

Message Outlines: Why Run?

Topic/Theme:

Running for a Purpose

- What are we to do as Christians? We are called to testify to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- What will it be like? Running or following Christ is hard.
- Why should we run? Life is about completing the task God gives us.

Scripture:

Acts 20:21-24

Get to the Point:

As a Christian you are “compelled” to run the race, sharing the Good News of what God has done in your life.

Context Commentary:

Acts 20:17-38 is considered Paul’s farewell speech to the Ephesians. He is speaking to a group of Christians from that city before he goes on to Jerusalem, where he will be arrested. This is his only speech recorded in Acts that is given to a Christian audience. The topic is Paul’s call to ministry.

We are focusing on Acts 20:21-24. Paul in this section of his speech shares that he has not discriminated in his sharing of the Gospel. He has preached to both Jew and Greek the same message: repent and believe. Jews and Greeks are to repent of their sins before God and to believe and have faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul tells the audience that he is going to Jerusalem, not of his own will but because he is “compelled by the Spirit.” Paul never sees himself doing anything of his own accord in the scriptures. Paul is always being led, guided, compelled, or prompted by the Holy Spirit. Paul does not know what is going to happen there, but maybe Luke (author of Acts and Luke) was foreshadowing Paul’s imprisonment here in the text.

Paul acknowledges to the crowd that he is aware that it may not be easy. Paul says that the “Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.” It appears that not

only is Paul's mission and ministry guided by the Spirit, but that the Spirit also leads him to testify in the face of hardships. This trend will continue throughout Paul's missions.

Paul shares that his "life is worth nothing." Paul has given up everything for Christ. His one desire is to be faithful to the task of "finishing the race" that God has given him. He sees that race as "testifying to the gospel of Jesus Christ." This is only one of two times that the word *gospel* is used in Luke-Acts (the other is in Acts. 15:7). The word *gospel* is the perfect summation of the Christian calling. The Christians gathered here would have understood this call. To testify is to share one's experience of something. Paul sees his life as a race to tell others of what Christ has done in his life.

Today's message is about helping youth realize that they, too, are called to run for this purpose. They, too, are to testify to others what Christ has done in their lives, despite potential hardships. They are to run the race with purpose so that they will be able to finish the race.

Outline and Options:

Icebreaker/Game Option: Relay Race

You can use most any relay race to introduce this message. Use your favorite or the one below.

You will need several large industrial strength trash cans with wheels. Remove any garbage liners and smell if possible. You will also need a large room, gym, or wide hall.

Divide your group into equal teams of 8-10 students. Have students line up behind the starting line. Have the first person in line get into the trash can. The second person in line will push them to the other side of the room or down the hall. Then, they will switch places and push the can back to their team. The next two in line will go next. The first team to have everyone go down and back wins.

You may want to have adults at each end of the room or hall to help students in and out of the trash cans. They often tip over getting in and out.

After the race, discuss the following questions with your group:

What was the point of the game?

What is the purpose of the Christian Life?

How is the Christian life like a relay race?

These questions are just to help the youth prepare to receive the word during your talk.

- I. What makes someone a Christian? Repentance and Belief
 - a. Repenting to God

- i. To repent is to turn around and go a different direction.
- ii. We most commonly think of repenting as asking forgiveness for our sins.
- iii. But truly repenting means turning from our sin and pursuing a Godly life.

b. Believing in Christ

i. Christians believe in Christ

- 1. They believe Jesus lived to teach us how to love.
- 2. They believe Jesus died to show us God's love.
- 3. They believe God's power raised Jesus from the dead.
- 4. They believe Jesus' resurrection overcame death and that

God offers us eternal life through our faith in Christ.

II. What do Christians do? They testify to the gospel.

a. What does it mean to testify?

