, the true story of a man who lost his job in 1832. In that same year, he ran and was defeated for State legislature, as well. His business failed a year later (in 1833), and was finally elected to the State legislature in 1834. His sweetheart died in 1835, and he suffered a nervous breakdown in 1836. He was defeated for Speaker of his State House in 1838, defeated for nomination for U.S. Congress in 1843, & then elected to Congress in 1846. He lost his renomination for Congress in 1848, was rejected for land officer in 1849, defeated for U.S. Senate in 1854, and defeated for nomination for Vice President of the U.S. in 1856. He was again defeated for the Senate in 1858. But in 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected 16th President of the United States.

4. Of course, the Bible itself is also full of examples of perseverance and persistence.

A—For instance, in the New Testament alone consider the story of Bartimaeus in Mark 10:46-52, a blind man who ignored the “put-downs” of the people around him so he could reach Jesus and receive his sight.

B—In Matthew 15:21-28, we read the story of a Canaanite women persevering in her desire for Jesus to heal her of her hemorrhage.

C—In Luke 15, we find three stories about the persistence and perseverance of God’s love in the parables of the Lost Coin, Lost Sheep, and the Prodigal Son.

D—The last week of Jesus’ own earthly life is an example of the perseverance, in that even after being scorned, whipped, and beaten, dying on the cross he still cried out “*Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing*” (Luke 23:34).

E—And, of course, today’s scripture (in Hebrews 12) focuses on this, as well: ...the last half of Verse 1 says (MSG) “*we’d better get on with it... start running, and never quit*” (NRSV) “*let us run with perseverance the race set before us...*”

5. In other words, whatever your goal is – whatever your Dream/Vision is, whatever “stride” you’re being called to take in life – don’t give up on it until you’ve achieved it!

–II–

6. Now, there’s one additional aspect of perseverance this that’s absolutely essential if we’re to ever “Reach [our] STRIDE”: ...the importance of *other people!*

A—In today’s opening video, for example, we saw Derek Redmond’s own father brush past security guards in order to reach his son and help him reach the finish line.

B—Think about it: some track races are actually *built around* the skill of *several* runners, instead of just *one* – we call them “*Relay Races,*” and the idea behind them is that runners will achieve more when they run a race *together* as a *team* than if they try to run it *alone*.

C—Today’s scripture, in fact, gives a clear example of this:

1—Verse 1 says (MSG) “*We’d better get on with it... start running and never quit*” (NRSV) “*Let us run with perseverance the race set before us...*”

2—Notice the words here are *plural*, not singular (Not “*me*” or “*I*” but “*we / us*”).

3—...The point being that you and I will rarely persevere to the finish if we only try to run alone.

4–No. The best shot we have for success in running the “race of life” is for us to have the help of others along the way.

7. And if this is true for our own *personal/individual* lives, then how much more true is it when relating *corporately* with one another in and through God’s church!

A–E.G., when each and every one of us does *our part* by discovering the various S.T.R.I.D.E. principles for our lives, then God’s overall plans and purposes can be accomplished because all the divergent pieces (i.e., each of us) is now working together (with others) to bring about God’s Vision for our world.

B–In other words, just like in a relay race, what makes for a successful, persevering run in both our personal and our corporate lives of faith... is *teamwork* – the kind of teamwork that God created us to find and have within His church.

8. So my question is, are you being a “team player”?

A–Are you doing *your* part to help God’s church and God’s people persevere in our world? Are you partnering with others through His church so that both you and they can “*Pace to the Finish*” in the “race” called life?

B–You do it by offering to God your Spiritual Gifts, Talents, Resources, Individuality, Dreams, and Experiences (that is: your S.T.R.I.D.E.).

C–My hope and prayer is that if you aren’t already, you’ll choose to begin to do this today as we together offer our “*Reach Your STRIDE*” commitments to God.

D–...because when you and I do, watch what can happen...[WATCH VIDEO “*The Race*” (2:46) from SermonSpice.com]

9. [PRAY: “*Thank you, God, that you have created us as unique individuals, and given each of us specific things that we can share to help advance your kingdom. As you call us to accomplish the Dreams and Visions of life and faith, help us to not grow weary in the doing of them, or in the attempts to achieve them. When we fall down, help us look to others that you have put in our paths to help us up and cheer us on. Help us to do the same when others fall in their race, as well. And most of all, help us not to grow weary in the race of life, but to rely on the power of your Holy Spirit to help us persevere to the finish, until not only we but all those on our ‘team’ reach the goal of following you with our whole hearts, lives, and behaviors. Let us draw on you through the power of your people in your church to help us each ‘Pace to the Finish.’ In the name of the one who has already reached that finish and is now calling us forward to claim our prize, Jesus. Amen.*”]
10. [Finance/Stewardship Chairperson offer instructions inviting people to the offering of their “*Reach Your STRIDE*” Commitment Cards]