

Script: Pastor Frank R. Johnson

## First Peter: Truth and Hope for Sojourners

### “Winning the Great Race of Faith”

1 Peter 5:8-14

Take a first look.

I. “Vanderlei Lima went to Athens in 2004 to do what no other Brazilian had ever done—medal in the Olympic marathon. This marathon was special. The runners would retrace the 2,500-year-old route of Phidipedes, the original marathoner.

“As Lima neared the last leg of the race, he was in first place, and throngs of flag-waving spectators cheered him on. It was one of those moments where people of various backgrounds put their differences aside. The joyful celebration turned to bewilderment, however, when an eccentric spectator bolted from the crowd and tackled Lima. The assailant, [a defrocked priest] who was wearing a red, white, and green kilt, did not injure Lima, but the delay dashed Lima’s hopes for a gold medal. In the ensuing chaos, Lima lost 20 minutes and two other runners sped by him to win the gold and silver. Despite the unfortunate incident, Lima did not give up.

“Following the race Lima expressed this reaction: ‘I’m not going to cry forever about the incident, although it broke my concentration, but I managed to finish, and the bronze medal in such a difficult marathon is also a great achievement.’”<sup>1</sup>

II. It is God’s purpose that we enter the spiritual race to win! To win, however, is not necessarily to beat your companions in the race, but to finish the race with honor. He wants us to finish the great race of faith! He will help us get there from here. As Peter brings his short letter to a close, he gives us a glimpse of what it will take to be the victors in this great race of faith. This is a message for aspiring finishers.

Take a closer look at 1 Peter 5:8-14.

#### **I. WINNING THE GREAT RACE OF FAITH ASSUMES THE REALITY OF SPIRITUAL OPPOSITION. vv. 8-9a**

1. *Our spiritual enemy the devil is described as a prowling lion.* He is looking for his next meal. He is roaring and wandering, searching out a weak member of the family of God to destroy.

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| A—We must be careful that one of us does not become Satan’s next meal! |
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**I—I have heard that it is the old lion that must resort to loud roaring to attempt to intimidate his prey and paralyze it with fear.** We must not allow his intimidation to cause us to give up or give in. We need to be prepared for whatever he might bring against us, but we must not either underestimate his lingering power nor give him more credit than he is due.

**I—Satan is the master of the lie.** He attempts to twist our perspective in such a way that we think we are seeing something good when we are about to do ourselves and others

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<sup>1</sup> “Defrocked Priest Attacks Marathon Leader,” USA Today (8-29-04); submitted by David Slagle, Atlanta, Georgia, to *PreachingToday.com*.

great harm. Having an affair may look like fun or like an escape from boredom or difficulties in the marital relationship, but really it is no such thing. For the person who gives in to such a lie, it only compounds the pain in the long run, because that person then must face the fact that he/she is both a liar and a cheat, and that is a tough pill to swallow. Then that person must keep finding more and more reasons to blame his/her spouse for his/her own bad choice. It's a vicious circle of shame and blame.

"In July of 2004, the Arizona Game and Fish Department began nursing more than thirty emaciated, dehydrated, banged-up pelicans. During the previous two weeks, the injured pelicans had been found from Yuma to Phoenix.

"The brown pelicans were injured when they descended from the sky, sailed low over sidewalks and asphalt highways, stretched out their feet as though to make a perfect splash landing in water, and then tumbled end over end when they instead hit the pavement.

"The pelicans, apparently suffering a food shortage in California, flew to Arizona looking for fish. From the sky, the shimmering hot air over the black asphalt appeared to the Pelicans like water. Down they flew for fish and a refreshing dip in a lake. What they found instead was solid pavement, dehydration, hunger, and near death. Reality hits hard.

"Thankfully, the Arizona Game and Fish Department came to their rescue."<sup>2</sup>

If Satan can get us to mistake hard asphalt for shimmering and refreshing water, he will laugh all the way to hell. We must not allow him this twisted pleasure.

## 2. So we must be "self-controlled and alert."

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| A—Are we on our guard against such temptation? |
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I—"I live in a small, rural community," wrote an author in *The Wittenberg Door* magazine several years ago. "There are lots of cattle ranches around here," he went on, "and, every once in a while, a cow wanders off and gets lost. It's a big deal because if you happen to hit (as in 'drive into') a lost cow, it's your fault and you have to pay the rancher for his cow. (That is part of the rural culture—we have to worry about nuclear destruction and runaway cows.). Ask a rancher how a cow gets lost, and chances are he will reply, 'Well, the cow starts nibbling on a tuft of green grass, and when it finishes, it looks ahead to the next tuft of green grass, and when it finishes, it looks ahead to the next tuft of green grass and starts nibbling on that one, and then it nibbles on a tuft of grass right next to a hole in the fence. It then sees another tuft of green grass on the other side of the fence, so it nibbles on that one and then goes on to the next tuft. The next thing you know, the cow has nibbled itself into being lost.'"<sup>3</sup>

Here is the challenge for us as Christians. We must guard against the nibbling! It is the little choices that set us up for the big failures. This is where alertness is so important. This is why self-control is such a vital part of the Christian life. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:23). When the Holy Spirit is free to lead our lives, we are not as out of control ourselves.

