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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
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Title of sermon: **Revitalized - Keep Your Tank Full**
Series: Set Your Course - #2

Heb. 12:1-3 NIV:

¹ 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, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

If you would, turn in your Bibles to the book of Hebrews -- that's where we're at today. A great text, we're familiar with this, and this series, called "Set Your Course" -- we looked last week at the need to establish a focal point, and that is, if we focus our lives on the living God, He will give us a transformational living hope.

Well, today I want to talk about this issue of energy -- the ability to run to the end. Because if you start a race and you can't finish it, probably not worth much. I have a friend who -- she's a nurse, and -- she was telling me this past week, or -- I think two weeks ago -- she goes, "Mark, have you noticed the change?" And I said, "What change?" She goes, "Well, we're moving from COVID fatigue to COVID anger." And I'm like, "Yeah." I said, "What's it look like?" And she was describing the impatience and the brittleness and the short fuses, and she said, "Just the exhaustion." And I was thinking as I was interacting with her that a lot of people don't know where they're at. They don't understand how tired they are. They don't understand how exhausted they are. Because, unlike your automobile, nobody has a gauge that says "You're on empty." I mean, for those of you who drove here today -- unless your gauge is broken -- all of you kind of know where you're at. Some of you have that commitment that if my gas gauge gets down to half, I'm going to the gas station! Others of you are like me -- my motto is, "It's good to the last drop." More than a few times -- my wife is infinitely -- I don't know if she's in here -- oh well, she's already heard this sermon four times, so -- but, she'll get in the truck, and she goes, "So, are we gonna go to the gas station?" And I say, "Well -- yeah. I mean, eventually, thank you. Yeah." And she goes, "Well, it says you have five miles left." And I said, "Man, that's a lot of miles!" She goes, "Well, it's ten miles to the gas station!" I said, "That's awesome! Five miles on gas, five miles on faith -- let's go, Baby!" She doesn't like riding with me very often. Well, the fact is, you don't know. You don't have a little gauge. So, I want to give you a gauge today. And here's the reason. This is not to make anyone feel guilty. It's to awaken our heart. This text is about finishing well, and if you don't know maybe that your gauge is a little low, you might be thinking about lunch. And I don't want you to go there.

Number one -- you might be on a low tank emotionally, spiritually, if you feel frequently or constantly rushed. In other words, every day you're just mindful of everything that you have to do, and you often find yourself showing up late to meetings. You might be low in your tank if you find it difficult to make decisions. Simple decisions like paying bills on time. Simple decisions like getting things done that have been on your "to-do" list for three weeks, four weeks. And you're paying penalties simply because, "Oh, I didn't get this in on time." You might be low on your tank and your energy level if you are ever tempted to do a mass delete on your emails or on life. What's that? Well, it's simple. You have 75 emails in your "IN BOX" -- and you're wondering how I know how to do this -- it's simple. You just take the top one, hit the "SELECT" key -- or, the "SHIFT" key -- and drag down and hit "DELETE" and -- boom! 75 emails are archived. That's my world for you -- they're gone. And you know what you do. You think, "Oh, my gosh." No, it's very simple. If it's really important, they'll get

back to you. You know your tank is empty if you find your relationship with God is flat. It's not that you don't believe in God. It's not that you don't have a strong faith. It's just -- you find yourself kind of generally unmoved most of the time. You read the Scriptures -- hah. You go to worship -- hah. And you don't look forward to anything. Especially with what God is doing.

You might be low on your tank if you have a decreased ability to love. You look at your phone, and you realize that you keep hitting the "DO NOT ANSWER" because you just don't have the energy for whoever it is on the line. Why is that important? Let's read together -- Chapter 12 of the Book of Hebrews. "Therefore, since we're surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily wraps around you like seaweed in a lake. Gets around you and just begins to knarl you up and grab ahold of you and takes you down. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and the perfecter of our faith. Who, for the joy set before him he endured the cross, even scorning its shame, and then He sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. I want you to consider Him. I want you to focus on Him. I want you to almost obsess with Him, if you will -- who endured such opposition from sinful men...." And here's the reason -- underline this one -- "...so that you will not grow weary, lose heart, and quit."

