

Running With Horses
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God wants all believers to make progress - to move forward – to grow. But too many believers live life in park or reverse. They're going nowhere – or if they are moving – it's backwards.

But there are many Bible verses telling us to accelerate forward. For instance, Hebrews 6:1 says:

Therefore let us go on and get past the elementary stage in the teachings and doctrine of Christ, advancing steadily toward the completeness and perfection that belong to spiritual maturity.

We should all be steadily advancing in spiritual maturity!

As I was thinking about what to preach this week, God reminded me of an obscure verse from Jeremiah 12. Jeremiah was a prophet who was called by God when he was young. God warned Jeremiah to speak the Word – even though people would not listen to him. Jeremiah did this – but the lack of results got hard to deal with. So, he complains to God in Jeremiah 12:1 –

Lord, you always give me justice when I bring a case before you. So let me bring you this complaint: Why are the wicked so prosperous? Why are evil people so happy?

In verse 4 he asks - *How long must this land mourn?* I'm sure we can all relate to that. Complaints usually begin with “why” or “how long”.
 God, why do you allow this or that? God, how much longer will I have to wait?

Jeremiah had answered the call of God and was not seeing any results. In fact, all he was seeing was resistance and opposition. But God answers Jeremiah in verse 5. And He doesn't say things like: “Poor Jeremiah – you're working too hard, you need a break. Don't worry, things will get easier from now on.” No! Here's what God says in Jeremiah 12:5 -

If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?

I'm preaching today on Running with Horses. My first point is this:

1- God never said life would be easy!

Life has seasons.

Sometimes things go smoothly and sometimes things can be rough!

Too many Christians get sidetracked by the tough times in life. But the Bible repeatedly warns us about them. 1 Peter 4:12-13 says:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 3:3-4 says:

No one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them.

Life is hard. Stop waiting for life to get easy! Instead, realize that God wants all of us to learn to reign in life. Everyone wants to be an overcomer – they just don't want to have to overcome anything! But we must run with the footmen before we can run with the horses.

We must be faithful in small things before we're given big things. 2 Timothy 2:11-12 says:

This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him.

The Greek word translated here as "endure" literally means to stay under – to persevere – to hold fast to your faith even when you are under the weight of misfortune, trials or testings.

So – when God told Jeremiah he could not run with horses if he could not run with footmen – He was saying this:

You think this is bad?

You can't deal with this?

This is nothing compared to what you are going to face in the future.

And if you can't deal with this – how will you deal with that?

God doesn't say – "Slow down and take it easy."

God says – "Accelerate! Speed it up! Get ready to run with the horses!"

God did not call us to take the easy way out. That's why 2 Timothy 2:3 tells us

Endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

God calls us to live courageously, not cautiously! Yet, so many of us are like Jeremiah, wanting to quit at the first sign of difficulty. Wanting to retreat when we should accelerate! If we want to reign in life – we must learn how to endure hardship. Yes, sometimes God delivers us *from* tough times – but sometimes He takes us *through*.

We cannot allow ourselves to turn against God or think that He is not good when we go through tough times. God is good when He delivers *from* and God is good when He takes us *through*.

Think about it:

God did not deliver David from Goliath, He strengthened David to kill Goliath.

God did not deliver Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego from the fire: He took them through the fire.

God did not deliver Noah from the flood: He took him through the flood.

There are times God may allow us to go through hard times. In fact, tough times come to everyone, but we need tough faith to believe that God will get us through.

You will never run with the horses if you only believe God delivers us from tough times rather than understanding God also takes us through tough times for a purpose. That purpose is God's glory and our good.

2- God trains us with footmen so we can run with horses.

God never calls us to run with horses until He has trained us with footmen.

This is a great principle that God has always used with His servants.

- David fought a lion and a bear before he fought Goliath.

- Joseph trained in prison before he was sent to the palace.

You must believe God to heal a cold before you believe God to heal cancer.

You've got to read the word before you can preach the word.

If you are worn out by just normal every day living, what will you do when the horses show up? The horses can mean many things – but basically, it's talking about tougher times or a tougher opponent.

