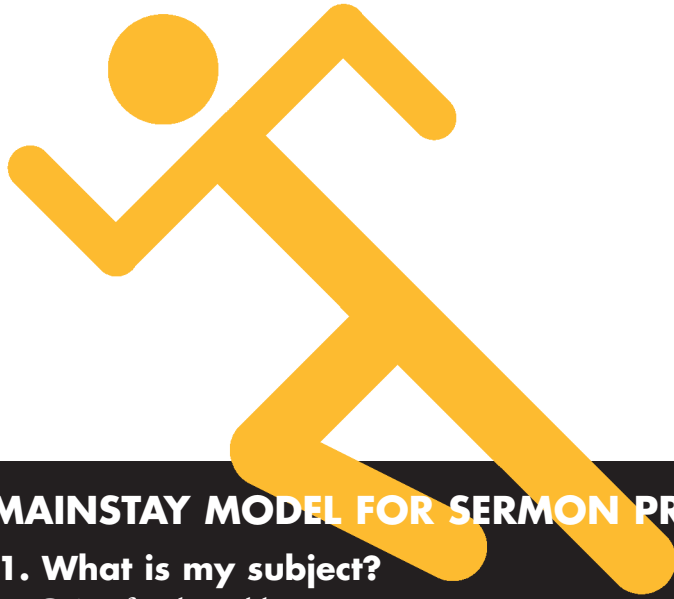




# SUNDAY 4

Reach for the Goal



# SERMON A

## SERMON TITLE

“Reach for the Goal”

## TEXT

Hebrews 12:2–4

## BY

Dr. David Mains

Mainstay Ministries, Wheaton, IL

## MAINSTAY MODEL FOR SERMON PREPARATION:

### 1. What is my subject?

Going for the gold.

### 2. What is the response being called for?

Reach for the goal.

### 3. What how-to's can be suggested?

Make Christ the first and last thought of your day; focus on Christ throughout the day by asking “What would Jesus do?”

### 4. How long will it take for this response to begin to mark people's lives?

Start this week and work at these practices until they become automatic; the next six weeks (or the rest of the summer) provide enough time to cement these spiritual habits.

*Note: David Mains originally preached Go for the Goal as a six-week series. We have provided all six sermons, should you wish to extend your series to a month and a half.*

## Introduction to Sermon Subject

In ancient times a focus of life was the hearth, or what we would call the “fireplace.” Actually, *focus* is the Latin word for “hearth.”

That use of the word *focus* was coined by the German astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571–1630). He used it to designate the point at which a parabolic mirror concentrates light rays to cause burning—a place of fire, or fireplace.

This ability to focus—to stay centered, to bring to bear intense concentration—is a key factor in Olympic competition. That's true when the actual time of the event arrives, but it's also the case in the days and weeks and months *leading up to* when the games are held.

...

The 2010 Summer Olympics in Vancouver, Canada, are now \_\_\_\_ days off [fill in appropriate number]. That's \_\_\_\_ weeks and \_\_\_\_ days, or about \_\_\_\_ hours. I

*Scriptures in this sermon are taken from the New Living Translation.*



wouldn't expect anyone here to know such details. But I have confidence that those athletes serious about competing have such dates well in mind.

Champions are marked by this burning fire—you can almost see it in their eyes. They're focused on what needs to be done. This task, this challenge, this calling is not something casual. It truly epitomizes who they are. Gold medal winners are not like the Iranian boxer Ali Kazemi who was disqualified at the 1992 Barcelona games because (can you believe) he had forgotten to bring his boxing gloves! That same year, 1992, Canadian yachtsman Hank Lammens was disqualified for not remembering to bring his life jacket.

Focus is a factor that comes to us now in our current series about going for the gold *spiritually* speaking. Christians who determine to be exemplary in their relationship to the Lord have a certain focus. See if you pick it up as I again read from Hebrews 12, not just verse 1 this time, but verses 1–4.



