

# Run to Win | Next Gen Sunday

Stand-Alone Message  
Southall Church  
Rob Rogers  
5.31.26

**PERSONAL:** I hate running. My least favorite activity in the world is running. I don't understand people who enjoy running. Everything hurts after I run. My knees hurt, my back hurts, it hurts me in my soul when I run.

But one of the primary analogies that's used in the bible for what it means to be a follower of Jesus is that you and I are in a race.

When you became a Christian... you entered a race. You might not have known that. But that's what you signed up for.

**Q:** The question is what kind of race are we in?

Hebrews 12 give us an idea.

**Hebrews 12:1-2** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

This is the word of the Lord  
Thanks be to God.

Now, the author of Hebrews starts in chapter 12 by saying "therefore." If you been around the church, you know this quip for studying the bible, whenever you see the word "Therefore," you should ask the question, "What's the 'therefore' there for?"

Hebrews 12 is preceded by Hebrews 11, which is one of the most famous chapters in the bible, called the Hall of Faith.

It lists 17 consecutive stories men and women living BY FAITH.

- Conquering kingdoms, by faith.
- Splitting the sea, by faith.
- Holding to the promises of God, by faith.
- Hebrews 12 tells us that we are right now, running the very same race.

**PERSONAL:** When I was 19, before I knew Christ, after another relapse... Bill Spencer, the man who eventually led me to Christ, said something that stuck with me. He said, *"Rob, you need to understand life is not a sprint, it's a marathon, and anyone running a marathon eventually is going to trip, or stumble. The question is what do you do when you fall? Get up, keep running. Don't quit."*

And now 23 years later, I'm still running that marathon, but I've also learned that while there are aspects of the Christian life that are like a marathon, I've also learned that life isn't *just* a marathon.

- But a marathon is about rhythm, and habits, and pacing over the long haul.
- It's step after step after step over 26.2 miles. Can you put one foot in front of the other for a ridiculously long amount of time. Even when it feels like your body is going to give out... can you keep going?

For the follower of Jesus, anyone can be in the word for a day. Anyone can worship once a week, but can you be in the word, giving yourself to Jesus, day after day after day... morning after morning, week after week, month after month... Life with God is a marathon, but here's the problem...

**A marathon begins and ends with you. It's an individual race.**

But Hebrews 11 and 12 point us to a much broader reality, that the Christian life is not a sprint; it's not even a marathon... **it's a relay race.**

**PERSONAL:** Back in middle school I ran track, and I would run the 4x400 meter relay and I learned that the most important part of any relay race is not who is the best runner. The whole thing hinges on this one little split second when the baton gets handed off. You can have the best runners and still lose the race, if you fail to effectively pass the baton.

And when you get to Hebrews 12, what it's telling you is right now, you've got the baton. The question is how are you going to run your leg of the race and how are you going to pass the baton?

### **STORY:**

How many of you have been involved with or ever heard of...

#### **Cru** (Campus Crusade for Christ)

- Today, Cru operates on 10,000+ college campuses across 190 countries, mobilizing students for evangelism and discipleship worldwide.

#### **World Vision**

- World Vision is one of the world's largest humanitarian organizations on the planet... impacted over 335 million vulnerable children in 2024 alone

#### **The Navigators**

- The Navigators currently has 5,900+ disciple-makers and ministry leaders bringing people to Christ and making disciples in over 120 countries.

#### **Young Life**

- Young Life operates in 100+ countries, reaching students with the gospel through clubs, mentoring, and camps worldwide. It is one of the largest Christian youth outreach movements in the world.

These organizations have impacted hundreds of millions of people all over the world. The people who founded these organizations...

CRU – **Bill & Vonette Bright**

World Vision – **Richard Halverson** (Chairman)

The Navigators – **Dawson Trotman**

Young Life – **Jim Rayburn**

Why am I telling you all of this? Because each of these individuals were all personally mentored and disciplined by one person.

**Q:** Henrietta Mears — How many of you have never heard that name in your life?

- Until about 1 month ago, I'd never heard of her until Greg Buzek mentioned her to me on a Sunday and sent me some information about her. I didn't know her name. But what's amazing is that nearly every single one of us have felt the impact of her life.

Oh, and there's one more person she personally disciplined and mentored that I forgot to mention—**Billy Graham**.

- He went on to preach the gospel to over 210 million people in 185 countries, served as the spiritual advisor to 12 U.S. Presidents, and was listed among the most admired people in America 61 times.
- How many of you in the room ever went to a Billy Graham crusade? How many of you came to the Lord at a Billy Graham crusade?
  - Without Henrietta Mears, you might not know Christ today.

