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## The Great Race

### Part 1 – Just Breathe

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We're starting a brand-new series called *The Great Race*. If you didn't know Branson was that beautiful... What a great trailer video. We are starting a series called *The Great Race* based off of 2 Timothy 4: 7. Paul is writing this letter to Timothy and in it he says, "***I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race...***" The race he is talking about is the Christian life. We are in this great race and he says "***...I have kept the faith.***"

I'm going to do something with you guys. The title of Part 1 is Just Breathe. I want you guys, just for a second with me, to take some deep breaths. Ready? Another deep breath. Now we are going to breath in truth. God created you, you're forgiven. Now we are going to breath out lies, shame, guilt, not good enough. Now we are going to breath in God wants to use you. Now we're going to breath out there is no hope, I'm discouraged. Let's breath in truth this morning. We're going to breath in a lot of truth this morning. God loves you, he forgives you. Breath out shame, guilt, not good enough, not pretty enough. Breath in God's got a plan for your life. Breath out Satan wants to destroy you. Breath in the truth, exhale the lies.

We're talking about just breathing in and we're talking about *The Great Race*. I actually ran a marathon back in 2003. These legs were not built for running marathons, just so you know. I don't have the tall stride, I don't have the kick like you see with a lot of marathon runners. I passed this onto my son. So, the last 4<sup>th</sup> of July, we were doing these fireworks. As they lit, my little five-year-old had no idea where to go. He just knew to run. [video plays] He didn't know where to go, but he was getting there quickly. Those little legs that Daddy passed onto him... He was running quickly and he was getting there quickly.

We do know where to go. We do know where to turn when things get difficult. We do know where to turn when things are hard or we're facing trials or tribulations. We do, unlike my sweet little five-year-old who didn't know where to go, but those legs were moving and he was running. He was in that race. We do know where to go. The problem I have is when I don't go there.

In 2003, I ran this marathon. I was prideful and I was arrogant. I just finished playing Division 1 Basketball. Friends of mine that were in this discipleship program I was in said, "Hey, let's run a marathon." I go, "Great! I can run one tomorrow." I was an idiot. I'm still an idiot, but I was serious idiot back then. They said, "There's no way you could run a marathon tomorrow." I thought I was in great college shape, so I said, "Hey, let's just try with three miles tomorrow." That's a normal training run day. So, I went out there, and I was dying. I was like *oh my goodness*. "When's this marathon?" They said, "Don't worry. It's not until March; you'll make it."

I started training. The Little Rock Marathon is one of the hilliest marathons in the country. I started reading marathon books. I read the Eric Liddell book and *Chariots of Fire*. Everybody was trying to fire me up and gear me up to run this great race – 26.2. Some crazy people invented that number. So, I start training and I do all the things, and marathon day approaches. You get all this crazy advice from runners that have run, which is always tough being a 26.2 person taking advice from a 13.1 person. Nevertheless, everybody has their advice and input just like when you're having your first child, and everybody knows how to parent that child better than you do.

So, I'm getting ready for this marathon. They're saying drink flat sprite, carbo load the night before, stay really hydrated. When you start the race, don't go out with the adrenaline in the pack. It's so easy to start strong, but if you do that, you are going to hit a big-time wall, which everybody hits the wall anyways, nevertheless.

So, we drive down the night before and stay at this Little Rock Hotel right by the marathon. I take the advice and I don't sprint out with the pack and I just pace myself. I do everything: I'm getting water and I'm getting these little goo packs that they give you. I mean, you've got to be crazy to run for four hours straight. But you also need something. There's a part of the Little Rock Marathon where it's on the water after all the hills. It's three miles out to this point and you've got this little tracker on your leg. When you get there, it tracks that you got there and then you have to run three miles back. So, it's just like a switchback.