## Response Review

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses” (Message 1)—Believers with a “go for the gold” mindset *Remember the Witnesses*. Have you acted yet on the recommendation that you discover a hero from the past who can push you in your walk of faith?

Back to Scripture—“Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress” (Message 2)—Believers with a “go for the gold” mindset *Remove Any Hindrances*. Have you learned to act quickly when temptation occurs? To immediately say no to the devil, like Jesus did? In the two weeks since I preached on this topic, have you discovered that there is actually greater pleasure in overcoming sin than there is in giving in to it? Is your name on the poster\* that reads, BECAUSE OF SOME VICTORIES THIS PAST WEEK, I AM AN IMPROVED RUNNER IN THE RACE GOD HAS SET BEFORE ME. Has being able to sign the poster done wonders for your journey of faith?

Scripture again—“And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us” (Message 3)—Believers with a “go for the gold” mindset *Run with Perseverance*. Perseverance. Early on you need to realize that going for the gold will not be easy. Then you no doubt agree that any expectation of being a winner will require great discipline. Your mindset will be one of putting the welfare of your team ahead of personal pain, and you must exercise faith at all times that this is something you can do. Have you worked further on your spiritual game plan?

Resaid: have you worked on what you would like to accomplish spiritually speaking by the end of the summer—by Labor Day weekend?

\*Note the use of a pre-made poster in this sermon.



## This Week's Response

Now, verses 2–4:

We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterward. Now he is seated in the place of highest honor beside God's throne in heaven. Think about all he endured when sinful people did such terrible things to him, so that you don't become weary and give up. After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin.

Message 4—Believers with a “go for the gold” mindset *Reach for the Goal*. They keep their eyes on the prize; they *focus* on Christ.

Keeping our eyes on Jesus (reads the text)—thinking about all he endured. The NIV renders it this way, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus. . . . Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men.” Here then is the believer's focus—the point of concentration—at specific times when centering on him is extremely critical, but also during the days and weeks and months and years that are more or less the normal routine of living.

Do others sense that you are Christ-focused? Is there this fire in your eyes, this desire to reach the goal? And how does one begin to be characterized in this fashion?



## How-to

I have two beginner suggestions to make. Both have been time-tested and proven effective—the first for many centuries, the second for over a hundred years now.

**Here's Suggestion 1**—learn to make Christ your first thought and last thought of the day. Upon awakening, train your mind to go immediately to Jesus. This could be through a song.

When morning gilds the skies, my heart awakening cries:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

Alike at work or prayer to Jesus I repair:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

Be this while life is mine, my canticle divine:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

Be this the eternal song, through all the ages long,

May Jesus Christ be praised!

That's a hymn from the 1800s. Use a modern praise chorus if you prefer.

Here's a prayer I've come to love. It's from a book about fixed-hour prayers—or prayers as practiced by a religious community of monks, for instance. Recently my wife and I have often found these words most meaningful:

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day. Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity, and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.



I've encouraged you to get acquainted with some of those heroes in what our Hebrews passage calls "the great crowd of witnesses." Listen to this magnificent awakening prayer from St. Patrick of Ireland (377–400 AD). I've cut some of the lines just because of length.

I arise today

Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,  
Through a belief in the Threeness,  
Through confession of the Oneness  
Of the Creator of creation.

I arise today

Through the strength of Christ's birth and His baptism,  
Through the strength of His crucifixion and His burial,  
Through the strength of His resurrection and His ascension.

I arise today

Through the strength of heaven;  
Light of the sun,  
Radiance of the moon,  
Splendor of fire,  
Speed of lightning,  
Swiftmess of the wind,  
Depth of the sea,  
Stability of the earth,  
Firmness of the rock.

