

I have a confession to make this morning – this sermon is not really mine. I have tweaked it a little, and shortened it a lot, but it is based on a talk given by Robert Madu at the Leadership Conference we attended in London. The title is Run the race set before you.

Hebrews 12:1 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.*

What an awesome thought that God has set a race before us and we're expected to run it. How are we supposed to do that?

Heb 12: 2 *We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.*

1 Samuel 18:5-9 *Whatever Saul gave David to do, he did it—and did it well. So well that Saul put him in charge of his military operations. Everybody, both the people in general and Saul's servants, approved of and admired David's leadership. As they returned home, after David had killed the Philistine, the women poured out of all the villages of Israel singing and dancing, welcoming King Saul with tambourines, festive songs, and lutes. In playful frolic the women sang,*

*Saul kills by the thousand,
David by the ten thousand!*

This made Saul angry—very angry. He took it as a personal insult. He said, "They credit David with 'ten thousands' and me with only 'thousands.' Before you know it they'll be giving him the kingdom!" From that moment on, Saul kept his eye on David.

The writer to the Hebrews says we run our race by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus. But here we have Saul, because of a comparison other people made, no longer running his race because his focus and attention has shifted onto David.

So many people today cannot run the race God has set before them because their focus is on the people in the lanes next to them.

I know that one or two people here today love to run. I don't understand it. I don't understand why you would choose to go out in all weather to run. It hurts your knees and your ankles. You can't breathe. At least if you go out you actually go somewhere – if you're on a treadmill it's even worse because you run without getting anywhere. I see people looking at each other, and I do it myself, although I do it on the bike or rowing machine. You check what level the person next to is on and you match it or go higher. You watch what speed they're doing and you go faster.

Comparing yourself to other people is ok at the gym but not in life, so today the question is, “Who are you racing?” Is there someone in your life and you have set your eye on them and are running according to their pace instead of doing the thing God has called you to do. When you run on a treadmill you expend a lot of energy, a lot of sweat, a lot of movement but you never get anywhere. It’s the same with comparing yourself with other people – all you end up doing is exerting a lot of psychological, emotional and spiritual energy trying to keep up with someone you were never called or created to be, and in the end you realise, “I am in the exact same position as I was when I started.”

I don’t know about you but I know that I find myself making comparisons, and I think that our enemy uses our proclivity to compare against us. That’s why he was kicked out of heaven – he began to compare himself with God and decided to exalt himself rather than give glory to God. He will use comparison to kill, steal and destroy. Comparison is the thief of joy.

2 Cor 10: 12 *For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.*

It is not wise to compare ourselves with others! Why – ***because comparison will consistently cloud the clarity of God’s call on your life!*** Every one of us has a call that God has placed on our lives. This is not something for special people, or holy people, every one of God’s people has their own calling. It is not random – it is unique and specific. It is designed for you and nobody else. You are not on this earth by accident; you are here because God has put you here for this time and this place and this people.

Call is not the same as career or job! They are what you get paid to do – a calling is what you were made to do! God has already given you all you need to fulfil the call. If you were supposed to be taller he would have made you taller; if you were supposed to be a model he would have made you cuter; if you were supposed to sing he would have given you a voice. Stop complaining about the pieces you didn’t get and praise him because you are a masterpiece. You have been carefully created and meticulously made by a God who is obsessed with you.

Eph 2:10 *For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

God is a strategic God and even before you were born he had marked out a race for you. All we need to do is get in the lane and keep our eyes on Jesus.

It sounds great and it sounds easy but we find it so difficult. It’s like when you’re in traffic and all of the other lanes seem to be going faster than the one you’re in. So you work your way out, only to find the one you were in then moves faster.

Two lines make a lane. Two lines mark out where you have to run. As believers, we all have two destinies: the first is universal and it is that we become more and more like Jesus every day. But we also have another destiny and that is to become unlike anybody God ever created because you are totally unique. So every day we are to become more like Jesus and unlike anybody else God ever created.

That's why we need to stop saying, "I am just..." "I'm just a teacher." No, you are God's representative in the classroom. "I'm just a student... social worker...housewife..

That's your lane.

Saul had been running his race: he looked like a king, he was good looking, talked like a king and was chosen as king. God blessed him. But, when the brightness of the blessing blinds you to the blesser the blessing becomes a curse. Saul was more concerned with being the king than worshipping the King. David, out on the hillside with the sheep, was concerned with being in the presence of God. He is called a man after God's heart. He wasn't looking for fame or recognition. He ended up fighting Goliath because he was offended that Goliath ridiculed God. That was a destiny moment for David. In that moment David's life changed because he was running his race. At that moment Saul also had a destiny moment – and he started comparing himself with David. He couldn't bring himself to rejoice with David. He didn't thank God for the victory. When he heard those women saying that he had killed thousands, but David tens of thousands he was offended

He took it as a personal insult. He said, "They credit David with 'ten thousands' and me with only 'thousands.'

That's where the downward spiral started for Saul. He took his eyes off God and started with the 'and me' attitude. You know what I mean..

Car.....BMW; 5 new members..... 16 Baptisms and 28 professions of faith

That attitude will keep us from our lane and our race – and we end up getting nowhere and feeling frustrated and defeated.

You were created to be you. God made you and you are a masterpiece. He has plans for you and if you don't run your race you will suffer, and so will we, and so will our community.

Doesn't matter how old you are, or how qualified you feel. You are unique and you need to become more like Jesus and unlike anyone else. I don't know what God's unique call on your life is – only you and God know – but when you start living it out we'll all know. It might not be as dramatic as David's fight with Goliath but we'll know.