It's almost close to the wall, the proverbial wall that you hit in a marathon. Some of the advice was that when you are running, you look at people's name tags and just encourage them because then you won't think about all the pain you're feeling; you'll be focused on other people. I thought that was great advice. It worked while people were switchbacking with me, but after the switchback, there was nobody to switchback with me so then I was just isolated and all the sudden all the pain that I had started coming to my mind. Like the baseball that felt like it was in my calves. So, now I'm running with a limp, I have a side ache, and people are like "breath through your nose and out through your mouth." So, now I'm like panting and just dying and I'm like *there's no way*. This is like the wall.

Travis Brawner, who is a teaching pastor here and one of the elders, said, "If COVID were a marathon, we're probably right in between 16 and 20, whereas the wall... I was at mile 19.5 and everything in my mind was like *quit, I'm done*. My body literally felt like it was shutting down. And then out of nowhere, my friend, Don Ford, jumps out and starts running with me. He's running alongside me, and he's got all this energy. He's just a cheerleader. He came down to cheer a couple of us on that day. He's just all peppy like, "You've got this, you're going to make it, you're doing great keep going; I believe in you buddy. You only have a couple more miles to go and just one more hill." I'm like hill! What!? No more hills! I'm dead serious that that little section of him coming alongside and running with me, I'm convinced gave me the energy I needed to finish that race, to finish and complete this race.

Now when you go into a marathon, there is a difference between what you need and what you want. When we go into this Christian life, there is a difference between what we need and what we want. What I needed for that marathon was to be hydrated, to be nourished, to have good running shoes, to

have shorts, to have lightweight stuff. I'm not going to run a marathon with a heavy suit or a snowsuit; that doesn't make sense.

So, there is a difference between needs and wants. In our own homes, there is a difference between needs and wants. I really need a new car. Really? I really need you to stain the deck. I really need the nicest T-bone steak you can get. So, we use this language I need... when it's really a want. The reason that is important to understand is because when we confuse wants with needs, it cultivates a heart of unthankfulness. We've all heard of Psalm 23. It's famous, right? ***Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death... The Lord is my Shepherd.*** The very first verse of this psalm is this: ***The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.*** Because he is everything we need. Why is that verse so powerful? It's because if the Lord is your shepherd, he is everything you need. Everything you could possibly need is in him. Everything you could possibly need to finish this Christian race is in him, in Christ. When we confuse that, this is what happens. **We miss the blessing of the Lord when we confuse needs with wants, thus replacing gratitude with entitlement.**

Is the Lord blessing you today? Are you missing those blessings because you're so focused on what you want rather than what he has already supplied in your every need? Think about that. I need, I need, I need. No, I want, I want, I want. And then we miss that he has already blessed us with everything we need.

I cut and pasted this right off of NASA website. The astronauts, right? *"We must have..."* These are needs. These aren't wants. *"We must have food, water, air, and shelter to survive. If any one of these basic needs are not met, then humans cannot survive."* We need those four things to survive. Now, in reference to the Christian race that we're talking about in this new series, I'll take it to the Christian viewpoint. We can't complete the Christian race without food, water, air, shelter, *and community*. God created us to be in community. How do I know that? I know that because when he created Adam out of the dust, he said, "It is not good for man to be alone."

So, I'm running this race and all of the sudden there is community cheering me on. What a time in a season in life where we could come alongside one another and say, "Hey, you're doing awesome. I see you trying harder in your marriage. I see you getting through difficult parenting seasons right now. I see you trying harder to walk in your relationship with the Lord. I see you making an effort to get your family to church in the midst of a crazy pandemic. Hey, you're doing awesome; great job."

The scripture says, "Let us spur one another on in good deeds." We need community, rather than all this hateful rhetoric. "Great job. Keep going. You're doing awesome. You may have a hill, but you're going to get over that hill. You've got it; let's keep going." We need this community. We need to come alongside one another as believers and encourage one another in this great race. We're not meant to do it alone.

