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Good Morning Everyone! Welcome to our Friday, April 3rd edition of the 10 @ 10 Daily Devotions. We are still participating in social distancing and now we are at the sheltering in place level. It was only a few short weeks ago that the thought of our country being affected on this kind of scale was simply beyond consideration. I mean, Walt Disney World rarely even closes for hurricanes, and the headline at the beginning of the week was "Disney Closes Theme Parks Indefinitely"! I do not even know what that means!

I understand that our church also has had a reputation for never canceling worship services. There was a time when we simply did not close for any reason! Snow? Peggy Finch, who loves snow, doesn't even want to cancel service for a snow day! I have even experienced worship with no power. And now, after almost a month of not worshipping as a community in our church building, we are faced with not even being in the sanctuary on EASTER SUNDAY!!! I mean, Easter is arguably THE most important Sunday of the church calendar. And, although the staff here at Memorial have some really cool things planned for our Facebook LIVE service next week, it just won't be the same as processing into the sanctuary as the entire congregation is singing "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today," and looking out on a sanctuary from where I typically sit, seeing the pews packed with people (some of whom I only get to see once or twice a year at church anyway).

And then, the altar area is filled the scent of Easter Lilies as they cover the altar, and there is that huge 10-foot cross that is erected in the sanctuary and which the UMW have so patiently and beautifully adorned with flowers. And then there is the music. Without a doubt, I have the best seat in the house every Sunday because I get to sit right between our awesome choir and the congregation, and all the voices mixing together is just a perfect blend. There are times when I just feel embraced by all of those voices.

I don't know if you can tell, but I think Memorial is a special place, and I am fortunate to serve on staff here. But enough advertising our church. My point is that when even Easter Sunday is affected, we are all on a long road to wherever this virus is taking us!

Speaking of "long roads" I heard this week that some projections are pointing to the possibility of 10 MORE weeks before we get this pandemic in a manageable place in our country. I looked at my wife, Martha Jo, and said, "Did he just say 10 weeks? We are only in week 3!" She added, "That was 10 weeks from NOW."

So, as we continue to venture into these uncharted waters of social isolation, perhaps we have slipped from the relative safety of a 2-week "sprint" to the end of the Coronavirus to a possible 3-month

“marathon” until we get back to any kind of normalcy. With this in mind, perhaps there are some pointers that we can gain from the world of marathon running. I believe that there are life lessons that might be able to help us out during this pretty difficult time.

Now, I know, in the corner of your mind you are thinking, how does Rodney know ANYTHING about running, much less running a marathon? Well, let me just introduce you to the 1988 version of Rodney Denton, elite cross-country runner for Ledford Senior High School! [Show picture.] In addition to that little blast from the past, one of the many proud moments of my married life happened in March 2012 when my wife ran the Virginia Beach Marathon! And I must say that even though I was only “watching” her run, I was still blessed with some valuable insight into the art of being a marathoner in a race as well as in life.

So, without any further fuss, here are the top 4 lessons we can learn from marathoners as we try to survive Coronavirus 2020:

LESSON #1 – RUN WITH THE RIGHT PEOPLE. When Martha Jo began her race she was placed in a corral, or group of people who felt like they knew how long it would take for them to finish the race. They tried to put similar runners together, so the really fast runners all started the race in the front, and the slower runners all had to wait closer to the back. Martha Jo felt like she could finish in just around 5 hours, so she surrounded herself with other runners who could complement her pace. An interesting phenomenon happens during a race like this. Runners end up matching the pace of the people around them; so, if they are running with slow runners, then they end up running slower, and vice versa. She ended up finishing in just under 5 hours (4 hours, 50 minutes), just as expected. But not only did she run with the right people, my sister-in-law, father-in-law, and I got a map of the race course the night before, and figured out where we could park and cheer her on from different points in the race. She says that knowing we would be there gave her confidence and inspired her to keep going when she got tired and wanted to drop out. My point is that the people whom you choose to expose yourself to, both physically and emotionally during this pandemic, make a difference. Just like you are probably avoiding people you know have been exposed to the virus because you don't want to get sick, you may want to be careful about surrounding yourself with toxic negative people. Be selective with who you choose to run with during this time. Those negative people can sometimes make you feel worse about the situation and bring your spirits down. However, the positive people in your life may be helpful and can build you up and strengthen you during this difficult time.