See, one of the greatest threats to you running your race is simply your ability to finish. My good friend Scott always said, "Sustainability is never achieved without great intention." Oh, how true that is. So, what is the author's concern? Not about the course you're running -- the direction you're running, necessarily -- it's about the energy. Do you have the stick-to-it-iveness to finish? How do we do that? Number one, he says, you've got to choose the right mentors. Of course, at the end, Jesus is going to be the primary mentor, but there's others that he lists in here. In fact, it's where he starts. He says, "We have this great cloud of witnesses. We're surrounded by them." Who are they? It's almost like we're in this great arena and they're there cheering you on. Well, does that mean from Heaven these people are looking down upon us? No, not at all. Who are they? I think they're the folks of Chapter 11. This great cloud of witnesses. And we know that -- why? Because the term "therefore" is referring us back to the text prior. So, what do we find in Chapter 11? We find those like Abraham and those like David and those like, you know, all of those folks that -- did what? They endured with God in the midst of really difficult circumstances. In what sense are they our witnesses? Do they talk to us? Yeah, they do. They're not witnesses like spectators at an event. They're witnesses in what they communicate to us.

You see, some of you are in the midst of really, really difficult family issues. There's been betrayal, there's been accusation, there's been all kinds of things. And you go, "I don't even know what to do!" Well -- let me tell you. Let Joseph be your friend. Joseph needs to spend some time with you, because he has walked the family betrayal, and he knows what it is to trust God, to forgive, and to restore. Some of you are called to work in an environment where your boss is not a believer, it's not a kind of an affirmational place, and it's not even safe. And you think, "I gotta get outta here!" Maybe. Or maybe you need to become friends with Daniel, who knew what it was like to go to work every day with people who were unethical and at a moment's notice would betray him. Some of you are called to be leaders. That's just your calling in life, and you know it. But you get frustrated leading people, because sometimes they're really loyal and faithful, and other times they'll turn on you and betray you and take you out. And you're like, "God, what do I do with this?" You spend time with Moses. Because Moses knew exactly what it was like to lead a group of people that one day wanted to enshrine him as the best leader they've ever had, and the other day, they're trying to figure out how to get rid of him and kill him. Maybe you've been called to a ministry that doesn't seem to be real fruitful. Maybe you look at your life and think, "God, what fruit am I bearing?" And you have a hard time finding it. You need to call Jeremiah, because he'll teach you what it's like to endure. Best of my ability is, I've looked through Jeremiah -- I don't think he converts one person. His church growth policy was negative. And his decisions were questioned. You see, they're witnesses. What do they tell you? They tell you how to endure. They tell you how to give your life passion -- life,

passionate life, in the situation that feels like it's gonna just take you down. And they'll teach you how to endure.

The author goes on. He says, "Not only do you need to choose the right mentors, but you also need to run unencumbered." He says, "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles." There's two ways that we can live an unencumbered life. Number one, he says, "I want you to learn how to run light." And number two, "I want you to learn how to run free." I'm not a runner -- wish I was. I'm jealous of runners. I just talked with a runner not too long ago, and she's entering into an ultra run, that's a hundred miles. I said, "I'll loan you a horse. Be a lot funner." A hundred miles! I mean, if I have to drive a hundred miles, I balk. I guarantee you, on that day when she runs a hundred miles, she's never gonna go to her husband and say, "Hey, can you throw some extra weight on? I think I need it to run faster." There is no way on God's green earth that she is going to add weight to her legs just so she can run! Oh, in training, maybe -- but not on the day of the race. See, that's the truth in the Christian life. There are things -- like, lack of focus, I think overcommitted, I think issues of distractions, are all kinds of weights. They're not sins -- he deals with that in a minute. I think one of them -- it's not necessarily, I wouldn't call it a sin, but just people live and are encumbered with regret. I was talking with someone not too long ago, and I said, "Are there things you regret?" And she goes, "Yeah. I regret that I quit playing the piano. I think about it every day." I said to her, not to be mean, but it's like, "It's been 35 years -- get over it." It's been 35 years! Either get over it, or here's 40 bucks -- go get a lesson and have the time of your life! But you're thinking every day -- I doubt it's every day, but those were her words -- every day you're living with this regret? I'm telling you, when you live with that kind of regret it steals energy from your life and it distracts you. It's not helpful.