I arise today

Through God's strength to pilot me;  
God's might to uphold me,  
God's wisdom to guide me,  
God's eye to look before me,  
God's ear to hear me,  
God's word to speak for me,  
God's hand to guard me,  
God's way to lie before me,  
God's shield to protect me,  
God's hosts to save me  
From snares of the devil,  
From temptations of vices,  
From every one who desires me ill.

Afar or anear,

I summon today all these powers between me and evil,

Against every cruel merciless power that opposes my body and soul,  
Against incantations of false prophets,  
Against black laws of pagandom,  
Against false laws of heretics,  
Against craft of idolatry,  
Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and soul.

Christ shield me today

Against poison, against burning,  
Against drowning, against wounding,



So that reward may come to me in abundance.  
Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,  
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,  
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,  
Christ when I arise,  
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,  
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me,  
Christ in the eye that sees me,  
Christ in the ear that hears me.  
I arise today  
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,  
Through a belief in the Threeness,  
Through a confession of the Oneness  
Of the Creator of creation.

Do you see his focus? Sense his centering for the day? Hear the intense concentration? Feel the fire? Learn to make Christ your first thought of the day—and also your last thought as the day comes to an end.

For many of you, what I'm suggesting is elementary. Others, who have not made it a habit to pray in the evening before retiring, might need a few suggestions as to what to do. Well, don't make things more difficult than necessary. Understand, you won't be praying like St. Patrick in the next week or two. So, before you get in bed, or when you stretch out on your Sealy PosturePedic or your dux bed or water bed, simply start talking to the Lord, OK?

If you get done and haven't fallen asleep yet, slowly pray the Lord's Prayer in your own words. Our Father, who art in heaven—*not my earthly father, but my heavenly one*—Hallowed be thy name—*I honor your name. I revere it. I hold it in highest esteem.* Thy kingdom come—*thy reign, your rule, your kingship: let that come about soon*—on earth as it is in heaven (and so on).

Still awake? Review the words of a hymn, or go over what you've been learning here in church. Believers with a "go for the gold" mindset *Remember the \_\_\_\_\_*. They *Remove Any \_\_\_\_\_*. They *Run with \_\_\_\_\_*. And they *Reach for the \_\_\_\_\_*, which means they no doubt start the day and also end it centering their thoughts on the Lord.

So, focus on the Lord at both ends of the day. Now here's a way to remain more Christ-focused *throughout* the day.

**Suggestion 2**—As the 1800s came to a close, a minister named Charles Sheldon wrote a book that has sold multiple millions copies. Even today it continues to be popular. *In His Steps* is a fictional story about a pastor and his people in a church probably not all that unlike this one, where the lives of many were profoundly



touched by an unusual incident that you saw portrayed earlier in the video clip.\* What happened next I'll read to you.†

The narrative continues with the pastor preaching the following Sunday.

The appearance and words of this stranger in the church last Sunday made a very powerful impression on me. I am not able to conceal from you or myself the fact that what he said, followed as it has been by his death in my house, has compelled me to ask as I never asked before "What does following Jesus mean?"

I am not in a position yet to utter any condemnation of this people or, to a certain extent, of myself, either in our Christ-like relations to this man or the numbers that he represents in the world. But all that does not prevent me from feeling that much that the man said was so vitally true that we must face it in an attempt to answer it or else stand condemned as Christian disciples. A good deal that was said here last Sunday was in the nature of a challenge to Christianity as it is seen and felt in our churches. I have felt this with increasing emphasis every day since. . . .

What I am going to propose now is something which ought not to appear unusual or at all impossible of execution. Yet I am aware that it will be so regarded by a large number, perhaps, of the members of this church. But in order that we may have a thorough understanding of what we are considering, I will put my proposition very plainly, perhaps bluntly. I want volunteers from the First Church who will pledge themselves, earnestly and honestly for an entire year, not to do anything without first asking the question, "What would Jesus do?" And after asking that question, each one will follow Jesus as exactly as he knows how, no matter what the result may be. I will of course include myself in this company of volunteers, and shall take for granted that my church here will not be surprised at my future conduct, as based upon this standard of action, and will not oppose whatever is done if they think Christ would do it.