3. We are taught to "resist him" in confident faith. We must stand against the enemy of our souls with resolute tenacity.

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| A—Are we determined to stand against the tempter in the power of God's Spirit, or are we just rolling over and being defeated? |
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<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Larson, Washington D.C. and Craig Brian Larson, Arlington Heights, IL; source: Associated Press, "Pelicans Mistake Arizona Asphalt for Lakes," CNN.com (posted 7-12-04) (viewed 7-13-04).

<sup>3</sup> From the July 1988 issue of *The Wittenberg Door*.

**I—A guy named John Eastwood has said, “People do not decide to be drunkards, drug addicts, prostitutes, murderers, or thieves, but they pitch their tent toward Sodom, and the powers of evil overcome them.”** He is describing a lack of resistance in the small things that build up until they are major moral compromises.

**I—We need to be constantly on guard against not only the obvious attacks but also to the subtle small compromises. Henry Ward Beecher**, renowned preacher of the first half of the twentieth century, said, “Oftentimes great and open temptations are the most harmless because they come with banners flying and bands playing and all the munitions of war in full view, so that we know we are in the midst of enemies that mean us damage, and we get ready to meet and resist them. Our peculiar dangers are those that surprise us and work treachery in our fort.”

So we must guard the fort! We must be ready for open attack and be alert to spies in the camp. We must become more alert to subtle compromises in our attitudes that creep into our hearts one little choice at a time.

## **II. WINNING THE GREAT RACE OF FAITH DEMANDS A PERSPECTIVE ON SUFFERING. vv. 9b-11**

*1. In suffering we have solidarity with our brothers throughout the world.* There is some comfort to know that we are not alone in our fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

A—The Church is more than just this local congregation. We have a vital connection with every Christian in every place, no matter what they are up against.

**I—When we pray for a family in the Sudan whose daughter has been forced into prostitution and slavery because the family is Christian, we should suffer with them.** When we face sexual temptation in this oversexed society, we are not alone. The same fight is being waged by believers in Amsterdam, Holland, and in Nairobi, Kenya. When we read or hear about a brother in an Islamic country who is on trial for his faith, we should allow ourselves to imagine what it would be like for us to be there with him, uncertain of whether he might be hauled out of jail at any time and beheaded. When we feel slighted or discounted in public affairs discussions because of a stilted idea of “separation of Church and state,” we should take heart. Many of our brothers and sisters in Pakistan or Iran or Albania have no voice whatever in public affairs, except, that is, the voice of prayer to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

*2. Suffering will always be temporary.* Peter says that this present moment of hardship will last but “a little while.”

A—Can we learn to wait for God’s best in His time?

**I—I told you recently that Jeannie and I read a book called *Breaking Down Walls* a few years ago.** This book was written by Raleigh Washington and Glen Kehrein, a black and a white brother in Chicago who were doing a team-ministry at that time. We were powerfully moved as we read Raleigh Washington tell how he was discharged from the Army one day short of twenty years, the time that would have earned his full Army retirement. Why? White officers whom he had passed up in promotions were jealous of him and made false accusations against him. They had presented thousands of pages of written accusation, all of which had no basis in fact, but which the review board accepted anyway.

God used that discharge under “other than honorable conditions” for His purposes, however. Raleigh and his wife had become Christians while in the military, and he was more and more drawn to a preaching vocation. Because of the terms of his discharge, they were unable to afford to leave the Chicago area where they were stationed. God provided in many unusual ways for them. Raleigh had begun to speak once in a while in various venues of ministry while still in the military. The crunch came when, after giving a message in a nursing home, an elderly white woman named Georgia looked at his uniform and asked him, “Have you ever been in a war?” He answered, “Yes, ma’am, Vietnam. But I didn’t see combat because I was in Personnel and Administration—behind the lines, you know.”

“Don’t knock it, sonny,” she said. “God brought you back for a reason. Have you ever thought about preaching?”

Raleigh relates, “She must have noticed that the question made me freeze, because she said, ‘Young man, I perceive God has called you to preach. I also perceive that you’re running away. Never run from what God tells you to do.’ With that she turned her wheelchair around and rolled away.” He says that this conversation made him break out in a cold sweat.

And because he was unable to leave the area after he was discharged, he finally managed to enroll in Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. God got him through the experience with some timely reversals of his V.A. status, and then raised up a Jewish lawyer who managed to gain a hearing for reviewing his discharge. His new discharge came after he had finished his seminary training and had already joined forces with Glen Kehrein of Circle Urban Ministries. Brother Raleigh was called back into active duty for one day, so he could fulfill his twenty years and receive his deserved retirement pension. The day was taken up with a parade and speeches made in his honor for his distinguished career, retiring him as a lieutenant colonel.