- i. Testifying is giving your experience of something that has happened.
- ii. To testify about Christ is to share your experience of what Christ has done.
- iii. Witnesses in a court of law testify to what they saw happen. The jury and judge listen to all the testimonies and then make a decision. Giving our testimony allows others to hear and see God's story.

iv. You are called to testify only to what you know. Do not wait to give your testimony until you have Christ all figured out. You never will. Instead, be prepared to give testimony to what you have experienced. Just like in court, they can only ask you about what you have seen.

b. Is a testimony restricted to using only words?

i. Paul talks about his “task” as a race.

Video Clip Option: Forrest Gump

In the film, *Forrest Gump*, there are two scenes about running. The first is when boys are picking on Forrest and calling him stupid. Forrest runs away and his braces fall off as Jenny cries, “Run, Forrest, run!”

The other scene is the one where Forrest takes off running across the country trying to deal with his grief. “I just felt like running,” Forrest says. This clip could be used as a great introduction to this talk or as a reflection piece at the end of the talk.

WARNING – if you show the whole cross country running scene, watch out for the scene where the guy asks for help making a bumper sticker. There are two profanities in that section.

ii. You can testify to God’s love in your life with your actions just as loudly, if not more so, than with your words.

Illustration #1: The World’s Bible

The poem/hymn lyric, *The World’s Bible*, by Annie J. Flint, is a great way to express the need for us to testify of Christ’s love with more than our words. During your talk you can share this poem or share a story from your own life and experience of a time when you gave your testimony without using words. You may have helped someone who did not ask for it. You may have cared for someone who needed it.

Christ has no hands but our hands, to do His work today;
He has no feet but our feet to lead men in His way;
He has no tongue but our tongue to tell men how He died;
He has no help but our help to bring them to His side.

We are the only Bible the careless world will read;
We are the sinner's gospel, we are the scoffer's creed;
We are the Lord's last message, given in deed and word;
What if the type is crooked, what if the print is blurred?

What if our hands are busy with other work than His?
What if our feet are walking where sin's allurements is?
What if our tongues are speaking of things His lips would spurn?
How can we hope to help Him and hasten His return?

If time allows, you might ask students about times when they think they were Christ's hands or feet and shared their testimony with someone without using words.

III. Running is hard.

- a. Paul runs the race knowing that it is going to be hard.
 - i. Sharing your faith with others, whether through word or deed will often cause people to judge you.
 - ii. Remember though that God simply asks us to testify to what we have experienced.
- b. Illustration #2 – Your Testimony

Illustration #2: Testimony

Sharing your personal testimony of how God and Christ have affected your life is essential to helping youth understand what it means to testify. Take time to reflect on the people who have shaped your faith, the experiences you have had of God, and the beliefs that you hold sacred. Tell the story of one person who testified into your life, or one experience you had of God, or the reasons that you believe something you believe. It will be more powerful than any other story you could share.

IV. Starting the Race

- a. Paul says that he is “compelled” by the Spirit to run or follow Christ.
- b. Are you compelled?
- c. Have you repented and believed?

- d. Are you willing to tell others what Christ has done for you?
- e. Are you willing to show others what it means to love like Christ?

Interactive Activity: Memorable Testimonies

Give each teen a pen and some paper. Direct them to do the following:

1. Make a list of all the people who have positively influenced their faith journey.
2. Make a timeline of their personal experiences with God.
3. Write a short list of the things they believe about God.

Have youth look over their lists and timelines. Let them know that all of those people shared their testimony with them. Ask them how much they remember of what those people said. Then, ask them how much they remember of the personal care those people demonstrated toward them.

Tell them that each of their experiences is a part of their testimony and God's story. Conclude by telling them that it is probably because of these experiences and those people that they believe the things they believe.

- f. Take time to pray that you would have the strength to begin the race or to keep going. If you have stopped running because you are tired or have forgotten why you are running, get up!
- g. Ask God to give you the desire to let go of your life and the strength to finish the race.

Further Study Resources

Contagious Christianity – Bible Study