Have I made my meaning clear? At the close of the service I want all those members who are willing to join such a company to remain and we will talk over the details of the plan. Our motto will be, "What would Jesus do?" Our aim will be to act just as He would if He was in our places, regardless of immediate results. In other words, we propose to follow Jesus' steps as closely and as literally as we believe He taught His disciples to do. And those who volunteer to do this will pledge themselves for an entire year, beginning with today, so to act.

Well, you need to read on your own what happens. The book is 248 pages long. Where I've read from is only page 15.

W. W. J. D. —what would Jesus do? As significant decisions are made through the week make that your focus, a way of centering your thoughts, the point of concentration, your brush with sacred fire.

Believers with a "go for the gold" mindset reach for the goal. They keep their eyes on the finish line as they strive to become winners. They remain Christ-focused. Notice the word *remain*. This is not something you toy with for a week

\*For information on obtaining the video clip, see p. A5.

†Pastor, consider providing a few of these inexpensive books for your congregation.



and then quickly forget. All along I have been saying that champions are not made overnight. What I'm sharing with you in this series is their mindset—their way of thinking, which marks them until the prize has eventually been won.

More specifically, that means you make Christ your first and last thoughts of the day until the practice becomes almost an automatic reflex. And you regularly ask, “What would Jesus do?” whenever such questioning is appropriate.



## Conclusion

Certainly that's better than coming up to a time when God is counting on you to be ready to go—only to be disqualified, because you forgot something as essential as your shield of faith . . . or (would you believe) you plain neglected to wear your belt of truth, or sword of the spirit.

But then, I foresee something better than that for many of you. In the next few weeks—between now and Labor Day, as was targeted last Sunday, the end of the summer—I envision numbers of you making great improvement in your ability to focus on Christ, to stay centered on him, to bring intense daily concentration and purpose to this matter of fixing your eyes on Jesus and reaching for that goal. Am I right?

In fact, I believe I detect in some of you real championship material, spiritually speaking, with eyes on fire for your Lord!



# SERMON B

## SERMON TITLE

“Reach for the Goal”

## TEXT

Hebrews 12:1–3

## BY

Rev. Joseph Liddick

Wheaton Wesleyan Church, Wheaton, IL

## MAINSTAY MODEL FOR SERMON PREPARATION:

### 1. What is my subject?

Going for the gold.

### 2. What is the response being called for?

Reach for the goal.

### 3. What how-to's can be suggested?

Fix your eyes on Jesus (specific examples given in sermon).

### 4. How long will it take for this response to begin to mark people's lives?

Four weeks is enough time for this to become a spiritual practice.

## Introduction to Sermon Subject

Every four years athletes from all over the world gather in the Olympic Games to compete against one another and determine who is the best in their particular sport. To be the best in the world in an event is an ambition that requires superior talent, training, and mental toughness, and is finally rewarded with standing on the top of a podium and receiving a gold medal while your country's national anthem is played.

What do you think it would feel like to win a gold medal? What do you think it would feel like to win seven? Well, in the 1972 games in Munich, American swimmer Mark Spitz did just that. In his first event he won the 200-meter butterfly. A few hours later he swam the anchor leg in the 4x100-meter freestyle relay. In the next three days he took gold medals in the 200-meter freestyle and the 100-meter butterfly as well as anchoring the 4x200-meter relay. Understandably, he was getting tired. His next event was to be the 100-meter freestyle, and he asked the coach to pull him out of the event so he could be fresh for the final medley relay. One of his teammates had actually recorded a faster time coming into the Olympics. His coach told him that if he didn't compete in the 100 he would be

*Scriptures in this sermon are taken from the New International Version.*



out of the relay and people would say he was a “chicken” for not facing his rival. So he swam, beating his rival by several feet and setting a world record. In fact, in addition to winning 7 gold medals at Munich, he also set 7 world records in the process! Understandably, he was dubbed “The Golden Boy” and later even received the Sullivan Award as the outstanding male athlete of the year.

