

Note: The sermon below will be delivered by the Rev. Caleb Kim on Sunday, March 2, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.

Title: Finish—Time to Dream (VI)

During the 1968 Olympic marathon in Mexico City, a runner named John Stephen Akhwari from Tanzania participated in the race... He gave the reporter the powerful statement: My country did not send me over 7,000 miles to start a race; they sent me to finish one!" How is our spiritual race going so far? Sometimes, our God-given journey is challenged by unforeseen obstacles. But God calls us to "stay on track with our faith in Jesus and finish the race for His glory" with a spirit that keeps moving forward.

Throughout the New Year's sermon series, "Time to Dream," we have learned key principles toward God's Vision: dreaming our God-given dreams regardless of our circumstances, making the decision to pursue them, continuing to believe even in the delay room, moving forward despite difficulties even in dead-end situations, and experiencing God's deliverance.

Today is the last part of our series, called "Finish." In our Epistle reading today, the Apostle Paul encourages his readers to "in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead," follow his example of finishing the race well. He hopes they will run for "the crown of righteousness," which "the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award" not only to him but to all who have longed for the return of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 4:1-8). This morning I want us to explore how to finish our spiritual journey strong and apply these lessons to fulfill our God-given visions with a forward-moving spirit.

Firstly, we need to "stay resilient about retirement." Please understand this: I am not saying we should never retire from our occupations. Rather, I want to introduce a biblical concept of retirement and redeployment through God's Word. In our Old Testament reading this morning, the Lord instructed the retirement of the Levites. In those days, the Levites were temple workers, and one of their primary duties was to transport animals and sacrifice them on behalf of the priests and worshippers. According to God's guidance to Moses, those who were 25 or older could serve at the Tent of Meeting. But when they reached 50, they were to "retire from their regular service and work no longer" (Numbers 8:24-25). This might be the only scripture in the Bible that speaks directly about retirement.

While reflecting on this passage, I came to realize anew that God loved and cared for His servants in the temple. Back then, it would have been physically demanding for people over 50 to continue doing those tasks. According to God's retirement plan, once the Levites reached 50, they were to rest and spend time with their loved ones. God understood their limitations, paid attention to their well-being, and wanted them to take care of themselves. The concept of retirement in the Bible can be similar to the idea of the Sabbath. After completing His work of creation in six days, God rested on the seventh day. Later, through the Ten Commandments, God commanded the people of Israel to keep the Sabbath day holy. The fourth command instructed them not to do any work on the Lord's Day, and this direction applied not only to the people but also to their servants

and even their animals. Rest is essential for us to care for the human temple of the Holy Spirit—our physical bodies.

From a biblical point of view, our occupation is God's calling, no matter what field we work in. That is why we often refer to our jobs as our vocation. All work is sacred since God uses every profession to operate His whole universe. After reaching a certain age, we may retire from our careers to pursue personal passions or spend more time with our loved ones. However, it is important to remember that retiring from a job does not mean retiring from our God-given purpose. According to the Word of God, we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works that He has prepared in advance for us (Ephesians 2:10). Retirement was never meant to be "the end of the Levites' work". In fact, God's goal in their retirement was "not to remove productive workers from service, but to redirect their service in a more mature direction." Even after they retired from frontline service, they continued to assist their fellow Levites "in the Tent of Meeting" (Numbers 8:26).

In our Psalm for today, the Psalmist compares those in their old age to a palm tree: "Planted in the house of the Lord, they will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green" (Psalm 92:12-14). This is so true. As Pearl Buck, the famous writer and daughter of missionaries to China, once said, "I've reached an honourable position in life because I am old and no longer young..." I fully agree with her. Though I am not yet in that age category, I have certainly learned many life lessons as I grow older.

The Lord calls us to be resilient, to not give up on ourselves when we reach a certain age or retire from a job. Instead, He wants us to stay connected to His dreams and visions, using the talents and resources He has given us to build His Kingdom, regardless of our age.

Secondly, we need to "stay vigilant after our victories." Someone once examined spiritual leaders in the Bible and categorized them into three types. The first category consists of those who kept the race well from beginning to end. Very few individuals in Scripture fit into this group. The second category includes leaders who began strong but later gave up. They were blessed with their God-given strength, but after enjoying many blessings, they let their guard down and failed to fulfill their God-given missions. The third category is the most common: leaders who did well, fell at some point, repented of their sins and then kept running the race. These leaders were not perfect, but one thing they had in common is that they continued to turn their hearts toward God and finished their God-given race. The Apostle Paul, the author of today's Epistle, is a perfect example of this third type of leader. Paul had many talents and gifts, but initially, he used them to oppose God's will. However, after encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul was transformed and became a passionate follower of Christ. In Christ, Paul found his true purpose and dedicated his entire life to serving God's Kingdom. He did not dwell on his past mistakes or failures. Instead, he learned from those experiences and used them to stay faithful and fight the good fight for God's glory.

