On Your Mark… Get Set… Go!

Sermon Outline
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Track: The Start of a Race
Scripture: Hebrews 12:1–3

I. Who Should GO? (Mark 16:15)
   A. Practice means Preparation — Discipleship is becoming Christ-like
   B. More than Giving Alone — You Should GO
   C. Spectators are Pre-Christians

II. Before You GO (Acts 1:4)
   A. Wait for the Gift (Acts 2: 14–41)
   B. The Importance of the Power (Acts 1:4–5)
   C. Going Without God is not an Option

III. When You GO (Mark 16:16–20)
   A. You are God’s only Plan (1 Corinthians 3:2–3)
   B. The world is watching for people who act upon what they believe. Believing and actions validate truth (Matthew 7:22–24).
   C. Signs will accompany you (Mark 16:20).

IV. Where Should You GO?
   A. Known Facts — Jesus included Jews, Gentiles and even mixed races!
   B. Where is your Jerusalem? Your neighborhood, school and job.
   C. Who is touching your neighborhood? Run the race and tell the story!

V. Conclusion/Altar Time
   A. Have you been sitting in the stands? It’s time to run the race!
   B. Are you struggling with too much stuff in your life? Too much on the calendar?
   C. Have you been running this race under your own power? Your big brother has a gift for you.
   D. Is God calling you to a part time or full time mission assignment?
   E. The Starting Line
   F. After Altar Time — The Final Lap
Introduction
There is an air of expectation in the stands, as a great cloud of witnesses looks on. The runners stretch and re-check their shoelaces in preparation for the race. The track official makes the announcement over the P.A. system introducing the runners and their lane assignments. And the crowd turns quiet in anticipation for the race to begin. The on-track official instructs the runners “Take your mark”. The runners quickly make the final adjustments to their position in the blocks, bodies almost horizontal to the ground — their fingers are outstretched and placed just inside the starting line. The official raises his starting gun into the air and calls “Set” and the runners appear motionless, feet pushed back fully into the blocks, they are cocked like a missile ready to fire. Now all await the sound of… Bang! The gun sounds and the race begins.

When we were kids we simply started our neighborhood races with, on your mark, get set, GO!… and the race was on.

We are in a race
Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Paul would have enjoyed ESPN. He uses so many references to races and fights. Here the writer of Hebrews tells us to throw off any weights.

Anything that slows you down in the race, drop it now, get rid of it. And look to Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:1–3, NIV

The Baton has already been passed
Jesus started this race. In fact, He won the race for us and now he hands the baton off to you and to me. We are not only in the race, we are in it to win!

Jesus stood one day after the resurrection and like the track official, he spoke these words to start the race:

Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Mark 16:15, NIV Jesus
1. Who should Go?

Practice Means Preparation
Everybody knows it is much easier to watch a race than to run a race. The race is the culmination of years of practice and preparation. A real athlete gets up everyday and spends hours getting his body, mind and spirit ready to win. His daily life reflects his pursuit of winning the race. What he eats, how much he eats, where he goes and who he hangs around can all deter his goal. So he is very selective. He is not merely in this race to finish. He is in it to win. We call that Discipleship — becoming like Christ.

And have you noticed? In our games, the spectators always out number the athletes. It should not be so in this eternal race.

More than Giving Alone
Too often we assume that all God requires is for us to give. Giving is necessary and needed. Too many people have mistakenly assumed the entire command to go was fulfilled by only giving. They believe that there is someone else who will GO if I will send in a check. This sterile approach misses Jesus real command for every Christian to GO!

Spectators are Pre-Christians
Fact: Spectators should only be Pre-Christians, people who have not yet accepted Christ as their personal Savior. They are watching us to see if this is real!

Muscle Builders/Illustration
A young Texas congregation was filled with guys who were into muscle building. You know the kind of guys who go to special events where they pose for judges that rate their physic. These guys had so many muscles they couldn’t even wear regular button down shirts! But when the music pastor needed help moving the grand piano off the stage, not one muscle builder showed up to help. They were afraid of possible injury. What a waste!

This should not be the picture of a Christian — flexing spiritual muscles at church, but never touching a hurting world.

When Jesus said “GO!”
- His GO was not intended to be for the apostles alone.
- It was not a GO for the missionaries alone.
- It was not a GO to the pastor(s) alone.
- His GO included every believer.
- Jesus call to GO… includes you!