In Jeremiah's case – God was saying, "I see your future and trust me, you need to accelerate your faith!" What God knew – and Jeremiah did not know – was that Jeremiah would face:

- Ministering for more than 40 years during the darkest days of history
- Preaching a message no one would listen to
- Rejection, discouragement and despair
- Conflicts with false prophets
- Being arrested and thrown into a dungeon

Jeremiah was at a crossroads and had to choose to turn back or press on. But He chose to go on! He chose to run with the horses. Yet many of us wonder if we can go on with this boss or this spouse or this teacher or this roommate or this pastor.

But if you can't cut it in high school – how will you make it in college?

If you can't do well in a minimum wage job – how will you run a business?
 If you can't tithe on a little bit of money – what makes you think you can tithe on more money?
 If you can't run with footmen, how can you run with horses?

Faithfulness starts where you are now with what you have now. So many people think – when I get to a certain place in life – then I'll do this or that that I'm not doing now. They project their obedience into the future or to another place in life. But Proverbs 17:24 says:

Wisdom is in the sight of him who has understanding, but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth.

In other words – my obedience or maturity is always somewhere out there. Anywhere other than here and now!

So many Christians think, "I'll be faithful in prayer and Bible study when I get out of school or get a different job or get a better schedule." No, you won't! It won't be any easier ever! If you can't run with footmen, you'll never run with horses!

Some Christians think, "I'll be faithful in tithing when I make more money or get a different job or get out of debt." No, you won't. You'll probably spend all that on yourself too. In fact, studies show that the more people make, the less they give as a % of their income! If you can't run with footmen, you'll never run with horses!

People think – I'll start studying and making good grades when I get to college – failing to realize if they don't make the grades now, they won't get into college. If you can't run with footmen, you'll never run with horses!

Some people think, "I'll work hard and succeed at my work when they promote me and pay me more money." No, you won't. If your boss does not see what you can do now where you are, you receive no raises or promotions. If you can't run with footmen, you'll never run with horses!

Faithfulness in small things causes advancement to bigger things. Don't deceive yourself into putting faithfulness off until the future. Be faithful now where you are.

Christians want to walk in power and anointing, but they don't pay their bills or take care of their possessions.
 How can God trust you with a congregation of thousands of people if He can't trust you to take care of your house and car?
 How can you plant a church if you don't even mow your yard?
 How can you wage war on demons in your city when you can't win the war over your own flesh!

In church, there are people who want to be in leadership, yet they can't even get to church on time. They don't tithe, they don't help out, but they want to lead. No way! The first person you lead is yourself! You must run with footmen before you run with horses.

Deborah and I rented at least five places before we ever bought a house. Every time we moved out, we got our deposit back. Not only that, the owners were amazed because we left that house in better shape than when we moved in. I believe that we showed ourselves faithful as renters, so we became owners.

Before we ever pastored a church – we were members of churches. As members we were faithful in tithing, serving, helping, using our gifts. We did our best to make the pastors successful.

When we felt the call to preach and pastor, we went to our pastor. He gave us many things we needed to get in order in our natural and spiritual lives. He told us if we wanted to teach, he had an opening for us – the 5-year-olds' Sunday school class. We did not complain. We did not get offended. We were grateful, and we did what he asked.

We were faithful there and were given an adult small group to lead.

We were faithful there and were given the new member's class to teach.

We were faithful and eventually became elders in the church.

I believe that because we showed ourselves faithful with another person's ministry, so we were eventually given our own. We started this church with 6 people and we had to be faithful with 6 before we got 60 and we had to be faithful with 60 before we got 600. And we must show ourselves faithful with 600 before we're 6,000.

Likewise – God has a destiny for you. But listen carefully: whatever your destiny is, God will first give you smaller versions of it. This is so you will learn to be faithful in the small things before He gives you the larger and more important things. So, do not despise the days of small things. Be faithful with the small things and you will see the truth of Job 8:7 –

Though your beginning was small, yet your latter end will increase abundantly.

