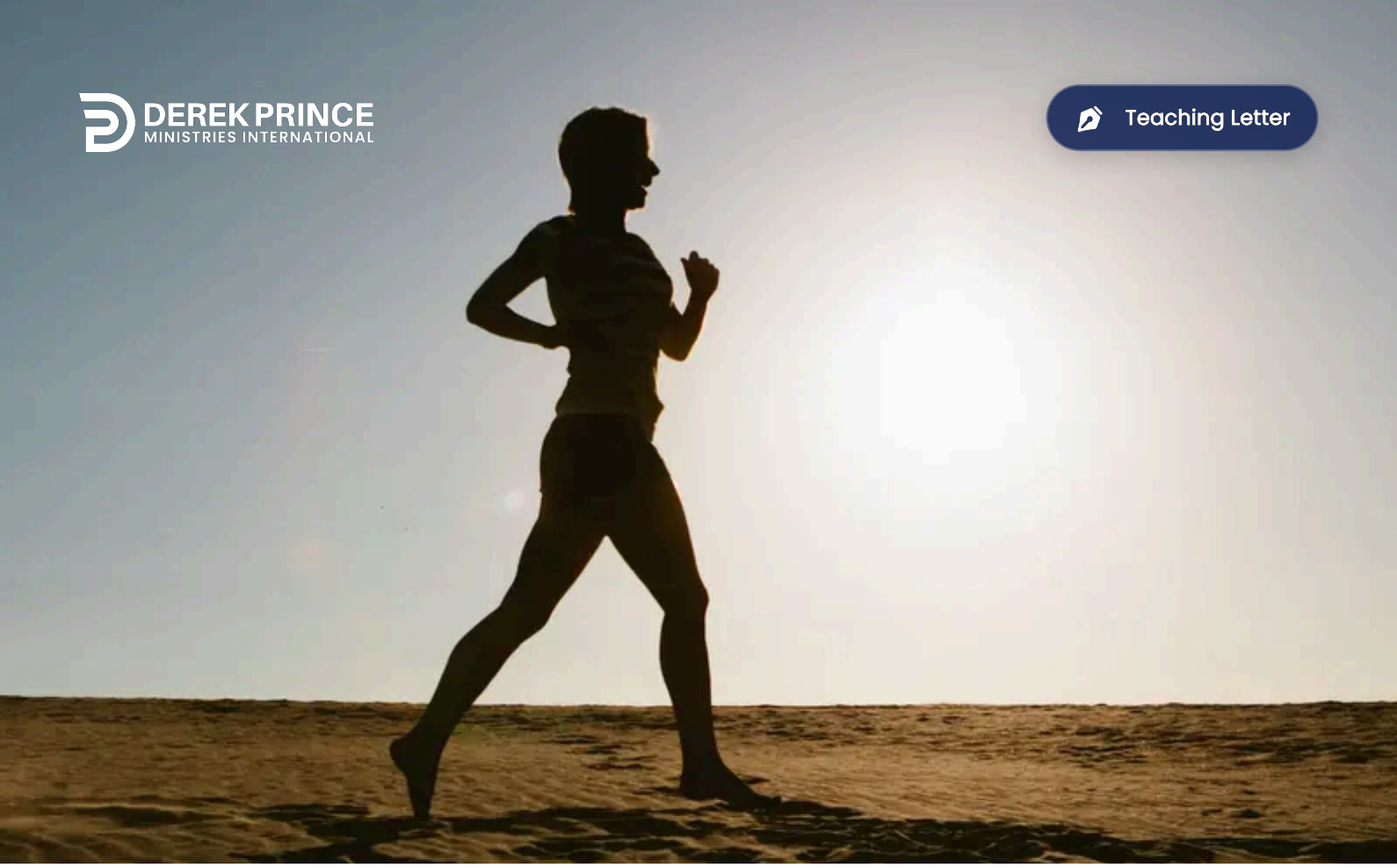


Twelve Steps to a Good Year - Steps 9 and 10



Part 1/2

Twelve Steps To A Good Year By Derek Prince

This is the fifth installment in this teaching series, bringing you twelve steps to a good year. Each of our twelve steps is taken from a sentence in the epistle to the Hebrews that begins with the words, "Let us." So far, we have looked at eight successive steps:

1. Let us fear.
2. Let us be diligent.
3. Let us hold fast our confession.
4. Let us draw near to the throne of grace.
5. Let us press on to maturity.
6. Let us draw near to the most holy place.
7. Let us hold fast our confession without wavering.
8. Let us consider one another.

I urge you to remember my suggestion that, as we go through these successive steps, you commit them to memory.

Step 9: Let Us Run with Endurance the Race

We will now look at the ninth step, found in the opening verses of Hebrews chapter 12.