The apostle Paul once wrote, “But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13–14). What is the goal toward which you are pressing in your life? For the last several weeks we have been talking about “going for the gold,” but rather than setting our sights on Olympic gold, we have been looking at what it takes to become a spiritual champion in life.



### Response Review

We looked at the lives of a number of spiritual champions, the great cloud of witnesses that line the grandstands of heaven and cheer for you and me as we attempt to run our own race. We noted that it is critical for us to strip off the sin and the weights that tend to trip us up in our Christian life. And we also noted the importance of persevering through the difficult things that life throws at us as we run the race that God has marked out for us.



### This Week's Response

Now the writer of Hebrews, our coach in this season of training, instructs us to “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.”

Athletes, for better or worse, become heroes to those who look up to them. Let's face it, what aspiring young basketball player does not want to “be like Mike?” Well, God has given us the perfect role model to look at for our own individual races—Jesus Christ. In fact, when it comes to becoming a spiritual champion, there is no one else in the entire world that even comes a close second.

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in still another village where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty. Then for three years he was an itinerant preacher. He never had a family or owned a home. He never traveled 200 miles from the place he was born. He never set foot inside a big city. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never went to college. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself. While he was still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends deserted him. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his clothing, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned put together have not



affected the life of man on earth as much as that one solitary life. (“One Solitary Life” by James Allen Francis)

What is there about Jesus’ life that makes us want to fix our eyes on him? I believe that, without question, it is his love. In fact, the first song I ever learned in Sunday school was “Jesus Loves Me.” From the moment he began his ministry we see him touching lepers, healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons, feeding hungry multitudes. But yet nothing demonstrated his love for people more than his death. He willingly went to a horrible cross of shame and suffering in order to die for our sins. The apostle John wrote, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16). And so we sing, “What wondrous love is this, O my soul, that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dreadful curse for my soul.” The writer of Hebrews says, “He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterward. . . . Think about all he endured when sinful people did such terrible things to him, so that you don’t become weary and give up” (12:2–3, NLT).

The Bible, our training manual, says, “Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Christ did” (1 John 2:6, NLT). In other words, we should always be asking ourselves the simple question, “What would Jesus do?” WWJD has become cliché today, but it still should be the driving motivation behind all of our decision making. Well, almost all. Ann Landers wrote about a young 16-year-old boy who looked out at the driveway and did not see the car he had expected. He spoke to his father who reminded him about the length of his hair, his neglect of his Bible reading and the sad state of his grades in school. So the young man got busy, and at the end of the semester he approached his father again. He had a report card that showed considerable improvement, but his father shook his head and commented again on the length of his hair. The 16-year-old protested. He reminded his dad that he had been reading the Bible and noticed that Jesus had long hair. His father responded, “You keep on reading that Bible, son, and you’ll find out that Jesus walked nearly everywhere he went!”

Olympic runner Eric Liddell is a wonderful example of someone who tried to pattern his life after Jesus. Eric was the son of a Scottish missionary to China, and sensed that he too had a call of God upon his life. Prior to the 1924 Olympics he had been one of the fastest men in the world in the 100-meter dash, and, as a Scot, he was chosen to represent Great Britain in the games. However, when he arrived there, he discovered that the time of the event had been changed and would now be run on a Sunday. This presented a real dilemma, which very few people including the prince of England could understand. You see, as a committed Christian, Eric believed that his speed in running was a gift of God. He also believed that he could not honor God if he violated the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment regarding the Sabbath. So, after training for four years and being sent by his country to win a gold medal, he painstakingly made a decision not to run. [Show clip from the movie *Chariots of Fire*]