Question Who should Go?
Answer Every Believer!
2. Before you Go

Wait for the Gift

_Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit._ Acts 1:4, NIV Jesus

They didn’t know they needed anything else, but 120 of Christ’s followers obeyed and waited in the upper room for this baptism. Did it help? Well Peter who had once denied Christ — three times, got up and boldly spoke to the citizens who overheard the upper room prayer time. He connected the dots from prophecy and let them know they needed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And over 3000 souls were saved that day. See Acts 2:14–41.

**Back to the Track/Illustration** _Suggestion: Have samples of these shoes to show._

a. Sandals are light, but running in them can be dangerous.

b. Loafers protect your feet better, but they can fly off, and you’re left running in your socks.

c. Wing tips stay on much better, but the leather sole slips on the track.

d. Tennis shoes will work, but they don’t really grip the surface very well either.

e. So, track aficionados came up with a solution, the light weight track shoe, it weighs only ounces and it comes with spikes on the bottom. You can even choose your length of spike according to the conditions. It is a great invention. They literally take seconds off of your time.

**Grandfather and Gifts/Illustration** An old grandfather had an unusual habit. Every year at Christmas time he would take all of his gifts into his room and sit them on the dresser. The family had bought him new shirts and hats and socks, things he really needed. But the gifts were never opened. They were his, but they were not available for use, because he didn’t tear off the wrapping and open the boxes.

Many Christians struggle with this gift called the Holy Spirit. They are rather like the old grandfather and are satisfied to simply know that the power of the Holy Spirit exists and they put it on the dresser for safe keeping.

If your big brother brought you a gift, a wrapped up pair of track shoes, would you open the gift and use them?

**The Importance of the Power**

Jesus spent three and a half years with his disciples and now He says don’t GO without first waiting in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to baptize you. He knew that they needed some specialized equipment. They needed more than just His teaching. They needed Supernatural Power.

If it was important for these men, how much more important is the power of the Holy Spirit needed today? Your Elder Brother has wrapped a very special gift for you. Will you open the gift?

**Going without God is Not an Option**

Going without God is not an option. We must have His power, His direction and His blessing.

Like the American Express ads say, “Don’t leave home without it.”
3. When you GO

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well. After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.
Mark 16:16–20, NIV

The World is Watching for People Who Act Upon What They Believe

Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evil-doers!’ Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. Matthew 7:22–24, NIV

The sad note here is that there will be people who look like Christians but won’t make it into heaven. Jesus infers that they heard the words but they didn’t put them into practice. They told the story, but they didn’t Live the Life!

Note: Looking like a Christian, and sounding like a Christian is not enough. People today will not buy a product that doesn’t prove itself valuable and effective. That is why this race cannot be won from inside your church building and count on it, you will get dirty and sweaty running this race.

You are God’s Only Plan

We are God’s only plan for the world to hear the Gospel. Jesus made no provision for a Silent Witness. It is our assignment to tell the story of how He changed our lives. We are to Live the Life and Tell the Story.

You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. I Corinthians 3:2–3, NIV

We are God’s billboards. Our actions and our words are having an impact on our generation and those who follow. Are they buying what you are selling?

Will we act upon the words we say? Pre-Christians have seen too many people who wear the team jersey but only cheer from a distance and are never in the game.

Who are these people?
3. When you GO (continued)

Signs Will Accompany You

**Harry and Tony**  Harry was a Christian that lived the life. He worked as the credit manager for over 25 years at the same company. Tony worked in the same company as the foreman of the warehouse. Harry reached out to Tony with kindness. Although Tony was not a Christian, Harry and Tony became friends. Tony went to the doctor one day and was diagnosed with cancer. He was omitted to the hospital and not expected to live. Harry took his wife and went to visit Tony. It was there in the hospital in his last few days on earth that Tony asked Jesus into his life. Harry led Tony in his prayer for salvation. Tony is in heaven today because Harry not only shared the story, he lived the life. And for Tony to hear the gospel, Harry had to GO. Tony came to Jesus through a life he observed over time. Who is watching your life? Are you willing to GO?

**This is a Win-Win Proposition**  Just… Run the race. His promise is that He will show up and confirm His Word with signs. He will get their attention, when we give Him the glory.

Notice — the scripture doesn’t say these signs might accompany, or will happen once in a while.