> "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:1–2)

This ninth step is found there in verse 1: "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." However, because of the circumstances of the English translation, I need to add a word of explanation about that verse. In the

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English translation, there are two "let us" phrases in that one verse, which is a perfectly legitimate translation. But in the original Greek, the first phrase, "lay aside every encumbrance," is not in that form. Instead, it reads like this: "Laying aside every encumbrance, let us run with endurance the race." The real "let us" phrase on which we need to focus is, "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."

Here and elsewhere in the New Testament, the Christian life is compared to a race. This implies there is a specific course marked out for us in advance, and success in the Christian life consists in completing the course in accordance with the rules of the competition. In light of the fact that we are confronted with this race that is set before us, I want to point out four requirements for success in the race. Each one of these requirements is found in the New Testament.

Right Mental Attitude

The first requirement is exemplified by the words of Paul in Philippians chapter 3:10–11 where, speaking about his relationship to Jesus Christ, he says:

> "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

You see, Paul had a specific objective. Elsewhere he says that he did not run aimlessly (1 Corinthians 9:26–27). He had an aim before him. He knew what the goal was—and this determined his mental attitude. Then he goes on to say in Philippians 3:12:

> "Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect [or complete], but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus."

Paul has the vision that Christ laid hold of him for a purpose, and that the fulfilling of that purpose means he must relate to the purpose. He has to be determined that the purpose of Christ will become his purpose. He continues:

> "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (verses 13–14)

Notice that the phrase "I press on" occurs twice. That is the mental attitude you and I need to share. "I press on. I have a goal. I haven't arrived, but I know where I'm headed." The last time Paul uses the phrase he says, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." There is a reward for those who successfully complete the race. Let's always keep the goal in mind, reminding ourselves that we don't want to lose our God-appointed reward.

Self-Control

The second condition for success in this race is self-control. Again, this is illustrated by the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:24–25. Here he compares the Christian life to competing in an athletic contest. This is a really good parallel—one that is vivid for us today, because we are often following athletic contests in the newspapers and on television. The same principle still applies.

> "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath [that's the prize], but we an imperishable [wreath]."

The objective is to win the prize. If we are going to win the race, we must meet the condition of self-control. It is obvious that every athlete who wishes to participate in world competitions today has to exercise the most rigorous self-control. Each one has to "go into training"—controlling what is eaten, how much sleep is taken, the amount and type of exercise that is done. Controlling one's psychology is also important, building the right kind of attitude. Negative thoughts must be put aside to maintain a positive attitude in order to achieve victory.

All this is equally true for us as Christians in our race. We cannot win the race without self-control.

Endurance

The third condition for victory in this race is stated in the verse we cited, Hebrews 12:1: endurance. This is one quality that is essential in Christian character if we are going to achieve real spiritual success and fulfillment. Endurance must be cultivated.

The opposite of endurance is giving up or quitting. Christians cannot afford to be quitters. When God commits something to us, we must set our face and go through with it. There is a close relationship between self-control and endurance; that is why I put them in that order. In actual fact, without self-control we will not achieve endurance. We have to master our weaknesses. Otherwise, every time we are tested in the area of endurance, some weakness—emotional, psychological, or physical—will get us down, and we will give up just at the point where we should have been holding on and enduring.

Eyes Fixed on Jesus

The fourth condition for success is to have our eyes fixed on Jesus. This is stated in Hebrews 12:2:

> "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of [our] faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross..."

In other words, we cannot run the race in our own self reliance. *Looking to Jesus* means that He is our example. We put our confidence in Him. He is the author, the beginning of our faith. He is also the perfecter, the one who will bring us through to victory.

Testimony of a Victor

The apostle Paul was a victor. Here is his testimony in 2 Timothy 4:7–8:

> "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up 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 loved His appearing."

Paul knew he had won the race, he had finished the course, and he knew the prize was there waiting for him. That is a glorious testimony and it can be your testimony and my testimony if we will meet the conditions.

Step 10: Let Us Show Gratitude

Like the ninth step, the tenth step is also found in Hebrews chapter 12. The ninth step comes at the beginning of the chapter. The tenth step is near the end.

> "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28–29)

The King James Version says, "Let us have grace." It is important to understand the connection between grace and thanks. The King James translation is a literal translation of the words, but the phrase "to have grace" is commonly used in Greek to express the giving of thanks. This brings out the connection between grace and thanks, which is found in various modern languages. For instance, the French say, Grâce à Dieu, "Thanks to God." In both Italian and Spanish, the word for "thank you" is taken from the word "grace." In Italian, it is grazie, and in Spanish it is gracias.

