

**Final Message In The Series: “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus” – FINISHING WELL**

I have many vivid (some of them fond) memories from growing up in the 1970's:

- Saturday mornings.
  - Bowl of sugary cereal or Pop Tart.
  - Scooby Doo and Looney Toons.
  - Pro Wrestling
- Every afternoon – watching reruns of Gilligan’s Island and Batman
- Roaming the woods or hanging out at the neighbor’s house till mom called us home for supper.
- Backyard football and wiffle ball games
- Pong video game
- Raking leaves and dumping them over a hill and jumping in them for hours every fall.
- Choking down liver and onion – canned spinach – lima beans...knowing you couldn’t leave the table until your plate was clean.

Like I said...vivid memories and some of them fond!

And somewhere along the way, most of us learned something back then that kids today may never understand:

You didn’t quit just because something got hard.

- If your bike chain came off, you flipped the bike over and fixed it.
- If the baseball went through the neighbor’s window, you faced the consequences.
- If you struck out, you came back the next inning.

- If your best friend beat you in a game of HORSE, you practiced your shot and challenged them again.

At some point things changed, culture started telling us and we began to believe:

“If it’s difficult, walk away.”

“If it hurts, quit.”

“If it takes too long, give up.”

“If it’s uncomfortable, find something easier.”

It's sad but, that mindset has started creeping into our spiritual lives.

There are people in this room today—you love Jesus—but you are tired.

- You’re tired of praying and not seeing results.
- Tired of trying to restore that relationship.
- Tired of fighting for your marriage.
- Tired of believing for your child to come back to God or to reconcile with you.
- Tired of battling anxiety, addiction, loneliness, depression, temptation.
- Tired of doing the right thing while everybody else seems to get away with the wrong thing.
- And maybe nobody knows it... but deep inside you’ve been wondering:  
“Would it just be easier to give up?”

That’s who I came to talk to today.

Because this final message in our series *“I Have Decided to Follow Jesus”* is really about one final decision:

### **When I commit... I don’t quit.**

The Apostle Paul writes some of the most emotional words in all of Scripture in 2 Timothy 4.

He's sitting in a Roman prison. Nero has already decided Paul will be executed. And knowing his life is almost over, Paul writes these words to His spiritual son:

***"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."*** (v.7)

So simple...so straightforward...so powerful

He said:

**"I FINISHED THE RACE"**

Church, there's something powerful about finishing.

Anybody can start a diet on Monday.

Anybody can join a gym in January.

Anybody can make promises when emotions are high.

But finishing?

That takes grit...perseverance...faith.

Jesus said in Matthew 24:13:

***"The one who endures to the end will be saved."***

Galatians 6:9 says:

***"Let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."***

**Notice:** The harvest comes at the proper time... *if you don't quit.*

**The Enemy wants to keep that from happening.**

**1 Peter 5:8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the *devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour***

He knows he doesn't have to destroy you. He just needs to discourage you enough to throw in the towel.

Because partial obedience leaves unfinished impact.

Some of you were called to start something:

- a ministry,
- a deeper prayer or devotional life,
- reconciliation,
- serving,

But somewhere between the beginning and now...life happened.

Resistance showed up. And what started with excitement and passion slowly turned into apathy and exhaustion.

That's why Hebrews 12:1-2 says:

***"Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."***

Notice the wording: it says

***"Run with perseverance."***

Because this Christian life isn't a sprint.

It's a marathon.

Marathons are not won in the first mile.

I've spoken with those who run in distance races...most know they won't win...so their goal is to FINISH. When tempted to quit...they keep putting one foot in front of the other to FINISH

## **Sometimes The Most Spiritual Thing You Can Do Is Take The Next Step**

That's what faithfulness is.

Not having everything figured out.  
Just taking the next step.

Somebody here today feels overwhelmed because you're trying to see the entire future.

God rarely gives us the whole map. He typically gives us enough light for the next step.

Psalm 119:105 says:

***"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."***

A lamp. Not a spotlight...not stadium lights  
Just enough for the next step.

