**Deliberate Readiness: The Christian Life as a Race**

**Text: 1 Corinthians 9:24–27**  
“Run in such a way as to get the prize” – 1 Corinthians 9:24

**Introduction: What Is Deliberate Readiness?**

* **Definition**: Not just being “available,” but purposefully and consistently preparing to serve Christ—like an athlete in strict training.
* The Christian life is not a casual stroll but a **disciplined race**.
* Readiness is more than willingness—it’s **intentional preparation**.
* This preparation involves the **heart, mind, and will**, all set on obeying and glorifying Jesus.

**I. The Christian Life Is a Race**

* Paul uses the metaphor of an athletic race (1 Cor. 9:24–25).
* We don’t compete against each other—but we do run with discipline to win the **prize of Christ’s approval**.
* Key phrases:
  + “Run to win.”
  + “Strict training.”
  + “Not running aimlessly.”
* Like athletes:
  + We must train our spiritual lives.
  + We run with **focus, endurance, and urgency**.
  + The prize? An **imperishable crown**—eternal life, joy, and reward in Christ (2 Tim. 4:8).

**II. Total Surrender: The Prerequisite to Readiness**

* You cannot be ready to serve God while **holding part of yourself back**.
* Jesus: “Deny yourself… take up your cross daily” (Luke 9:23).
* Romans 12:1: Offer your body as a **living sacrifice**—your whole life for His use.
* Partial surrender **halts spiritual progress**.
  + Example: Rich Young Ruler (Mark 10:17–22) – moral but unwilling to surrender wealth.
  + Contrast: Abraham—offered Isaac in obedience (Genesis 22).

**III. Abraham’s Example: Total Readiness in Action**

* God tested Abraham in Genesis 22:
  + “Here I am” (v.1) – Abraham was ready to be taught, examined, and used.
  + He acted in **faith and full surrender**, trusting God to provide.
* Result: God **provided the ram** and reaffirmed His covenant (Jehovah-Jireh – “The Lord will provide”).
* Abraham teaches us:
  + Don’t hold back.
  + Go as far as God asks.
  + Trust that God will meet you at the point of your obedience.

**IV. The Danger of Looking Back: The Story of Mark**

**Section 1 – Mark’s Departure**

* Acts 13:13 – Mark deserts Paul and Barnabas mid-mission.
* Paul saw this as a failure of readiness (Acts 15:38).
* Paul refuses to take him again—causing a split with Barnabas.

**Section 2 – Possible Reasons**

* Fear of danger, spiritual warfare, discomfort, or immaturity.
* Mark looked back—similar to Luke 9:62: “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit…”
* He went **so far**, then quit.

**Section 3 – Redemption and Recovery**

* Mark later restored: “He is useful to me in ministry” (2 Tim 4:11).
* Possibly wrote the Gospel of Mark.
* Lesson: Even if we falter, **God’s grace allows us to return and finish well**.

**V. Running the Race to the Finish**

**Section 1 – Run with Endurance**

* 1 Cor 9:25 – Strict training for an eternal crown.
* 2 Tim 4:7 – Paul “finished the race.”
* Hebrews 12:1–2 – Run with perseverance, **eyes fixed on Jesus**.
* Christian life requires:
  + **Discipline**
  + **Endurance**
  + **Focus on the goal**: Jesus and eternity

**Section 2 – Run with Intention**

* Not aimless (1 Cor. 9:26).
* Be intentional: say no to sin, distractions, and apathy.
* Deny the flesh, embrace the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, Phil. 2:13).
* Goal: To hear “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:23).

**VI. What Holds Us Back (and How to Overcome)**

**1. Fear & Lack of Faith**

* Fear of unknown or hardship.
* Proverbs 3:25–26 – “The Lord will be your confidence.”
* 1 Peter 5:7 – Cast anxiety on Him.
* Build boldness through prayer and step-by-step obedience.

**2. Clinging to Comfort**

* Half in the world, half with Jesus.
* Luke 9:61–62 – Looking back is disqualifying.
* Hebrews 12:1 – Throw off hindrances.
* Philippians 3:8 – Jesus is more valuable than anything we surrender.

**3. Lack of Discipline**

* Spiritual fatigue leads to neglect.
* 1 Cor 9:27 – “Discipline my body.”
* Romans 13:14 – “Make no provision for the flesh.”
* James 1:2–4 – Trials produce endurance.
* Stay rooted in the Word, prayer, fellowship.

**4. Distractions**

* We lose focus through media, busyness, etc.
* Fix eyes on Jesus (Heb 12:2).
* Worship and the Word recalibrate our focus.
* Stay reminded of the **finish line** and eternal prize.

**VII. How to Develop Deliberate Readiness**

1. **Daily Devotion & Prayer** – Surrender afresh each morning.
2. **Study & Apply Scripture** – Let God train your heart.
3. **Embrace Small Challenges** – Say “yes” in the little things.
4. **Stay in Community** – Be encouraged by others and accountable.
5. **Keep Eternity in View** – Reflect on the reward, not just the race.

**Conclusion: Run to Win**

* Deliberate readiness is the lifestyle of those who want to serve Christ **wholeheartedly**.
* Abraham ran all the way up Moriah—and God provided.
* Mark fell back but got back up—**and finished strong**.
* You can too.

**Reflection Questions for the Congregation:**

* What is one area of your life that needs surrender for readiness?
* Are you running with discipline, or just coasting?
* Are you willing to go “all the way” with God—like Abraham—or have you stopped short, like Mark once did?