Eric Liddell wanted to bring glory to God through his running, but he would not compromise God's law to do it. He kept his eyes on the true goal, on Jesus. Consequently God honored him for his decision. One of the other British runners, Lord Andrew Lindsey, who had already won a silver medal in the hurdles, offered to let Eric take his place in the 400-meter race on Thursday. Eric was a short-distance sprinter and had never raced at the longer distances, but the British Olympic Committee decided to give him a chance. On the day of the race, just before the start, one of the runners from the United States, Jackson Shultz, handed him a note which read, "God will honor those who honor Him." Then he took his place and the gun sounded. [Video clip]

Well, this is 2003, not 1924. And you and I are not being asked to race on Sunday in the Olympic Games, although my guess is that today we would not have likely made the same decision that Eric Liddell made. Nevertheless, we still have our own race to run. But as we run, just where is it that we are fixing our eyes? If it is anywhere except on Jesus, we are inevitably going to miss the mark of becoming a spiritual champion.



### How-to

So how do we go about fixing our eyes on Jesus? I believe a few spiritual calisthenics might help to strengthen our focus. Here are a few exercises that have helped me along the way:

- Do a slow read of one of the Gospels. As you read, ask yourself the following questions: "What did Jesus do? What did he say? What can I copy for my own life?"
- Start and stop the day with prayer and meditation. If I don't intentionally take the time to look to Jesus right away at the beginning of my day, something always jumps in and steals my focus.
- Listen to praise music as you drive. It's a great reminder of who we must keep looking toward.
- Keep asking the question, "What would Jesus do?" It will radically change the way you go about your work, your play, even your worship. In fact, for a quick inspirational read about a group of Christians in a town who accepted the challenge to ask this question each day, pick up Charles Sheldon's book *In His Steps*.

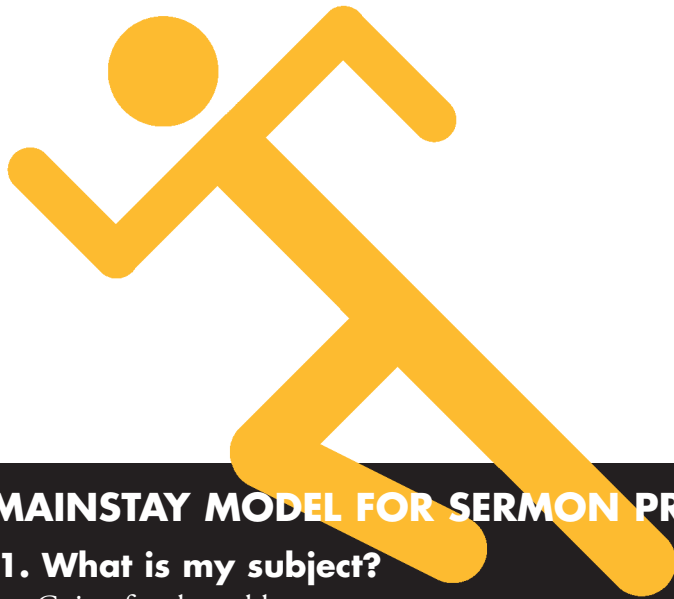
Can I let you in on a secret? If you keep yourself focussed on Jesus, in time you yourself will become more and more like him. That's what the race is all about. Olympic runners run for a gold medal. We, on the other hand, run our race to hear those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Listen to this testimony of someone whom I believe ran it well. He was a young African pastor, and this note was found tacked to the wall of his house.



I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of his. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure. I'm finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarfed goals. I no longer need pre-eminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean on his presence, walk by patience, lift by prayer, and labor by power. My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way rough, my companions few, my guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the adversary, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity. I won't give up, shut up, let up, until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till he comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till he stops me. And when he comes for his own, he will have no problems recognizing me. My banner will be clear!