That's how marriages survive.  
Not by fixing everything overnight.  
But by taking the next loving step.

That's how recovery happens.  
Not one giant leap.  
One decision at a time...one day at a time.

It's how spiritual growth happens.

One prayer.

One scripture.

One act of obedience.

One more step.

You may not be where you want to be...

but thank God you're not where you used to be.

And here's the reason we keep going:

Because Jesus never quit on us.

Hebrews 12:2-3

***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.***

***<sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted***

Think about His journey to the cross.

He was betrayed.

Rejected.

Mocked.

Beaten.

Abandoned.

And yet He kept walking.

Isaiah 53:3 says:

***“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.”*** But he didn’t throw in the towel.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was under such agony that Luke says His sweat became like drops of blood.

And yet...

He pressed on.

Up the hill carrying the cross...

He pressed on

Nails in His hands...

He pressed on.

People mocking Him...

He didn’t quit.

Why?

Because love and commitment doesn’t just start...it finishes.

He wasn’t focused on the difficulties of the race...He was locked in on the goal (the joy set before Him!)

That’s why right before He died, Jesus was able to cry out:

***“It is finished.”***

Not **I AM** finished.”

**IT** is finished.”

The mission was complete. Race run.

Sin was defeated.

Grace was purchased.  
Redemption was secured.  
Debt was paid.

Jesus finished what the Father sent Him to do.

And because He finished...  
you and I can begin again.

Somebody needs to hear this today:

If God started something in you,  
He has not abandoned you.

Philippians 1:6 says:

***“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”***

You may feel weak...  
but God is faithful.

You may feel tired...  
but God is your strength.

You may feel like you're barely hanging on...  
but God has not let go of you.

I think about a child learning to ride a bicycle.  
At first the parent holds onto the seat.  
The child is wobbling everywhere.  
Scared to death.  
Certain they're going to crash.

BUT...Eventually the child grows confident enough to trust the stabilizing force and ride.

They learn to ride because somebody stronger has been carrying them.”

That’s the Christian life.

There were moments you thought you made it on your own.

But God had His hand on you the entire time.

Deuteronomy 31:8 says:

***“The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”***

TRUST HIM **So Don’t Quit**

Don’t quit praying for that child.

Don’t quit believing for healing.

Don’t quit fighting for your marriage.

You may struggle...

but don’t stop.

You may falter...but pre-decide you are gonna finish!

And if you FALL?

Get back up.

Proverbs 24:16 says:

***“Though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again.”***

Not “if” they fall.  
When they fall.  
The difference is they get back up.

## **Closing**

I started today talking about growing up in the 1970’s.

My best friend back then was Robbie Knuckles. We did everything together.  
Fiercely competitive.

One Fall Day we created an obstacle course in my back yard.

Under a picnic table. Weaving through clothes line poles...sprinting...hurdling  
chicken wire fence around garden...before diving into giant pile of leaves.

I went first and flew through the maze of picnic table, clothes lines and  
sprint...attempted to clear the fence and my foot didn’t get over the  
hurdle...sprawled out face first to the ground and got the breathe knocked out of  
me. But I hopped up cleared 2<sup>nd</sup> hurdle and dove breathless into the pile of leaves  
struggling to get my wind back.

After what seemed like an eternity...I asked Robbie what my time was.....

I forgot to start the timer was his reply.

And that’s when the fistfight started. HAHAHA.  
But ultimately...it didn’t matter.

**I FINISHED THE RACE!**

Sometimes in life you’ll soar through obstacles unimpeded...only to get tripped up  
unexpectedly.

You may crash out.  
Get the breath knocked out of you.  
And feel like quitting.

Following Jesus does not mean you never struggle. It means you keep getting back up because Jesus is still holding onto you.

And one day, by the grace of God, we'll be able to say like Paul:

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

So church...  
let's decide today:  
When I commit...  
I don't quit.

Why?

Because I have decided to follow Jesus...no turning back, no giving up,