While preparing this part of the message, I was reminded of an interesting article about mountain accidents. Eighty percent of all accidents occur when hikers are going down the mountain, and only twenty percent happen when going up. Climbing up a mountain requires a lot of stamina and strategy. When hikers reach the top, they celebrate their triumph. There is nothing wrong with that. At the same time, descending to the bottom also requires the same level of care and preparation. To some degree, descending a mountain can be more dangerous than ascending it. Since the descent may feel like merely retracing our steps, we might become less attentive. That is why the Bible warns us to remain humble and alert, even after we have achieved something great. Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." In 1 Corinthians 10:12, Paul warns, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" The Bible encourages us to continually examine ourselves through God's Word and keep our focus on Jesus, who completed His race strong and well.

As we prepare to observe the Lord's Supper today, God invites us to "examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5). This sacrament is an opportunity for us to reflect on our relationship with God through His Word and in prayer. And as we continue our journey, God wants us to move forward humbly in His direction, always vigilant, until the race is done.

Thirdly and lastly, we need to "stay focused until we are finished." In our Gospel reading today, Jesus provides us with an excellent example of staying focused through His prayer. After the Last Supper, He invited His disciples to pray with Him at Gethsemane. In that sacred moment, Jesus made a heartfelt petition to God: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). Jesus knew that He needed God's strength and endurance to accomplish His mission. He then encouraged His disciples to stay awake in spirit and pray once more. Jesus prayed again, saying, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (Matthew 26:42). For the third time, He made the same request to finish the work God had given Him to do (John 17:1-4). I believe this should be our prayer as well: "Lord, help me to follow Your will and finish the work you have given me to do."

Almost five years ago, during the COVID lockdown, I read a book titled "Forward" by the late Dr. David Jeremiah, pastor of Shadow Mountain Community Church in California. In the book, Dr. Jeremiah shared how God continued to use him in ministry after his retirement age of about 65. According to a list he made of his accomplishments with God's help, over the past 14 years, Dr. Jeremiah published The Jeremiah Study Bible, saw his broadcast ministry "Turning Point" grow, wrote 14 new books, and reached millions with the Word of God. He did not describe these achievements to boast about himself. He only mentioned them as a "gratitude list" for what God had allowed him to do because he did not retire. Dr. Jeremiah helped his readers to move forward, regardless of their age or circumstances.

Over the past six years, my wife and I have become more aware of our roles, which could be described as part of the "sandwich generation." By this, I mean that, as parents of three sons and caretakers of my mother, we feel a dual responsibility to care for both our

children and our mother. It has not been easy to handle these dual responsibilities, on top of caring for each other and ourselves. We have found that our hearts, time, resources, and energy have always been focused on both sides. Like many of you, we have done our best to manage these ongoing tasks for our loved ones. At the same time, deep down, I just wanted to get through those times. In recent years, however, the word “Forward” has shifted our perspective. Instead of seeing these responsibilities as duties, we have come to view them as privileges. With a divine forward perspective and God’s strength, wisdom, peace, and endurance, we have been encouraged to be more grateful to the Lord who has provided us with the opportunities to support our loved ones more diligently. We have realized how blessed we are since God has given us double, triple, and even quadruple blessings through our roles. My wife and I firmly believe that by continuing to fulfill our God-given dreams, we too will “live a full and exciting life” as Jesus did.

Throughout the Bible, we see many examples of people who lived forward-thinking lives. At the age of 75, Abraham responded to God’s vision and left his hometown to fulfill his calling as the father of many nations. When Joseph was a young man, he had a dream. While he faced numerous challenges, he confessed that God used all those difficulties to fulfill his God-given vision. Whether we are young or young at heart, God encourages us to keep challenging ourselves with a forward spirit, pressing on toward the fulfillment of His great plans for us.

Since the beginning of this year, many of us have been working to improve various aspects of our lives—whether it is our health, finances, family, or spiritual matters. Are we feeling discouraged in these areas? Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, is the One we rely on. We need to praise Him because He is the One who will finish the good work He has begun in each of us. Jesus not only completed His work, but He also kept His eyes on God, who began the work of salvation and completed it through Him. After praying in Gethsemane, Jesus pressed on to Jerusalem, and on the cross, He declared, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Jesus fulfilled the entire work of salvation with the Help of the Holy Spirit. As followers of Christ, we are called to finish the work God has given us, staying faithful to our mission until we are called our real home to Heaven.

To conclude, I would like to share Dr. Jeremiah’s statement: “You are not done until you are done. God saves the best till last.” Friends, have we finished the work the Lord has entrusted to us? What are the forward-thinking dreams that God has given us this year? God calls us to keep moving forward, to stay faithful, and to fulfill our God-given visions, no matter the challenges we face. He wants us to fight the good fight of the faith and press on toward the heavenly prize, just as Jesus did. When we follow the Lord wholeheartedly, we will see our God-given dreams and visions come true in the days to come. And when we are called to be home with the Lord, God will invite all of us to participate in His final victory and say to each of us in Heaven: “Well done, my good and faithful servant! Come and share my banquet!” Amen!

**In this message, I have used some thoughts and materials from the “Forward” study with Dr. David Jeremiah. The texts in this sermon are Numbers 8:20-26; Psalm 92:12-15; Matthew 26:26-30, 36-46; Timothy 4:1-8.*