



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on January 9th 2022 at 10:45, meeting once more at Bethesda Chapel.

Whilst some are able to meet in person, others we know are still at home. We hope and pray that you will find this outline of our service helpful, as we all seek to worship God as a Church family, wherever we are.

Today's service is led by Alec, as we begin a Mini-series, entitled 'Spiritual Fitness'. Tim plays the piano for us as we prepare to worship together.

We begin by showing an **introductory video on the screen at Bethesda**: "Run the race" (there's a slight technical hitch, and Tim goes to the back of the church to help Debbie start the video!) This is the link if you wish and are able to watch it at home.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nhk_5c6H-yc

Alec gives a Welcome, an introduction to the theme of Spiritual Fitness (today thinking of running the race) and our notices for this week.

- Refreshments after the service
- Coffee Morning – Tuesday 11th @ 10 - 12 am
- Tiddlywinks Parent and Toddler Group – Wednesday 12th @ 9.30 am
- Fellowship Meeting – Thursday 14th @ 7.30 pm (prayer meeting)
- Movie Morning – Saturday 16th @ 10.30 - 12 am
- Church Members' Meeting - Tuesday 18th @ 7.30 pm
- Barbara also mentioned that Songs of Praise today is based on Baptism, and Colin shared that the church cleaning which should have taken place last Thursday will now take place tomorrow!!

We share in our opening hymn: Immortal, invisible, God only wise, Tim playing the piano for us at Bethesda as we sang:

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above,
Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all, life Thou givest, the great and the small;
To all life Thou livest, the True Life of all;

we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish, but naught changeth Thee.

Great Father of glory; pure Father of light;
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;
all praise we would render: O help us to see
'tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee.

Words: Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908)
CCLI SONG # 124466 Public domain
CCL no 5664

**Alec invited the congregation to join in a Responsive reading, taken from Psalm 18:
1-3, 30-36 and 46**

**I love you, Lord, my strength.
The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
I called to the Lord, who is worthy of praise,
and I have been saved from my enemies.
As for God, his way is perfect:
The Lord's word is flawless;
he shields all who take refuge in him.
For who is God besides the Lord?
And who is the Rock except our God?
It is God who arms me with strength
and keeps my way secure.
He makes my feet like the feet of a deer;
he causes me to stand on the heights.
He trains my hands for battle;
my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
You make your saving help my shield,
and your right hand sustains me;
your help has made me great.
You provide a broad path for my feet,
so that my ankles do not give way.
Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock!
Exalted be God my Saviour!**

Debbie came to the microphone to lead us in prayer:

Dear Lord,

As we start a new year, we give you thanks for your faithful presence and support throughout 2021. Thank you that you brought us moments of joy and comforted us and gave us strength through times of trouble, pain and loss. Thank you that, although we do not know what the new year brings, we can be assured that you

will be with us every step of the way, giving us the power and peace to cope with whatever comes our way. We are so grateful that you are our unchanging and faithful God.

We continue to pray for our country, still in the grip of the pandemic. We especially pray for wisdom for our leaders at a local and national level, that they will know what to allow and what to restrict, that they will make the best decisions for the good of us all, and that we will all act sensibly and with caution, mindful of the needs of other people, as well as ourselves.

We thank you that the current Omicron variant seems to be a weaker strain and pray that this will continue but we know that our NHS is under pressure again, with increasing admissions and staff absences. We pray for all NHS workers, that you would protect them and strengthen them, physically, emotionally and mentally, to get through this challenging time. We pray for the ready availability of PPE , medicines and equipment for treating patients. We also pray for those awaiting non-Covid treatment and operations, that people will know peace and be understanding, despite the inevitable frustration of operations and appointments being cancelled. We pray that those who urgently need care will be able to get it.

We pray for the richer nations of the world to share their supplies of vaccines with poorer nations, that as many as possible might benefit from the protection vaccination confers. May our government have compassion and lead by example.