Run light. And run free. What is it that he was talking about? He says, "I want you to get rid of, throw off the sin that so easily entangles." One time our family was camping, and the kids were down in this lake. It was up in South Dakota. And the kids were in this lake, and Jacob was with one of these young boys, and he just disappeared. None of the adults were there, and we didn't see it. All we heard later is that this kid went under the water and he was gone, and the only person who saw him go under was Jacob. Jacob, being quite a bit taller than this young man, dove into the water, reached down, grabbed him, and stood up and got him up to the point that the kid could breathe. Apart from Jacob being on that day noticing -- that kid was dead. What was it that grabbed him? The weeds that had wrapped around his leg, and the more he tried to pull himself up, the more he buried himself into the mud. He was stuck. That's what happens.

Now, I don't know if the writer had specific sins, but I can give you four that I've seen people just get absolutely derailed in their life. Number one -- these are in no particular order, is worry and anxiety. It starts in your head and it always ends up in your gut. Worry never stays in your mind. It doesn't. Oh, it runs around in your mind and you worry about things, but it always moves down to your gut, and it takes up residence in your gut. It first starts off with just a mild little thing called an ulcer, but it ends with your life. Howard Hendricks was at a conference years ago -- I was 28 years of age -- and he was telling us at that conference he turned 66 when he was there with us, and he said, "The sobering thing about my life," he says, "is two-thirds of my graduating class from Dallas Theological Seminary, by the age of 66 were dead." Two-thirds. Primary cause of death -- gastrointestinal issues. Stress. People think it's some badge of courage, and if I don't worry about my kids, I'm not loving them. Oh, yes you are. You're killing yourself. Worry can entangle you and it can wrap around you, and the next thing you know, it is directing your life and stealing hour upon hour of your day.

I think another one is jealousy. Jealousy causes you to buy things that you don't need with money you don't have. What happens is, you look at another person -- a Christian -- we always have to use them, because the non-Christians, well, they don't have Christ -- but anything that a Christian does is like fair game, right? And so, somebody does something it's like, "Wow, I gotta have that!" And so they go and they buy it, and the next thing you know, they're in my office. Why? Well, they overextended themselves. They lived way beyond their means. And the next thing you know, the

poor guy or the gal is working an extra job, an extra shift, an extra day. And then they come in wondering why their marriage has drifted apart. Can we go back here? How jealousy motivated you to live way beyond your means?

I think a third issue that entangles people is grudges, or vengeance. We put a mask on vengeance, it's called "justice." But that's just so that we can live in the Christian community. That's just so that we can seem noble. But Haman -- he hated Mordecai. Oh, he did. He despised Mordecai, and he wanted to kill Mordecai, and so he got a group of his friends together and they had a building party. They built a gallows. And Haman didn't realize he'd been the one on it. What's the moral of the story? It's that vengeance will destroy people, ultimately you. You watch it. Watch it nationally, watch it individually. When we are moved by vengeance -- we'll mask it with justice, but it really is a passion to get back at somebody. Your ex. Somebody in your family. An old boss. A neighbor. And it'll eat you alive. It entangles its thread around your heart.

The fourth one that I see a lot is simply the issue of unforgiveness -- the inability to forgive people. And sometimes, that's the inability to forgive yourself. And you live with this kind of boiling anger at somebody. Oh, you have days where it subsides. But it ambushes you and lets you know that it's still in there. What do we do with that? Because Paul says that's going to be key to your running this race well. If you let that sin grab ahold of you, you're never gonna be free. But let me first turn to the Scriptures. Because it says, "For there is now no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus." You first have to understand that whatever you're wrestling with, Jesus does not hold it over you -- He wants to free you from it. "And if God is for you," the Scripture says, "who can ever be against us?" In other words, anything that you face is not more powerful than God in your life. If God is for you, nothing has ultimate power in your life, including your grudge. Your jealousy. Your anxiety. He finishes in this text, in Chapter 8, he says, "Whether we're high above the sky or in the deepest of ocean, nothing in all creation is ever going to be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord." People will frequently tell me, "I feel like, you know, I'm not close to God." And the reality is -- yes, you are. Because nothing can separate you from God's love. Nothing. So, what do we do?