I love what Ted said last week. "Though we may be weary of this pandemic, let us not grow weary of one another." Let us encourage one another. Let us spur one another on. Let us push one another. Let us be Dons that jump in the marathon and just start speaking life and speaking truth. It's so important.

So, when we talk about our basic needs: shelter, water, food, air, look at this. Scripture supplies that every need, and every need we see is actually in God himself.

Psalm 46: 1 – **God is our shelter...** What did the secular astronaut say are our four basic needs? Shelter, food, water, oxygen. God is our shelter and strength... always. Not sometimes. You hear that you rarely use the words always and never in your marriage. It doesn't get you in a good position when you use it. "You always do this..." "You never do that..." Don't say that and you'll be in a lot better position, husbands. I promise, okay? **God is our shelter and strength always ready to help in times of trouble.** So, scripture says, guess what? You need shelter to survive? Guess who your shelter is. It's God himself.

You need food to survive and water to survive? **"...whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst...** I went to Mama Jeans this week up in Springfield. They have all these crazy waters. This water is literally called *Eternal Water*. So, I looked at the back and said, "Where's the source? Spring source; that's blasphemy. Jesus is the source of eternal water." It tastes like normal water. They just jacked up the price and didn't call it Aquafina. We do know we need water to survive. You can only go a couple days without water before you would die from dehydration. **"...but the water I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to the eternal life."**

You know, we can get some pretty humid summers here in the Ozarks. Is there anything more satisfying than as you move around... you've weedeated, you've mowed a yard, you've gone for a workout, and you come back, and you just grab that water and wet your whistle. Think about that. David said, "My soul thirsts for you like a parched land." Have you ever seen a parched land absorb water? Have you ever seen something that desperately wants to drink water? That cold water that runs on the back of your throat, and then afterwards, what do you always do? Ahhhhhh. You drink and you're so satisfied. If you put that times a million when you drink from this well (God's Word), you would have the Ahhhhhh over and over and over again.

So, your basic need is shelter? Well, God is our shelter. Oh, your basic need is water? Well, Jesus is the Living Water that you will never grow thirsty from. Oh, now you have the basic need of food? Well, watch what scripture says about food in John 6: 35. **Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life..."** That's food. Just to give you the context of culture, everything in their culture was around bread. They had bread with fish, they had bread with vegetables, they had bread with wine, they had bread with everything. There were no South Beach diets going on back then, okay? This was it. They weren't worried about counting carbs. He is the Bread of Life. They broke bread together at the Last Supper and he was the bread, and we take the bread to remember his life through communion. He is the Bread of Life. **"...whoever comes to me shall no hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."** He is the Bread of Life. Where was Jesus born? Bethlehem. You guys should know that; Christmas is coming up. He was born in Bethlehem. Look what the Hebrew word for Bethlehem literally means – *the House of Bread*. How crazy is that? That the Bread of Life was born in the House of Bread? Isn't that cool? That's so crazy. Sometime, scripture just blows my mind. And we're just getting started.

So, when I was running this great race, if I didn't have those goo packs, if I didn't have bread, there was no way I run for four hours. I shouldn't anyway, but there's no way I could have without it. He is the Bread of Life.

But here's the crazy thing. Jesus fasts for 40 days, no food, no water, which tells me he was completely sustained by God. This is before he starts his ministry in Mathew 4. Then Satan comes to him. Some of you know the story. Satan comes to him and says, "Hey, see all these? I'll give you everything. I'll feed you." Satan knows he's parched and hungry. Jesus responds to him in Verse 4 like this. Satan is trying to tempt him and get him to fall. Jesus says, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, Satan." He answers Satan with scripture. **"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.'"** Man shall not live by bread alone. This secular world should not be your sustenance, it should not be your need, it should not be what satisfies you, it should not be what keeps you going. It literally says, "...but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

2 Timothy 3: 1 – **All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.** Let me tell you why this is really important. There are 66 books in the Bible. There are 39 in the Old Testament – 17 prophetic, 5 poetical, 17 historical. There are 27 in the New Testament – 4 gospels, the first 3 are called the synoptic gospels and John is called the love gospel, and then an historical book called the Book of Acts. And then there are 13 Pauline epistles, also known as Paul's letters. And then there are 9 general epistles and also the Book of Revelation, which would be a prophetic book. There are 40 plus different authors, written in three different languages – Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic – written over a span of 2,000 years.

