



*Week 1*

NO MORE HIDING BEHIND  
THE PAST

*Use these statements to follow along as you watch video session 1.*

God does not want us to make excuses for the failures in our lives. He wants us to take responsibility.

We can no longer hide behind the past. We can no longer let yesterday define us.

We men need God to deliver us from yesterday because too many of us are chained to yesterday.

God wants to deliver men from the hostage taking the enemy has done in our lives so that we're able to blaze into our future, getting rid of the limp and the excuse and not being held hostage to the past.

God can take your yesterday and turn it into an awesome tomorrow.

Forgiving does not mean you don't remember it happened. It means you're no longer seeking revenge because it happened.

God can take the mess of yesterday and turn it into the miracle of tomorrow. He can take the pain of the past and turn it into the productivity of the future. He can take the limp and give you life.

Video sessions available at [LifeWay.com/NoMoreExcuses](http://LifeWay.com/NoMoreExcuses) or with a subscription to [SmallGroup.com](http://SmallGroup.com)

## MAN UP

*Use the following questions to discuss the video teaching.*

**Read Genesis 50:20.**

Joseph embraced his past because he recognized that God had used it to turn around his present and give him a pleasurable, productive future. We often hear that hindsight is always 20/20. Joseph made this statement in a season of his life during which he lived out the fulfillment of God's plan for him and the nation of Israel. You could say he was already in the winner's circle. But God has called us to live according to this truth even when we haven't yet seen Him turn our circumstances around. He asks us to do that by faith.

**What are some hindrances to living in the truth of Genesis 50:20 before we've seen God turn our situation around? An example might be doubt.**

**What are some benefits of embracing the truth of Genesis 50:20 in full faith? An example might be greater confidence. Identify other benefits.**

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In sports if a player fails to make a kick, catch, tackle, or prevent a completed pass, the player sometimes gets up with a limp. At times that limp reflects a real injury, like the one Sebastian Janikowski experienced in the Cowboys-Seahawks wild-card game in January 2019. Following a missed field goal, Janikowski was out for the rest of the game because of a torn hamstring. But sometimes a player gets up and limps when nothing is wrong at all. A player uses that kind of limp, what I call a loser's limp, to imply that he failed because of an injury, not through any fault of his own.

The limp is an excuse. It implies that if the player had been at full capacity, he would have been successful. It's meant to draw attention away from the failure of the present by directing that attention to an excuse that preceded it.

**In what ways might men use this loser's limp excuse in everyday life?**

On the video Dr. Evans said, "God does not want us to make excuses for the failures in our lives. He wants us to take responsibility and ownership. ... That means that we can no longer hide behind the past. We can no longer let yesterday define us." Injury or not, painful past or not, God opposes the use of negative situations in our lives as excuses for personal failures. We're to own our failures, get up, and move forward.

**What does it look like to own a personal setback or challenge in the present instead of making an excuse for it?**

Dr. Evans used the example of an enormous adult elephant staying chained to a small stake due to its memory of the past. As a younger, smaller elephant, it couldn't pull away from the stake. As an adult, it could get loose, but the memory of the past keeps the strong elephant chained because it believes it can't break free.

**Name common mindsets that hold men back from fully living out their strength and biblical authority.**

All of us have gone through difficult experiences. Joseph's example is poignant but not isolated. Joseph got through those days by recognizing that God was with him. God is with you as well. And He was with you during the challenging experiences in your past.

Dr. Evans said Joseph had to forgive yesterday. This meant no longer seeking revenge, sulking, or staring at the past but trusting that God knew how to turn it around for good.

**Do you need to forgive someone or something? It might even be yourself. Identify benefits of forgiveness that you learned from the video teaching.**

## PRAYER

*Close the session with prayer.*

Father, in a world full of excuses, You've asked us to rise above them and live with personal responsibility and ownership. Help each of us identify past hurts and experiences we need to let go of, forgive, and see in the light of Your power and purpose. Help us live as men without excuses as we trust in Your ability to transform our lives. In Christ's name, amen.