Let me give you four thoughts on those four areas. Number one -- if anxiety is your issue, then learn to release all anxiety to God. How do you do that? Number one, acknowledge that you can. God would never command you to do something that's impossible. He said, "Do not worry," and He commanded that because it's possible. Secondly, you have to understand that worry, or anxiety, is an expression of my lack of trust of the character and the nature and the power of God. You gotta own that. How do we know that? Because in Matthew it says, "Do not worry. Have you ever considered the birds of the air? What do they teach you? It's that God loves sparrows, but He loves you more. And if He provides for them and takes care of them, then what's the conclusion? He will take care of you." Anxiety is an expression. It's really -- let me say it this way -- it's an assault on the character of God. Your willingness to embrace worry and anxiety is declaring to God, "You're not powerful enough to protect me! You're not good enough to protect me! I ultimately don't trust you." And so, what do I do with it? Peter says "Cast it." You give it to God. And you say, "Well, I give it to God and it just keeps coming back!" Then cast it again! There's a reason why I'm not a good fisherman. I cast two or three times, and if I don't catch a fish, I'm going home. But let me tell you what -- that doesn't work for anxiety. You gotta just keep at it, you gotta keep at it. But you gotta keep at it with conviction. "I do not have to have this, it's not good for me, it is an expression of my lack of trust of God, and I don't want that. Therefore, as Peter says, in 1 Peter 5, 'Cast your anxiety upon Him.'" Why? Because God loves you.

Number two -- if I want to clip the weeds that draw me down into the muck, I have to learn to release all grudges. I do. I plead with you, I plead with you -- vengeance is not justice. It's not. It's the delight and the dessert of Haman. It's something that is wonderful to consider and death to you to live out. Learn to release all grudges and wounds through the power of God.

Number three -- learn to be content in every circumstance. This is the crucifixion of jealousy. The crucifixion of jealousy is when -- like Paul said, "I've learned to be content in any and every circumstance. I've had a lot." It's easy to be content when you've had a lot. "And I've also learned to be content." In other words, I can be delighted in what God is doing in this situation. I can see the beauty of what God's doing, and I can experience the delight of what God's doing in virtually any circumstance. I don't need things to make me happy. Learn to be content, because it will clip the damage that can happen because of envy and jealousy.

And finally, learn to embrace the forgiveness of Christ. I have a promise for you -- and you can hold me to it. If you learn to embrace the forgiveness of Christ, forgiving people will be easy. It will be. I'd go this far -- flip it. If you can't forgive certain people, it's because you haven't embraced the forgiveness of Christ. Text -- Matthew says, "If you do not forgive, then the Father will not forgive you." Does that mean that somehow my forgiveness initiates the Father's forgiveness? Well, that doesn't make sense, because the Bible says that He loved us before we loved Him. He loved us while we were -- what? Yet sinners. He forgave us before. He gave us forgiveness. So, it doesn't make sense to flip that, so what's Matthew saying? I think it's this -- that if you are a forgiven person, you will freely forgive. But if you struggle with forgiveness, it's because you haven't embraced the forgiveness of Christ. It's a weed that tangles around your feet and it keeps you connected to the past like hobbles that kind of tether and tie you to something of the past and never releases you to the future. Run unencumbered.