Let me tell you why I'm pointing all this out. If my man right here and I went outside and watched a fight break out between two Woodland Hills staff members, which God forbid ever happening, and we came back in here and told you guys how that fight went, he and I are going to tell you completely different account of who won that fight. Why? It's because he and I have different perspectives. That's why you go to movies and you rave about them and you tell someone in your family to go see them and for them, it's a bust. That's because we have different perspectives.

So, ladies and gentlemen, is it possible that 40 plus different authors, with three different languages, from all walks of life, in over 2,000 years tell the exact same story? It's called *Theo Nustas*. This word *Theo* literally means God. That's where we get theology – the study of God. *Nustas* literally means God's divine breath. So, it is God's divine breath that is breathed into these authors and into His pages.

Let me tell you why I'm pointing this out. Let's jump over to Genesis 2: 7. **...then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life...** Don't miss this. Everything God had created in the first five days of creation, up to this point, he spoke. He spoke – let there be light and dark. He spoke – let there be mountains. He spoke – animals. He spoke. But then when he gets to man, he breathes into him. He formed man and he breathed into him. That same Hebrew word – *Neshamah* – is the same translated word that we get from *Nustas* in the Koine Greek, so that same breath that God breathes into his Word is the same breath he breathed to give man life.

Woodland Hills, let me ask you a question. Are you feeling alive today? This (God's Word) gives you life. When you breathe this in, it gives you life. This is God's breath into your life. This gives you breath. The very same breath that brought man to life, has the ability to bring you to life ever single day. God's Word bring life. He brings oxygen.

If you know anything about your breath, you know you can't run very long without it. And the crazy thing is sometimes... And I'm the first in line with this. You can walk with Jesus for a while and be like *I know all the stories, I know all the Old Testament, I went to VBS, I went to church.* And then you stop breathing for yourself. You stop spending time in the Word. You stop breathing this in. Could you imagine climbing Mt. Everest and looking at the Sherpa and saying, "Hey, you breath my oxygen for me; I'll just take whatever you breath in for me." The higher and higher you get on Mt. Everest, the more and more you climb. The more and more we run this great race, the more important it is we keep breathing in this oxygen.

I have a training mask at home. It has these little valves on it. I can change the valves to set the elevation. I can set it at 15,000 feet, 17,000 feet, 19,000 feet. I'll run hills with this mask. As I'm running these hills in the summer, I'll get to the top of them and I'll literally tear open the Velcro in the back and gasp for air, just trying to catch my air because it's taking so much of the oxygen from me. Could you imagine if someone jumped up behind you, covered your mouth, covered your nose? You're not going to just sit there and let them do it. You are going to scratch and claw and do whatever you can to rip their hands off to get that breath. I wonder if we longed for God's breath the same way. I wonder if we longed for that same urgency to scratch and claw to breath in. Remember what we did at the very beginning? Let's breath in truth and exhale lies.

Here's another crazy story in Ezekiel 37. It's these people that knew God, but then they stopped... They knew of him, but they became spiritually dry. They became spiritually dead. There's the prophecy and it's called The Valley of Dry Bones. They weren't experiencing the breath of God. Watch how they come back to life.

[video plays] ***1 The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. 3 He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"***

***I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know."***

***4 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! 5 This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. 6 I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'"***

***7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.***

***9 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. – Ezekiel 37***

What brought this valley of dry bones back to life? It was God's breath. Let me read it again for you in Ezekiel 37: - ***5 This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: "I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life."*** What are you breathing in? What are you breathing in right now? What is it that you're taking in?