LESSON #2 – BEWARE OF THE WALL. During Martha Jo's marathon, at around mile 18, there was a section of the race affectionately known as Heartbreak Hill. It was a steadily inclining hill that lasted for about a full mile. After that hill it was downhill the rest of the way, but so many people couldn't bring themselves to finish the race because of that hill. It was one of the places that we made sure to cheer on Martha Jo, because it was a “make it or break it” moment in the race. I sort of hit a moment like that this week. I had turned on the news because I had sort of avoided watching it for a while but wanted to see what was going on in the world. And I'll admit—I was sort of overwhelmed by the virus facts and stats that were being shared. The projected number of American deaths, the worldwide impact, the lack of medical supplies, the desperation that people are having for social interaction. Not only was there nothing but Coronavirus on the news, but it all seemed so grim. I ultimately had to leave the room and find a distraction. My life lesson here is just to understand that we need to be aware that there are going to be tough times through this, and we need to take care of ourselves so that we can find positive ways to overcome them. It might come from having sandwiches ONE MORE TIME for dinner. It might come from having to do ONE MORE school assignment. It might be a result of a whole host of factors that end up making you lose your patience and feel the full gravity of what's happening in the world. But the wall is coming, and if you listen to Lesson #1, you will have the right people around you to get you through it!

LESSON #3 – PACE YOURSELF! I watched Martha Jo train for a full year building up her endurance and finding ways to train even when it was raining. She started the marathon at a pace that she knew could maintain so that she would have enough energy to finish strong! Compare that strategy to Gracen, my 12-year-old son, who plays soccer at the YMCA. Last Spring, before every practice, the coach would have them run around the field to get them warmed up. It was interesting watching Gracen's running style. First of all, running is not Gracen's favorite thing (he probably gets that from his dad), so during this

warm-up, he would be all full of energy at the beginning and just attack the run as fast as he could hit it for about 50 yards. Then, of course, he would be out of breath and he would stop and walk for a while, then run another 50 yards FULL OUT, then walk. This went on until he made it the whole way around the field, usually near the back of the pack. It was interesting to watch, but I'm not sure how it benefited his soccer game. My point is that we seem to be in this Coronavirus situation for the long haul, and we have to be careful how we approach it. On Sunday, my family and I sat down and made a list of all of the "projects" that we wanted to get done around the house during the quarantine. After everybody added to the 20+ item list, I was overwhelmed. So, I folded up the piece of paper and went to take a nap. Maybe a better approach for all this time at home is to stay busy but pace ourselves. Learn some new skills, like figuring out how to use that crazy Instant Pot. Or go old school and take a break from the online games to teach the kids or your friends a new board game. There are all sorts of videos online that can teach us new skills and projects. The deal is that binge-watching Netflix shows has already lost some of its luster. I just hope I can find a way to use this time to make myself a better person instead of wasting it on Fortnite and Minecraft.

LESSON #4 – FUEL YOURSELF WITH THE RIGHT FUEL. One very important lesson that Martha Jo learned about marathons happened about mid-way through her training. She had signed up for a half-marathon in Winston-Salem during the month of December. She had trained properly for it and was ready when the big day arrived. She completed the race with a good time, and, although she was tired when she was done, she felt great about her effort. Then, later that afternoon, she began to feel light-headed. She lay down for a nap, and when she woke up, her head was pounding and she was really tired. She took her blood pressure and it was dangerously low. We found out later that she was severely dehydrated. She went to the urgent care, got some fluids, and began to feel better. But she learned that the things that we put in our bodies (or in her case what we fail to put in) matter. That is one of the reasons why the staff at Memorial decided to do these 10@10 devotions. After a steady diet of negative news and crazy TV, it's important to feed our souls something that fills us up and gives us the fuel to keep us going in a positive way.

OK, so in case you are sitting there thinking, I thought this was a church devotion, not a "Rodney's Life Lessons from the World of Running," I want you to know that the inspiration for this devotion did come from a source much deeper than me. The book of Hebrews actually talks about running a race.

Check out these words from Hebrews 12: 1-4:

*"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, **[RUN WITH THE RIGHT PEOPLE]** let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. **[BEWARE OF THE WALL]** And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. **[PACE YOURSELF]** We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. **[FUEL YOURSELF WITH THE RIGHT FUEL]** Because of the joy awaiting him, [Jesus] endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin."*

From this vantage point, looking at how long we may be in our current situation we may feel like we are at the beginning of an insurmountable marathon. But, just like with all marathons, with the right strategies, we can remain strong and hopeful and we will make it, TOGETHER. So, as we get ready to enter Holy Week (this Sunday is Palm Sunday), make sure you are running with the right people, fueling your body and soul, and pacing yourself, so that when that wall, that moment of anxiety and fear, comes, you are prepared. So that we do not lose hope. We stay safe, and we stay healthy, and allow God to walk, or run, with us through this season of our lives.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!