Number three, run with a dogged determination. God has a fondness for perseverance, if you haven't seen that before. He says, "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." James says it this way -- "Consider it all joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds. Because you know, the testing of your faith produces -- what? Perseverance." Ha! I don't like it! But God loves perseverance! Why? Because He's not a quitter, and He has never birthed a quitter in His life. He doesn't. To quit on things, to quit on people, that's not the spirit of God at all. That is the spirit of the enemy. So, how do we do this? How do we run with dogged determination? This text tells us at least two things. Number one is, each person runs a unique course that is designed by God. Run with perseverance. Here's the line -- "...the race marked out for you." Who did that? Well -- it's gotta be God! I mean, it's like, nobody is running and marking any race out for a person. I know we say, "God loves you," and "the church has a wonderful plan for your life," but the fact is, that's not true. God is the One who set out your race.

And there's three things that I think are really important for you to understand. Number one is, in your unique race, you have a calling that nobody else has. Nobody else has your calling. You married your spouse -- I didn't. You live in the neighborhood that you live in. You work where you work. You invest in your neighborhood. That's a calling that God has put upon you, and like your fingerprint, nobody else shares your fingerprint and nobody else shares the race marked out for you. Why is that important? Because if you look over the fence and you see somebody else -- "Well, I want to run my business like them," or, "I want to do this," and the reality is, God didn't call you to live their life! He called you to live your life. You have a unique calling, you have unique gifts. And third, you have a unique journey. See, Kerri and I and our family, we had a unique journey, and I wouldn't trade any of it. I wouldn't. I wouldn't trade the years of collegiate ministry at Oregon State that were so, kind of, genetic in the sense of, kind of the genesis of our life, that gave us a heart for missions and for people. And then, 16 years in the inner city. I wouldn't trade that! I mean, man, we had the most unbelievable time. We had helicopters landing in our front yard! We had police knocking on our door -- "Hey, Chaplain, can you come over? We got a gurney here we need to get to the chopper. Can you help us?" I mean, who gets to do that? Your lives are boring! We had things that were just amazing -- I wouldn't trade one ounce of it! Because along every step of the way, God was teaching us and perfecting us and changing us -- and, yes, disciplining us. See, the only real passion you get is when you discover that you have a race. You have a course. You have a calling. It's not my calling. And if you don't run it, there will be consequences, and people will miss things that God designed you to meet.

How do I run with dogged determination? Number one is just recognizing you have a unique race, and if you don't run it, no one else is going to because they can't. Number two is that you have to determine to finish. I'm pretty convinced that not everyone -- in fact, I'm a little afraid that a lot of people have not made certain declarations to God. I WILL RUN MY RACE TO THE END. GOD, I WILL NOT DISQUALIFY MYSELF AS MUCH AS IT IS UP TO ME. GOD, I WILL PREACH EVERY SERMON THAT YOU CALL ME TO PREACH. I WILL LIVE AS A PASTOR EVERY DAY WITH THANKFULNESS THAT YOU HAVE CALLED ME, AND I WILL NOT STOP IT ONE MOMENT BEFORE YOU ASK ME TO. But you have to have courage to run to the end. The kind of courage that I saw in Bill Broadhurst. Bill was a runner. Not a fast runner. Every year, he ran in the Pepsi Challenge. It's a run, it's a 10k run in Nebraska, and every year he ran it, and he never entered the race without the commitment to finishing, and he never stopped early. He wasn't a fast runner. The average runner in Pepsi Challenge -- it's a 10k, not a long one -- I could do that one -- and the average run is probably somewhere around, the good ones, you know, like 30 minutes. Many of you could run it that fast, and after 30 minutes, you finish and you go home. Bill -- two hours and 29 minutes on average. Two hours and 29 minutes! You could crawl that fast! Well, he needed to. He had a brain aneurism and he was paralyzed mostly on his right side. So, when you saw Bill run, he'd take a step with his left, and then kind of fling and rotate his hip. And then he would take a step, and then he would fling, and he'd just plop plop all the way down the road. For 10k! 6.2 miles! But he finished.