## HIT THE STREETS

### *Three Steps to Winning the Race*

Every Thanksgiving my family and I take part in what's known as the Turkey Trot. This 5K run/walk brings thousands of people together with the goal of raising funds for the Dallas YMCA. In this race, finishing is winning because all proceeds go to a good cause. But not so for most races. Most races award a first-place finisher with a medal, trophy, jacket, or another symbol of victory. In those races, coming in fifth, tenth, or one-hundredth is never the goal. Athletes train and compete in order to come in first.

Paul pictured the Christian life as a race. He wrote:

*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.*

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24



Men, I want to challenge you to develop a passion to be a winner for God. Following these three strategic steps can help you accomplish your goals.

## 1. Go for the Gold

A nice jogging suit doesn't make you a runner, just as wearing a football jersey doesn't make you an NFL player. To go for the gold, you need to do more than be a part of the pack. Never settle for simply getting on the field or in the race. Yet even the glory of a thrilling win on the field will pass. The glory God has for all who know Him is eternal and unfading. One day God is going to reward you for what you do for Him. Because of the nature of that reward, you pursue "the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14) with all you have. Living a life filled with excuses keeps you from pursuing the finish line with a fervor and intensity befitting the stakes of your eternal race.

## 2. Keep Your Eye on the Prize

Athletes who compete take part in strict training. They do this in order to get the prize. Strict training and hard work are just that—hard. They're disciplines you have to make yourself do. Unless you stay focused on the *why* behind the *what*, you might quit.

We have an Olympic gold medalist who attends the church where I pastor. I've known her since she was a kid. The hours, days, weeks, and months she put into preparing for the Olympics were possible only because she kept her eye on the prize. Every decision she made in the years leading up to her gold medal was influenced by that one pursuit. We, as kingdom men, ought to pursue God's eternal prize with no less effort.

Kingdom men train daily in godliness. They invest in the eternal. They seek to spend time with the Lord in prayer and Bible study, they serve others, and give sacrificially of themselves to the cause of the kingdom.

## 3. Remove Distractions

The writer of Hebrews expressed the last step this way:

*Let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us.*

HEBREWS 12:1

What's distracting you? In what ways are you spending your time on things that aren't of eternal value? Get rid of it. Stop watching it. Stop talking to them. Stop going there. Whatever stands in the way of fully living out and gaining the victory ought to have no place in your life.

Go for the gold; never settle. Keep your eye on the prize set before you. Remove the distractions holding you back. Follow these three steps, and you'll live as a victorious kingdom man.

## BIBLE STUDY 1

# *If You're Not Dead, God's Not Done*

Various passages in the Bible picture the Christian life as a race or other athletic competition (see 1 Tim. 4:7-8; Gal. 5:7; Heb. 12:1; Jas. 1:12). Parallels abound. Both require attention and effort. Both require self-denial and perseverance. Both have a clearly defined finish line we strive for. The finish line of this study is to become a kingdom man—a man who places himself under God's rulership and submits his life to the lordship of Jesus Christ. A kingdom man lives according to God's rule. Now that we have a goal in mind, we'll begin making strides toward the finish line.

Unlike athletic competition, the race for the Christian lasts a lifetime. If you're not dead yet, you aren't finished yet. You still have time to push forward in the race and win. You may be coming to the starting blocks with regrets over personal, family, or spiritual failure. You may have stumbled coming out of the blocks. You may have tripped during the race. You may even be starting the race a little late, but God can help you make up for lost time. He can help you pick up speed in the last half of the race and cover more ground in less time than the average runner.

**Read the following verse and answer the questions.**

*I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*

PHILIPPIANS 1:6

**What confidence comes from knowing that God began and will complete the work in your life?**

Our relationship with God begins with God. Paul was saying that what God starts, He finishes. What God initiates, He completes. God wants us to be involved in His mission in the world to make Himself known by making His people more like His Son. He always helps us finish. Sometimes it may appear that God is doing nothing and everything is up to us. Yet God routinely works behind the scenes to lead us toward the finish line.