It says — these signs will accompany those who believe… the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

We can expect God to show up and show off!
4. Where should you GO?

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.
Acts 1:8, NIV

Jesus is including everyone with this command. Jews (Judea) and Gentiles, even mixed races (Samaria) in every town and every village, they all need to hear this message.

Known Facts
God is calling some folks to full time missionary ministry. But He is calling all of us today… to touch our communities! Full time ministry is our calling, our jobs are the way He has provided to pay for our ministry!

Where is your Jerusalem?
Your Jerusalem is your neighborhood, your school, and your company. You are God’s missionary on campus. God’s person of influence on the job. God’s word of encouragement to an overwhelmed mom down the street.

Who is touching your neighborhood?
Whose the Witness? What Gospel is being shared in your neighborhood? Who is taking that turf? Who are the witnesses? Are your missionaries on bicycles? Where are the Spirit filled runners? God is not willing that any should perish!

Too many people believe that there are many ways to get to heaven. You won’t win that argument through debate. But when you show them that you believe in a God that still answers prayer. Give them time… life’s troubles will come and they will need someone to pray for them. So do just that. Stop right there and pray for them — let God show up in those moments. Remember: Our assignment — Run the race and tell His Story.

Did you know that your family is on God’s Top Ten List? Your family is assignment #1. Your neighbors, your classmates and your co-workers are next in line. Here are some races that you can run today:

1. Ask your boss for permission to hold a five minute prayer time on Monday mornings ahead of work and pray for God to bless your company. God will show up!

2. Start a Parenting Group on your block. Young parents need help and godly information is incredibly deficient. God will meet with you!
3. Create a Mom’s Day Out for your neighbors. Take turns watching the kids while Moms go to the store. Those kids need Jesus too!

4. Start a Youth Alive Club, an Integrity Club at school. Students have so many things vying for their attention. Mind pollution is rampant. Deliver some Heavenly air into your school.

5. Throw a BBQ back yard party for your neighbors. They may show up with their own cans of refreshment, don’t let that stop you! They need living water, but they don’t know even where to get it. You be the fountain of living water!

**Mom and Dad** Did you know that you can go online and find out about short term opportunities to serve alongside missionaries in the states and around the world? Check out [ag.org](http://ag.org) and click on U. S. or World Missions and see the MAPS opportunities. Why not use a week of your vacation to help build a church?

**Retirees** Check out the RV program with Maps. Go to [rss.ag.org](http://rss.ag.org)

**Singles** Check out [youngadults.ag.org](http://youngadults.ag.org) and click on Events and Missions. In May every year many young adults go to Beach Reach to share the good news on Padre Island, Texas.

**Teens** Go to [youth.ag.org](http://youth.ag.org) and click on Win for ideas to help you reach your school for Christ. And then click on Send because every summer there are AIM trips — ministry opportunities for you to serve in the states and in foreign countries. FYI: This summer there is a big outreach to Detroit!

Your place to GO, may not be Africa, but He has called you to GO.

Your workplace, your neighborhood, your school, that’s where He has called you. Are you in this race?
Conclusion/Altar Time

We start where we began…

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*

Hebrews 12:1, NIV

**Have you been sitting in the stands?**
It’s time to run the race! This race starts by giving your life to Jesus. He is the only one who can change your life and give you a brand new start. Meet me here and let me pray with you.

**Are you struggling with too much stuff in your life?**

**Have you been running this race under your own power?**
Your big brother has a gift for you. It is time to come down and unwrap it. There is supernatural Power available for you.

**Is God calling you to a part time or a full time mission assignment?**
Bring every question and every fear right to Him. This altar is your where you make that vow, come and put your feet in the starting blocks.

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**The Starting Line**
The starting line is right here — *pointing to the altar area*

Let’s meet down here one more time and Re-Start this race.

**After Altar Time — The Final Lap**
Near the end of a long distance race, track officials have a special way of signaling to the racers that this is the final lap… it is the sound of a bell.

If God has such a signal in heaven, the bells are ringing. We are in the final days, this race is almost over. The next sound we’ll hear is not the sound of a gun or a bell, but the sound of a Trumpet!

Time is short. Your family needs you, your neighbors need you, your co-workers need you. God has called you to GO!

Today, I stand as the Track Official and say — Runners take your mark… get set… GO!