On one particular day, he did finish, two hours 29 minutes, and when he crossed the line there were three people waiting for him. That's it. Thousands had entered this race. And when he finished, three people were there. There was a guy, happened to be Bill, came up to him, and Bill Broadhurst was there and he was leaning over and kinda breathing heavy, and this gentleman came up and put a medal around his neck. He leaned over, and he whispered into Bill Broadhurst's ear, "I know courage when I see it." It was a guy by the name of Bill Rodgers. Not Bill Broadhurst. He's a marathon runner. Has run over 60 marathons. The last one I know of was in 2009. Three-time winner of the Boston Marathon. One-time winner of the New York. An Olympian. He knew what it was like to run. And he could see courage -- and he saw it. Because every race that Bill Broadhurst entered, he finished. Why? Because he determined to. Just like the mentor that is in front of you. Not only should you run with that kind of dogged determination, but the writer says that you should run in the footprints of the One who's in front of you. Who are those footprints? He says, "I want you to fix your eyes upon Jesus, the author and the perfecter of your faith. The one who initiated your faith, the one who secured your faith, and the one who is perfecting your faith." The one who is every day, including today, working through your context, your journey, your race, and is not just trying to get you through but He's perfecting your faith. And what does He say that will motivate you in the darkest of times? It's right here. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and the perfecter of our faith." The one that is working in us right now.

What was His motivation and what will be your motivation? "Who for the joy set before him endured the cross." It was joy that motivated Jesus to run His race well. What joy? What's he talking about? "For the joy set before him he endured the cross." What enabled Jesus to run through the cross? The joy set before Him. When did that happen? I tend to think it was in the Garden of Gethsemane. I tend to think it was in the one moment when Jesus was tempted and wanted to quit. And I think that was a real desire. I think He was weary, I think He was isolated, I think He had been abandoned. He'd been left, and He was facing the most dramatic and absolutely terror-filled moment in His life when the wrath of God was gonna be poured upon Him. What's that wrath? Your sin, my sin, multiplied by billions of people. "For the joy set before Him" -- what enabled Him to get through? Well, I tend to think that that night in the garden God showed Him something. And it was so motivating to Jesus that He got up the next day when prayer was done and He ran to the cross. What was it? I think it was you. "For the joy set before Him." What did the Father set before the Son? I think it was your picture. Because, you see -- can you imagine even for a crazy moment that the Father would set your picture before the Son, and Jesus would look at your picture and say, "No. Not worth it. Let him go to Hell." You can't imagine that, can you? Because it didn't happen. "For the joy set before Him." You see, the greatest motivating factor of Jesus -- and, by the way, you -- is

what the Father sets in front of you. You see, there are people that you work with that if you don't run your race well and you don't finish well, they're not going to hear about the love of Christ. If you disqualify your life by your behavior, they will not take seriously your gospel because your life will disqualify it.

See, the secret of endurance is what? Mirroring the image of the One who runs in front of us. The secret of endurance -- when I run like my Master, I will win my race. Why? Because I have somebody who faced the temptation to quit, but it was your face that motivated Him. And my friend, that's what will motivate us -- when the Father puts in front of us the people we will love, those we will lead, and those who will be reconciled to God because of you. My friend Sarah ran a race. Unbeknownst to her, it started when she was 25. She was going to get married, and her dad told her, "I'm not coming to your wedding." When her children were born, her dad didn't show up. He told her, "Our house is no longer a place that you can come. You can't bring any of your family over. You're dead to us." What was Sarah's horrible sin? She was a white woman and she married a black guy. He was a little older than her, and his life before Christ was a little shady. Dad, a believer, said, "You're dead." It's a wound that will go as deep as you can imagine in a young woman's heart. There'd be times that she would drive by their house, the one she grew up in, and just weep and ask God, not just for her dad, but for herself, "Please don't let me get angry. Please don't let me build a wall." She ran a race. She won. How did she win it? There was a day her father called her -- after 18 years. And he called her and he said, "Would you bring the kids over, and would you bring Brian?" And when she sat around the family this year, she realized -- "If I would have stopped loving him, if I would have let a wall of vengeance grow, if I would have allowed a seed of unforgiveness to take fruit, I wouldn't be enjoying the reconciling work of Christ."

My friends, I've got a question for you. What race are you running? The consequences are significant. You quit and there might be reconciliation that never happens. There might be a gospel that is never preached. Run, tracing your master. And if you do, you will win. You will. And it will be glorious.

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