I won't mention the name, but I've been discipling and mentoring a man that has had a really rough season in his marriage for the last couple of years, like on the brink of divorce. As I started navigating with him and asking questions, I realized he wasn't breathing a lot of the Word in. So, all of the verbiage that is coming out towards his wife and his kids isn't the Word.

I said, "Okay, let's start hanging out at 6:30 am." So, for the last six weeks, he's been meeting with me at 6:30 am and then, on Thursday evenings, we're going through a Bible study together. What's crazy is I'm seeing him breath the Word in. His heart is beginning to soften. His rhetoric is beginning to change towards his spouse and towards his kids. He's allowing this breath to come in.

The reality is some of us are breathing pollution in all the time. We're breathing in news and social media and gossip and slander. We're breathing all this in and so this is what's coming out. Some of us don't even smoke, but we've got smoker's lung. Some of us don't even vape, but we have vaping lung because we're breathing in all this toxicity from the world rather than from the Breath, the Theo Nustas, the Neshamah, God's truth that gives us life, not death.

So, if this is our breath, and the only time you breathe this in is on Sunday, holy cow! How do you hold your breath for six days? If you're breathing this in and we need this to breathe... We need oxygen to live. We can go shorter without oxygen than anything else. You can go without a shelter, you can go without food, and you can go without water longer than you can go without oxygen. So, the most important thing in those four things is breath and what you are breathing in. A free diver can last only five minutes under water. I don't understand how you can go six days without breath.

The more you breath the Word in, the more it's going to come out of you and the more you breath this in, it's going to come out of you just like Matthew 12: 34 says, "***For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.***" Do you want to know where your heart is at this morning, Woodland Hills? What are the majority of your conversations? Is it sports? Is it news coverage? Is it gossip? This is an indicator of where your heart is. For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. This isn't Adam Donyes speaking. This is Jesus speaking. These are his words. If it's in your heart, if you're breathing it in, you're going to breath it out. If you're breathing good things in, like my friend who I'm helping with his marriage right now... He's starting to breath out and guess what? His sweet little wife's heart is starting to soften. The kids are starting to notice some difference. You can't breathe something in and not breath it out.

Jeremiah said it best in Chapter 20, Verse 9 of his prophetic book. ... ***his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.*** If it's in there, it's going to come out. Whatever is in there is going to come out. Whatever toxin you're inhaling, it's going to come out. Whatever news anchor you're listening to, it's going to come out. Whatever sports caster you're listening to, it's going to come out. Whatever you're breathing in is going to come out.

Remember what we did at the very beginning? Just breath.

***The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.***

I've been to Pastor Ted's house; I've been around his kids and I've been around his family. Regardless of what's going on in the political landscape, regardless of what's going on in our world, it's just steady. Do you know why his house is so steady and constant? God's word is steady and constant. He and Amy are breathing in the Word of God and they are breathing it out to their kids. They are breathing it in, and they are breathing it out to their church family. They are breathing it in and breathing it out to their parents. They are breathing it in and breathing it out to me and other people that he mentors. It's like steady Eddie... or steady Teddy I guess you could say.

***The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.*** What are you breathing in? What are you taking? Do you realize that there is no food, no water, no shelter, no breath, the four things you need, how crazy is this? Literally everything that astronauts say you need, Jesus says he is it. Amen! You don't need anything else.

And the crazy thing about when I told you he formed man, Adam, and breathed life into him... Right after that, Adam and Eve blew it, didn't they? So, they tried to cover their shame with fig leaves. Some of you missed this in scripture. What's crazy is right after they try to cover themselves, God knew it and he says, "Why are you hiding?" They said, "Because we were ashamed?" He says, "How did you know you were naked?"