But because one woman made a decision to radically and intentionally invest her life in the next generation of young men in the 1940s, the world is still feeling the impact of her life over 80 years later.

Henrietta Mears understood that her life was not a sprint, it wasn't a marathon, it's a relay race. And she understood that **the gospel is always one generation away from extinction**.

The world looks at Gen Z with varying levels of disdain... But God is doing some amazing things in this generation.

There are some incredible stats that are coming out from Barna, I'm just going to give you a few.

- **30 million more Americans** are committed to Jesus compared to five years ago, Gen Z accounting for the majority.
- Bible engagement among Gen Z men increased by nearly 20 percentage points from 2021 to 2024.
- Gen Z and Millennials now **lead** participation in church-life in America.

(Barna Research Group, David Kinnaman, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmrN55FV22U>)

**INTERESTING:** What's fascinating to me is the world thought Gen X would break the church, it didn't. Then millennials, we didn't. Now the world looks at Gen Z and says, *"Y'all are emotionally weak, lazy, entitled, overly sensitive, doom scrolling, a video game/porn addicted generation with no appreciation for hard work."*

Let me tell you right now – that is not who you are! That is not who you're destined to become.

**IMPORTANT:** Did you know that every single one of the four great awakenings in our country's history was led by young adults?

- George Whitfield, Charles Finney, DL Moody, and Billy Graham all started between 18-30 years old. The Jesus movement... teens and 20s.

Let me tell you, Gen Z... These are not the years to waste your life on meaningless things—these are the years to dedicate yourself for the purposes of God.

For us geriatric millennials, Gen X'ers, boomers... it's our job to pass the baton! To fan the flame of what God is already doing in the next generation. To mentor and guide the next generation... not just teach them, but to model what it actually looks like to follow Christ in daily life.

**Here what I think:** I think in every single church in America, there should be a waiting list of people looking to serve in student, kids, and young adults ministry. I think y'all should be banging down the doors to invest in these world changers.

- Because when you understand the grace of God over your own life, you can't help but give it away to others. And they are asking for it!

**CHALLENGE:** In order to help them find their way, older generations, that raises the bar for us. We can't be content to just consume a sermon once a week and call it good enough. It's not enough.

You have to refuse to settle for a preferential, consumeristic, "cruise ship" Christianity.

- We can't just say we believe in Jesus and not take God and His Word seriously throughout the rest of the week. It won't work.
  - We can't relegate the discipleship of our children, or grandchildren to a few church staff for one hour once a week. It won't work!
  - Don't waste the latter years of your life on you. Invest all the wisdom and experience in someone you can pass the baton to!
- If godly people don't step up and throw ourselves into discipling the next generation, secular ideologies and the spiritual forces of darkness will gladly fill the gap.

**Q:** What would happen in the world if we had 50 Henrietta Mears rise up in the church, and we didn't just settle for 1 in the 1940s and say, "Wow, good for her... Anyway, when's lunch?"

- **Q:** What would happen if you made a decision today that I'm going to do whatever it takes to invest and disciple the next generation, to mentor, to guide, to fuel, support and breathe life into the generation coming up behind me. To be the wind in their sails, not an anchor that holds them back.

One of the saddest passages in the whole bible... just to get you excited for it...

**Judges 2:7-10** And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the LORD had done for Israel.

What did they see?

- They saw the blood of the lamb on their doorposts at Passover...
- They saw God split the sea so they could cross over on dry land..
- They saw the manna in the wilderness
- The walls of Jericho fall..

But here's what it says next...

**Judges 2:8,10** And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 years. <sup>10</sup> And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.

What did they do? They failed to pass the baton. And that next generation death spiraled in godlessness, sin, and rebellion for the next 400 years.

If we, Southall Church, don't do our part... if we don't do our part, if we don't seize the cultural moment we're in, if we don't take seriously the call to **personally** be disciples that make disciples, there will be another generation after us who does not know the Lord...

**That's not on them, that's on us.**

**VISION:** That's why tomorrow morning is Day 1 of our **Southall Residency**, which we're able to launch because of your radical generosity during our Annual Missions Offering at the end of last year.

- We're intentionally investing in six extraordinary young men and women who sense a calling from God for vocational, kingdom-expanding ministry work.
- It's why when God called our family here, He gave us a vision for this church to be a training ground for sending and multiplication.