**Conclusion**

Well, have you entered the race yet? Are you in the process of training yourself to be a spiritual champion? If so, then don't give up. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Keep pressing toward the goal—the high calling of God in Christ Jesus to become like him. Remember, the race is only one step at a time. Just keep moving forward.



# SERMON C

## SERMON TITLE

“Reach for the Goal”

## TEXT

Hebrews 12:1–3

## BY

Pastor Michael Hernandez  
Manchester Trinity Chapel, Akron, OH

## MAINSTAY MODEL FOR SERMON PREPARATION:

### 1. What is my subject?

Going for the gold.

### 2. What is the response being called for?

Reach for the goal.

### 3. What how-to's can be suggested?

Say “good morning” and “good night” to God every day.

### 4. How long will it take for this response to begin to mark people's lives?

Four weeks is enough time for this to begin to be a spiritual practice.

## Introduction to Sermon Subject

I mowed my grass last week. I imagine some of you did, too. Some people just mow to get it over with. Not me. I like straight lines when I mow. Sometimes I start next to the fence; that becomes my first straight line. Sometimes I begin next to the house and make a ring around the yard. I simply follow that pattern through the rest of the yard. Sometimes I like to mow my grass in a different direction. Maybe it prevents lawn mower ruts or something. But I still like straight lines.

So how do I get those straight lines? This question, this life-changing dilemma, has baffled men and women throughout the ages! The first row is the key. I start at one side of my yard and find an object that is not in my yard. I fix my eyes on that object and walk straight toward it while I mow. I don't look down or side to side, except occasionally to make sure I'm not stepping into a hole or onto something I would rather avoid.

When I finish that first course, I turn around to look, and often I'm amazed at how straight that row is, because I fixed my eyes on an object and followed it. Here's the point: the object has to be outside of the yard. Otherwise, I could fol-

*Scriptures in this sermon are taken from the New International Version.*



low it until I got to it. Then I would have to find another object and follow it. But that rarely—if ever—results in a straight line. I've also tried to look back while I am mowing, to make sure my line continues straight. But that doesn't work, either. What works best is to *find that distant object, keep my eyes focused on it, and direct my path straight toward it.*



### Response Review

[Read Hebrews 12:2a] Over the past three weeks, we have been pursuing a prize. Going for the gold. Learning how to become spiritual champions. We have been using the first 3 verses of Hebrews 12 as our training manual. We learned that those who are spiritual champions: Remember the Witnesses, Remove Any Hindrances, and Run with Perseverance. [Read Hebrews 12:1]



### This Week's Response

Today we come to the last in our 4-part series, and we learn that **those who are spiritual champions: Reach for the Goal.**

[Read Hebrews 12:2–3] The *race* is God's will for our lives, as we learned last Sunday—his universal will for us all, as well as his specific will for you or me. So when we say we're "reaching for the goal," we emphasize this fact that we are not yet done. Though we conclude our series this morning, the race continues. We have not yet become spiritual champions, because our race is not yet over. Jesus has not yet returned. Nor yet called us home.

I'd like to answer two questions this morning as we talk about reaching for the goal.

1. How do we do it? How do we fix our eyes on Jesus? How do we reach for the goal?
2. How do we know when we've done it? What will it look like?

We will never be perfect. But we can continue to move towards Christ. Paul says this in Philippians 3:12–14. [Read Philippians 3:12–14]

Fixing our eyes on Jesus is straining for that prize. Reaching for the goal. But how do we know we are on the right track? We want to fix our eyes on it, so when our race is over, we may be able to say with the apostle Paul,

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7–8)

You have a handout in your bulletin so you can jot a few notes. **Those who are spiritual champions . . . Reach for the Goal.** Now, I'd like to take those questions



I posed in reverse order. First, ask the question: What will happen when I do it? In other words: What's in it for me? Why should I even want to fix my eyes on Jesus? Why should I reach for that goal? Second: What does it look like? What will be the end result? Let's tackle that one first; then I think we'll be in a better position to answer the first question (How do I do it?).