He reflected later, that had the accusations and the discharge not occurred, he may have never pursued a ministry vocation. We probably would have never heard of him, or of Glen Kehrein, since Glen was facing burnout and discouragement at the moment Raleigh Washington came on the scene. What was true of Joseph was true of their experience (see the end of the book of Genesis for this), “What [they] meant for evil, God meant for good,” to bring a blessing to many people beyond themselves.

*3. God’s promise is renewed strength and restoration.* Surely this is what happened for Raleigh Washington. It is what God wants to give us, if we will persevere and trust Him. He can restore our energy for serving Him, if we will look to Him in humble faith.

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| A—God may have a great purpose to fulfill through our limitations, if we offer them to God. |
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**I—Here is a story that lends credence to that idea. According to the Reuters’ news service back in 2004, “Researchers suggest that the 17th-century Dutch master Rembrandt may have suffered from a vision condition that contributed to his success.**

After analyzing thirty-six of Rembrandt’s self-portraits, experts concluded that the great painter suffered from strabismus—a condition involving the misalignment of one eye so that it points in an outward direction—more commonly known as wall-eye.

“Rembrandt’s paintings exhibit skill in using light to carry perspective. A misalignment of his eyes would have left the painter with no depth perception, giving him ‘an advantage in the task of translating three-dimensional scenes into two-dimensional paintings.’

“Harvard Medical School neurobiologist Margaret Livingstone observed, ‘It illustrates that disabilities are not always disabilities. They may be assets in another realm.’”<sup>4</sup> Our calling is to

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<sup>4</sup> “Wall-Eye May Have Helped Rembrandt’s Vision,” Reuters (9-16-04); submitted by Bryan S. Latchaw, Oskaloosa, Iowa, to *PreachingToday.com*.

seek the greater purpose and keep trusting in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ until we find it.

### III. WINNING THE GREAT RACE OF FAITH REQUIRES A FIRM BASIS FOR OUR FAITH IN THE GRACE OF GOD. v. 12

1. *Our faith must be a confident response to God's grace.* We can stand firm, because our standing before God in Christ is based on the work of Christ not on our performance or power.

2. *This is our only basis for standing firm, as the devil will always be true to his name as the "accuser of the brethren."* He will do all he can to beat us down, to make us wallow in our unworthiness, to be paralyzed by our weakness and failures.

A—Have we received the grace of God in Christ by faith? Are we standing firm in this acceptance by God because of Christ?

**I—You remember hearing about the man in the mid-1980's who owned a city's newspaper and had three sons (this may be apocryphal, but ...).** He offered ownership of the paper to the son who could write the most sensational headline of only three words.

The first son's headline was, "Reagan Turns Communist."

The second son concocted this: **28** "Khomeini Becomes Christian."

But the third son inherited the newspaper when his headline was submitted. It had only two words, "Pope Elopes."

Thankfully, we are not competing against each other for a place in God's kingdom. That is assured by the blood of Jesus Christ, which forgives each of us all our sins.<sup>5</sup>

### IV. WINNING THE GREAT RACE OF FAITH ASSUMES THAT WE ARE NOT RUNNING ALONE. vv. 13-14

1. *We need the strength and grace of God.* This is what every truly Christian writer emphasizes. God has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (See Hebrews 13:5). Jesus said, "Surely I will be with you all the days, until the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20, FJV). Then we will be with Him in that "face to face" life of the Resurrection.

2. *We need each other.* Peter speaks of his partner in ministry, who took down the dictation of his circular letter. Silas both took the dictation of this letter for Peter, and he was a traveling and ministry partner of Paul, too. He gives greeting from those who are even in the devil's stronghold, Babylon [which was probably a reference to Rome], and from his son in the faith Mark. He calls us all to greet each other with a "kiss of love."

A—We are in this together!

**I—Corrie ten Boom urged, "Be united with other Christians.** A wall with loose bricks is not good. The bricks must be cemented together." How is the cement between you and your brothers and sisters in Christ? What does it take to knock your fragile connection apart, some little inconvenience, some act of forgetfulness, some preference that differs from yours—oh, my, some vote in a Business Meeting? We should not be just piled together in one place as

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<sup>5</sup> *Biblical Illustrator* database.

members of the Church, we should be “cemented together” in the unity that only the Master Builder can create.

Take it home (applications).

I. DO WE HAVE A CONFIDENT FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST BASED ON HIS PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE? Why not?

1. Admit our sin.
2. Believe in Jesus Christ.
3. Commit our lives to Him by faith.

II. ARE WE UNITED WITH THE BODY OF CHRIST?

1. By faith in Him, we are part of the Church *universal*.
2. One characteristic of being a member of the Church universal is the compulsion to be a member of the Church *particular*.
3. Have we committed our lives to seek God in Christ together with a fellowship of believers?

III. ARE WE EQUIPPED WITH A PERSPECTIVE ON HARDSHIP THAT WILL CARRY US THROUGH THE HARD TIMES WITH CONFIDENT FAITH?