All through these languages there is a connection between grace and thanks—I want to tell you that you cannot have the grace of God in your life unless you practice giving thanks. Grace and thanks go together. There is nothing more ungracious than an unthankful person, whereas a thankful person will always experience the grace of God.

Two Requirements

You see, God requires two responses from us as His people. First, He requires that we appreciate what He does for us and second, He requires that we express our appreciation. It is important to understand that we need to express our appreciation.

There are those people who really are grateful to God, but they never take time to tell God how grateful they are. How would you feel if your children never thanked you for all that you did for them? You would not like it if they never said thank you or showed their gratitude, but just accepted everything you did for them as if it were theirs by right—and they just took it for granted. Unfortunately, many of God's children treat God like that, and it is not pleasing in His

sight. We are required to appreciate what God does for us; and we are required to express our appreciation.

One of my favorite Scriptures is Proverbs 3:6:

> "In all your ways acknowledge Him [God], and He shall direct your paths."

I have learned by experience that if I pause at every stage in life to acknowledge God, I can be confident that He will continue to direct my path. You may ask: "How can I acknowledge God?" The simplest and the best way is simply by thanking Him—thanking Him for all He has done; thanking Him for His faithfulness. When you do, you will get the assurance immediately that He is going to go on being faithful. Just as He has helped and guided in the past, He will guide in the future. But the key to this assurance is acknowledging Him by our thanksgiving.

God's Unshaken Kingdom

Now we need to look at the background of this exhortation to thankfulness. Looking at the previous verses of Hebrews 12, we read this solemn warning:

> "See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking [to us. And then a parallel is taken from the Old Testament, when God spoke to the people of Israel through Moses:] For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we [believers in the New Testament] escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.' This expression, 'Yet once more,' denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." (verses 25–27)

This is the background of the exhortation that we should show gratitude. We are in a world that is crumbling, falling apart. All around us is distress, uncertainty, perplexity, confusion, hatred, division, war, fear—not merely in one nation, but in all nations of the earth. To a greater or lesser degree, these conditions continue and, indeed, grow worse. God says, "There's coming a time when I'm going to shake once more not only the earth but also the heavens." This "once more" indicates this is going to be the final shaking, and in this final shaking everything that can be shaken will be removed. But in light of this, the writer of Hebrews says in verse 28: "Since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude."

That, my friend, is the appropriate response to the particular privileges and benefits we have in God. We are not dependent on a shakable kingdom. We have an eternal kingdom, an unshakable kingdom, the kingdom of God Himself. That kingdom is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). In the midst of all that is going on around us—all that is being shaken, all the threatening, all the alarms, all the fears and all the inadequate and insufficient remedies that only temporarily stop the gap—in the midst of all this, we have an unshakable kingdom. We have peace, security, purpose. There is only one appropriate response to that realization: it is thankfulness. "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude." Let us express our thanks to God!

An Acceptable Service

Not only is thankfulness or gratitude the appropriate response to what God has done and is doing for us—not only is it something we owe God and need to pay—but thankfulness or gratitude or the expression of our appreciation does something in our spirits that nothing else can do. Here is how I express it: Thankfulness releases our spirits for acceptable worship and service. That is why the writer of Hebrews says, "Let us show gratitude, that we may offer to God an acceptable service, with reverence and awe."

Without gratitude, our service to God will not be acceptable. It is that "attitude of gratitude" which makes our service acceptable, which releases our spirits. An unthankful person is bound up in himself. He is self-centered. He really cannot know true liberation. But thankfulness releases our spirits.

Look at what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:18–19:

> "In everything give thanks for this [giving thanks] is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit."

That is a clear commandment. If we don't give thanks, we are disobedient. If we don't give thanks, we are out of the will of God. Failing to give thanks quenches the Spirit. The only release for the Spirit, to serve God acceptably, is through thanksgiving.

A Consuming Fire

Note the closing warning in Hebrews 12:29: "For our God is a consuming fire." Here is what the writer is saying: "We have to approach this holy, awe inspiring God with the right attitude—with a humble, thankful heart."

In closing, let's look again at the background of the world in these last days. We have already looked at the shaking that is coming. Now we will look at the disintegration of character, morality and standards. In 2 Timothy 3:1–5, Paul says:

> "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them." (NIV)

What a terrible list of moral defects and character degeneration that is going to mark the close of this age! If you go over that list, I would suggest you will find most of these character defects very conspicuous in our contemporary culture. Right in the middle of that list, it says, "disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love." Notice that association. The ungrateful are right next door to the unholy. You cannot be holy and be ungrateful. Since our God is a consuming fire, and He requires that we serve Him with holiness (which is appropriate), then we have to serve Him with gratitude. We must come to Him with thankfulness.

Let's read those words once more.

Let us show gratitude, that we may serve him acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.

Teaching Letter

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