**How do you rest in the confidence that God will carry out His work in your life from start to finish? How should this assurance influence your emotions, prayers, and actions?**

Paul knew how to persevere. He knew how to let go of the past. Paul had a shady past. He persecuted and oppressed the church. But one day Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. That encounter changed Paul's life. He knew the wisdom of forgetting failures and even successes. He wrote about it in Philippians 3. Paul pressed on:

*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 ...*

PHILIPPIANS 3:13

**What excuses in failures from you past are you holding on to?**

**You may not be able to completely forget your past, but in what ways can you follow Paul's example of "forgetting what lies behind" and look forward to what's ahead?**

Paul has a kingdom-man attitude. He let go of the things that were behind him. His eyes were straight ahead, focused on the goal. Runners don't win a race looking backward. They have to keep their eyes on the finish line. You can't change yesterday, but you can do a lot about what happens tomorrow. Don't let other people stop you from running for God. Don't let other people distract you from seeking His approval.

The truth is that if you know Jesus, you already have God's approval. When you believed the gospel, God exchanged all the sin in your past, present, and future for the perfect life of His Son. You're now in Christ, so when God sees you, He doesn't see your past; He sees Jesus' perfect record. God isn't concerned about your past failures; however, He has an unmistakable, amazing way of using even failure to bring about success.

**Often we spend too much time thinking about what other people think about us and allow it to hold us back. Why is it important to focus only on God and His view of you instead of what others think about you?**

God has a purpose for your life, a destiny for you to live out, a plan that He uniquely created you to fulfill. You advance toward that goal by focusing each day on aligning your thoughts, attitudes, and behavior with His Word and His will. Be faithful in the small things, and He will put you in charge of many things (see Matt. 25:21). If you drop a pass or miss a tackle, don't blame others or yourself. Don't get sidelined for a play. Get back up; admit your failure to God, trusting in His provision for your forgiveness (the Bible calls this step repentance); let it go; and move forward in the knowledge that your past doesn't define you. Because you're accepted and forgiven, you're living under God's approval.

Living in God's approval allows us to bear spiritual fruit, which is the outward evidence that we're being inwardly changed by God's work in our lives. For example, when a man lifts weights, the hours in the gym show up as fruit in the body as muscles begin to develop and his body responds to the difficulties it has endured. Similarly, spiritual sculpting takes place when you let go of your past and take responsibility for your sins and your spiritual development. Fruit can include greater patience, tolerance, self-control, love, diligence, leadership, wisdom, grace, and a myriad of other traits and actions that lead to eternal rewards.

**Why would an unhealthy fixation on our past keep us from bearing fruit in the present?**

**Why is it important that we bear fruit after repenting of sin? What does it signify if we don't?**

For Paul, bearing fruit was rooted in self-control. He tells us:

*Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.*

1 CORINTHIANS 9:25-27

The best athletes exhibit self-control. The Greek word Paul used for *self-control* in verse 25 referred to athletes in his day who abstained from unhealthy food, wine, and sex prior to competition. These athletes understood the need for their bodies to be at full capacity for victory. They were willing to invest in themselves to win the prize set before them.

The prize in the Christian life is in the future. Hiding behind the past is harmful because it focuses our attention in the wrong place. It causes us to feel shame and guilt over past failings instead of resting in the approval we have in Jesus and in the confidence that comes from knowing He will finish the work He began. We need to exercise diligence and self-control to let go of the past.

**What's one area of your life in which you're willing to exercise self-control in order to have a greater capacity for spiritual focus and commitment?**

## PRAY

Pray about your personal commitment to God and His expression of greatness through you. Ask Him to give you a glimpse of His plans for your future and to inspire you on your path of spiritual development. Ask for His help in reducing distractions that keep you from fully pursuing Him. Thank Him for the work He has begun in your life and ask Him to increase your faith and bring it to completion.