So, then God commits the first sacrifice, the first death. He kills animals and he gives them loin cloth to cover up their shame and guilt, foreshadowing to the animal, the lamb he would ultimately sacrifice to cover up our shame and guilt for good. Your fig leaves aren't going to cover it. God's going to cover that. Even when he tried to supply his own want, God said, "No, this is what you need. You actually need me to provide a sacrifice for you and that will suffice. Your wants won't, but I have everything you need in me."

We have all we'll ever need in Christ. No matter where we're at in this life in this culture, we have all we'll ever need in Christ. And that will never change and that hasn't changed and that's not going to change.

So when I think about running a marathon, when I think about going through that Little Rock Marathon, as soon as I came across the finish line, I swore to myself, *I will never run another marathon for as long*



*as I live.* Guess what? I'm a man of my word. I felt things in my body I didn't even know existed. I felt muscles in my shoulders I didn't even know could grow on shoulder blades. I had pain that was unfathomable.

The reality is that some of you, right now, in this great race, you too feel some pain, you too feel some cramps, you too are trying to figure out the breathing and the dehydration and the hunger and the hurting marriage or the wayward child or the pandemic or everything else going on in this crazy time. You too are like man I just don't know if I can keep running. Yes, you can. Woodland Hills is right here with you. We're jumping in. You're alright; you've got this. We're right here running with you. You're doing great. You don't have to be perfect. Because guess what? Jesus was perfect for you. You're looking great. Just keep running. Keep running and keep breathing in the truth. Stop breathing in the lies. Stop breathing in the toxins. Stop breathing in the smog. Stop eating from the world. Eat from the Bread of Life. Stop drinking the toxins. Drink the everlasting water. You're doing great and we need each other. This church body, we need each other. We don't need to be caught up in any of the hateful rhetoric or spewing venom. We need each other. And the more we breath the Word in, church family, the more we're going to breath it out to others. And guess what's found in here? Hope. What a powerful word. Hope.

I'm going to close with this story. Just last service, A guy named Jim and his wife came up to me after the service. Jim was teared up. His wife was teared up. I get chill bumps telling you guys this story. He was standing right here, crying and he said, "Will you pray for me?" I said, "I'd love to. What can I pray for?" He goes, "I've been angry. I've been rude to her. I'm emotionally abusive. I haven't treated her well. I have fits of rage and anger." He goes, "I need to start breathing this in more so I will breathe it out to her more."

Now she's sobbing. She's standing right here, sobbing. So, now I start sobbing because I'm watching the Word of God do what the Word of God does. The Spirit came over this couple. They looked like they were probably in their late 50s to early 60s. I'm just trying to pray through the tears. I get back and tell Brawner, "Man, I was crying like a baby."

That's what the Word of God does, Woodland Hills. That's what this Theo Nustas... This is what we need. There is nothing else we need apart from Christ. Amen? There is nothing else you need to be breathing in. No sports, no news, nothing else that you need to be breathing in than this. And when we breath this in as a church body and breath it out on Taney and Stone Counties, the impact is far greater than you or I will ever grasp or imagine. I just saw it last service. May we be a body of believers that breathe in His truth and in return breathe it out upon others.

God, I pause this morning and just thank you that you are on the throne and you will remain on that throne and no one will ever, ever take that throne from you.

God, thank you for your Word, your Theo Nustas. It gives us life. Thank you that we have everything we need in you. It's not Jesus plus something; it's Jesus plus nothing equals everything. We proclaim that today and I pray for this church family.

I pray if there are any hurting marriage or hurting families or illnesses, Lord, that you're Jehovah Rapha hand would be upon them. I pray for their week. I pray for the way they interact with co-workers and the way they interact with friends and relatives that may disagree with them, Lord, that your Word would breath out of them, that your gentleness, your grace, your mercy, your patience, your love, your long suffering would breathe out of them, that it would breathe out of me.

God, would you be with this church, would you be with this family. May people look at the members of this church and know there is something different about them because of the Word that lives inside of them.

It is in the powerful and pure, high and holy, mighty and matchless name of Jesus that I pray. And all God's people said... Amen.