What you do with what God has given you now will determine what He will entrust you with later. The destiny for your life right now is for you to be more responsible with what God has given you.

I learned this lesson when I was a senior in high school. I was a Christian, but kind of lukewarm. Not really taking a stand for God. One day the realization hit me that I was about to leave home and go to college and if I didn't take a stand now – I wouldn't be able to stand then. If I couldn't run with the footmen, I would not be able to run with horses. So – I started right where I was and started to live for God then and there.

That prepared me for the horses I faced in college! I was not surrounded by loving supportive believers anymore! I was surrounded by unbelieving students and professors and if I had not learned to run with the footmen, I would have never run with the horses!

What are you putting off? God is saying to us – do it right now where you are with what you’ve got – because I’m preparing you for bigger and better and harder things!

New levels always bring new devils! If you can’t rebuke the little demons – how will you overcome the big ones? If you can’t make it through small difficulties – how will you survive the big ones?

Not only did God tell Jeremiah to run with horses, He also said:

If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?

Some translations say - how will you manage when the Jordan floods. Either way – this speaks of times when things close in on you like a jungle and overflow you like a flood. When the Jordan River flooded, it drove the lions and other beasts out of hiding and they went around killing animals and people. The Amplified version says-

If you take to flight in a land of peace where you feel secure, then what will you do (when you tread the tangled maze of jungle haunted by lions) in the swelling and flooding of the Jordan?

God was telling Jeremiah – your preaching has been to your family and friends in your own home town. You have been running with footmen, Jeremiah. But I have bigger plans for you! And if you’re ready to give up here, how will you make it where I’m sending you?

And I want to ask you today - Where are YOU in the training process?

Do you even run with the footmen? Running with the footmen is doing what God calls us all to do. It’s doing the basics of the faith. Things like -

- Seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness
- Loving God and people
- Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together
- Giving our tithes and offerings
- Going and making disciples
- Praying without ceasing
- Husbands – love your wives
- Wives – respect your husbands
- Children – honor and obey your parents

THESE ARE NOT SUGGESTIONS - THESE ARE COMMANDS, INSPIRED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD AND WRITTEN FOR OUR INSTRUCTION!

It's okay to be an immature Christian when you're a new Christian. But after a while – you need to grow up! I know people who've been Christians for years and they still act like babies! They say things like – “We're still new at this” and I want to shout – “NO YOU'RE NOT!!” You've been a believer for 10 years but instead of having 10 years of growth – you've had one year of growth 10 times! You keep doing the same things over and over! You never move on, press on, accelerate or grow. Yes - We must start with the basics. But we must progress beyond the basics. That's why:

3- To run with the horses – we must feed ourselves God's Word!

Unfortunately, many Christians cannot tolerate the meat of the word. They want to live their lives being bottle fed by someone else. But God wants us to grow to where we feed ourselves on His word. Hebrews 5:12-14 says:

In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Notice – they trained themselves! You see – preachers and teachers have a role – but at some point in time you should also be feeding yourself.

We have good food here and we're always looking at more and better ways to feed you! But – there comes a time when you must also feed yourself! Just stop making excuses and start getting into the word and getting the word into you. It will change your life. Mature Christians are strong in the word.

Where are you in regard to the word of God? Are you still drinking milk or are you eating meat? Still in elementary school or able to teach? The Bible says there should come a time when you should not only be able to feed yourself, but you should be able to feed others.

What are you doing to accelerate your spiritual growth? We must be willing to leave spiritual kindergarten and move on to elementary school and high school and college. Some people want to stay in kindergarten – it's easier and there's a snack and a nap time. But to do so is to choose to stay immature. But, maturity will not just happen - Childish things must be put away!

You can't outgrow Bible ignorance. You can't outgrow prayerlessness. You can't just outgrow not being filled with the spirit. It's like saying I'm going to outgrow being lost and will one day automatically be saved. It won't happen! It's time to put away childish things! It's time to accelerate – to take the next step in your spiritual growth! Start running with the footmen so you'll be able to run with the horses!