It's why today, I'm thrilled that as a church body get to commission, bless, and send Pastor Dylan Dawkins, who is stepping into a season of investing everything he's

learned here over the last 11 years in young men who are seeking the kingdom of God through the Narrow Gate Foundation one of our primary ministry partners.

Now, here's what you may not know...

**PERSONAL:** Twenty-three years ago, two people opened their home to a broken, heroin-addicted nineteen-year-old who didn't know Jesus.

- They prayed for me.
- They challenged me.
- They disciplined me.
- They showed me what it looked like to follow Jesus.
- And because they did, my life changed.

Out of that investment, the Narrow Gate Foundation was born.

Then a young man named Dylan walked into that ministry looking for direction and purpose. God met him there.

Over time he grew into a leader, a disciple-maker, a husband, a father, and eventually a pastor here at Southall Church.

**Q:** Do you see what God does?

- One act of obedience becomes another.
- One disciple becomes another.
- One generation reaches the next.

Nobody in that story could have seen all of it at the beginning. The people who invested in me couldn't see Dylan.

The people who invested in Dylan cannot see all the young men he'll impact in the years ahead.

But that's how the Kingdom works. **Faithfulness today becomes fruitfulness in someone else's tomorrow.**

And that's why today is so meaningful. Because we get to commission and send Pastor Dylan back into the very ministry God used to shape his life.

But before we do that, we want to give you a glimpse behind the curtain of what God is doing in and through the Narrow Gate Foundation. Take a look. [\[VIDEO\]](#)

**COMMISSIONING:** Bill, Stacy, Meagan, Dylan, would you guys come up here...

I've asked Bill to commission Dylan today. Would extend a hand this way? Let's fervently agree with the story God is writing in Dylan's life.

Church, THIS is what Hebrews 11-12 looks like in real time. One generation running faithfully... and then passing the baton to the next.

- That's what discipleship is.
- That's what the Church is.
- That's what the Kingdom of God looks like.

And we are standing in a moment right now where God is awakening something in the next generation.

The question is whether the church will have the courage to do something about it.

Will we invest in them, train them, disciple them, be wind in their sails? Will we give away what God has given us so another generation will arise that knows the goodness of the Lord and the works of His hands?

I believe the strength of the church is determined by how intentionally we take up the calling to make disciples that make disciples and invest in a generation whose impact will go far beyond us.

So, let me ask you: Who are you investing in?

- Who are you encouraging?
- Who are you disciplining?
- Who are you helping run their leg of the race?

Because someday your race will end.

And when you stand before Jesus, I don't believe the question will simply be: "What did you accomplish?"

It will be: "Who did you disciple? Who did you invest your life into?"

- You don't have to be a theological expert. You just have to be willing to see the good in someone else, and breathe life into it.

Some of you are going, "Man, if life is a relay race, I was passed a bad baton."

Maybe you're the first believer in your family and you're going, "My life is a mess... I can't invest in someone else."

But let me tell you... the story of your family changed with you. You get to change the story for the entire lineage that comes after you. And your finish line will become their starting block. Your ceiling becomes their floor!

I told you a year ago, church, we're raising the bar. This is what it means.

And church, here's the beautiful thing... none of us would even be in this race if Jesus had not run it first.

And He didn't run it for himself, He ran it for us...

**Hebrews 12:2** ...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,

Think about this...

The Son of God saw the cross.

The nails.

The shame.

The suffering.

The crushing weight of sin.

And He endured it...

for the joy set before Him.

His joy is you. Our salvation. Our redemption. Our adoption into the family of God.

All because Jesus ran the race and endured the cross.

**Hebrews 6:20** Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf

He went first. What better way to celebrate the victory He won on our behalf than through communion.

I want to invite the Elders, Pastors, and those serving communion to come forward and prepare the elements...

For those of you that aren't familiar with Communion...

- **The bread** is the body of Christ that was pierced for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquity...
- **The cup** is the blood of Christ poured out for the forgiveness of sin, as Jesus endured the cross, despising it's shame.

If you are ready to surrender your life to Christ, let taking communion be the profession of your faith. If you're not there yet, I'm so glad you're here, keep coming back. But I want to invite you to forego communion this morning as this is a sacred act of obedience to Christ for those who made the conscious, deliberate decision to follow Him with their lives.

**1 Corinthians 11:23-26** ...The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread,<sup>24</sup> and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

<sup>25</sup> In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

We know Jesus today, because he invested in a few. We have victory over sin and death because Jesus ran the race before us. He is our forerunner and we are His joy. So "...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.”

Amen.