Turn to Exodus 34. Jesus is God. When we fix our eyes on Jesus, we are fixing our eyes on God. Let's look at a few people who fixed their eyes on the Lord and see what happened.

[**Read Exodus 34:28–35**] Moses spent time with God: he fixed his eyes on the Lord. When he came out from the presence of the Lord, he actually glowed. He didn't even realize it until people starting running away. They figured he was radioactive or something.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 3. When we fix our eyes on the Lord, we glow! [**Read 2 Corinthians 3:18**] I won't take time to explain everything going on in these verses. Please read 2 Corinthians 3:7–18 this week. The point is that *we* are like Moses. He got to spend time with God; as a result, he glowed and everybody noticed. When we spend time with the Lord, when we fix our eyes on Jesus, when we reach for the goal—we glow, and others notice.

In the book of Acts, chapter 4, the disciples were on trial. Though they were “unschooled, uneducated men,” they confounded the authorities. Acts 4:13 says the leaders “took note that these men had been with Jesus.” They glowed. Not literally, like Moses, but spiritually; and everybody noticed. 2 Corinthians tells us as we spend time with the Lord, as we fix our eyes on Jesus and reach towards the goal, we will “glow,” and people will notice. And that will give us opportunity to share Jesus' love.

What will happen when we fix our eyes on Jesus? (What's in it for me?) We will glow. We will receive a spiritual high.

Just ask Isaiah. In chapter 6, he saw the Lord, and it enabled Isaiah to outlast five kings of Israel.

Ask Daniel. In chapter 10, he fixed his eyes on Jesus and became so overwhelmed that he fainted dead away. When he awoke, he saw a future revelation that people still argue about today.

Ask Paul, who was taken up to paradise, to “third heaven,” where he fixed his eyes on Jesus, and words failed to express his experience.

What happens when we fix our eyes on Jesus?

Ask John—he wrote the book of Revelation.

Ask Peter—he saw the transfiguration, which words fail to describe, and he walked on water, as long as his eyes were fixed on Jesus.



Ask Stephen—he was enabled to pray for those stoning him.

Ask Jesus—he was so anguished he sweat drops of blood, yet was strengthened by an angel.

How do we know when we've done it? We will see the things he sees. We will be where he is. We will be closer to him today than a year ago, or a month ago. We will be like Enoch, who walked with God and "was not." He didn't notice the change of location, because his eyes fixed on the Lord, and the Lord doesn't change. It's that fixed object, outside my yard (or my life), that enables me to make a straight course, as long as I keep my eyes on it.

One day Jesus will call my name  
As days go by, I hope I don't stay the same.  
I wanna get so close to Him that it's no big change  
On that day that Jesus calls my name.

—Wayne Watson, "One Day"



### How-to

How do we do it? Go where he goes. Look at what he does, what he's doing. If you're not sure what that should look like, here's a suggestion: say "Good morning" and "Goodnight" to him every day. In other words, read his Word and talk to him at the beginning of your day and again at the end. Get focused before you start your day; then return to him, unload the day with him, at night. If you're struggling to keep your focus, this is a good way to remind yourself. Determine not to start your day, and not to finish it, without carving out a part of that day for your Lord.

Hang out with his people; they'll tell you how they do it. If you don't have any friends who are helping you reach for your goal, call at the church. We have small group opportunities for you to plug into.\*



### Conclusion

It's like mowing the grass: as we keep our eyes on an object outside ourselves, we will wind up with "straight lines" in our life. What happens when we do it? We remember the greatest witness of all. Consider the example of Jesus. We will be enabled to throw off whatever hinders, like Jesus did. We will have perseverance, like Jesus in the garden and on the cross. We will be on our way to becoming spiritual champions!

*\*If your church doesn't have small groups, mention a similar fellowship idea.  
Or consider letting this Month of Sundays series launch some new small groups in your church.*