We also pray for the safety of students and teachers, as schools have returned this week, with many concerned that this might intensify the spread of the virus. We pray for head teachers, as they need to deal with the difficulties of staff and student absences on a daily basis – give them wisdom and help them to make good decisions. Would you protect and limit the impact this new variant has on education. We pray especially for students in important exam years, who are anxious about possible disruption in the lead up to summer exams – grant them peace and may teachers and exam boards do their best to ensure the final assessments are fair to all.

Whilst Covid dominates our headlines and thoughts, we also pray for other problems that may almost be forgotten at times – we pray for the tensions in Kazakhstan, that there would be a peaceful solution; we pray for the ongoing struggles in Afghanistan under the Taliban, that you would prevail and bring about justice and prosperity for the citizens of that land; for the migrant crisis and those who, for various reasons, feel the need to leave their homes. We pray that they will find safe and legal ways of applying to live in other countries, rather than risking their lives crossing the sea in small and flimsy boats.

We pray, too, for our church family. We pray for those experiencing illness or waiting for treatment or appointments. May they know your peace, a peace that passes all understanding, and may they know the reality of your presence on a daily basis to meet their needs. We pray that this will be true for those who have

lost loved ones, either recently or long ago, and who mourn their loss and face the days to come with sadness. Lord, comfort them. Be with any undergoing especially trying or difficult situations at this time – give them wisdom to know what to do and may they lean on you for wisdom and strength. We pray for any who are worried about family members and friends – may they bring all their concerns to you, knowing that you care and want to help. We pray for our pastor and deacons – may they know your will for us and have the courage to follow you. Grant them refreshment and joy, so that serving you will not weigh them down.

We want to bring before you Brian and Jackie Chilvers, our link missionaries in Chad. Thank you that they are now fully involved in work at Guinebor 2 hospital. Thank you that they are using the skills and expertise you have given them to show people God's love in action. We pray for energy and strength for both Brian and Jackie, as they often feel tired. May they know when to rest and would you refresh them, when this is needed. Thank you that the community needs assessment programme has gone well – we pray that they would be able to use the feedback so far to allow them to develop this work and make it even better in the New Year. We pray, too, for Brian's role in the emergency department, that some plans for next year will take shape and help to improve the team's ability to care for the Chadian people, who often have limited access to the medical attention we take for granted. Please protect them both and may they be a blessing to the people they have been called to serve.

We thank you that you are such a big God that there is nothing too hard or too difficult for you to handle, nor anything so small that troubles us that you are not willing to listen and help us with. We are amazed and overwhelmed by your love for us and know that we leave our requests in safe hands. We ask all these things in the name of Jesus, who died to save us and gave us the privilege of coming to you in prayer.

Amen.

We join in our second hymn again played by Tim, during which our offering was taken:

I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene,
and wonder how he could love me, a sinner, condemned, unclean.

How marvellous! How wonderful! And my song shall ever be:

How marvellous! How wonderful is my Saviour's love for me!

For me he prayed in the garden and bowed to the will divine;
he had no tears for his own griefs, but sweat drops of blood for mine.

How marvellous! How wonderful!...

He took my sins and my sorrows, he made them his very own;
he bore the burden to Calvary, and suffered and died alone.

How marvellous! How wonderful!...

When with the ransomed in glory his face I at last shall see,
'twill be my joy through the ages to sing of his love for me.
How marvellous! How wonderful!...

AUTHOR Charles Hutchinson Gabriel
CCLI SONG #25297 Public Domain CCL No 5664

After Alec led us in a prayer of thanksgiving, he invited Graham to share our Bible reading for today: Hebrews 12:1-13

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

God disciplines his children

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,
'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,
because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.'

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined - and everyone undergoes discipline - then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. 'Make level paths for your feet,' so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

We were invited to join in singing our third hymn "All the way my Saviour leads me". Tim again played the piano, this time playing the tune Blaenwern, to which we usually sing Love divine - some struggled singing other words to this familiar tune!! You may know the original tune, as this hymn is in the old Baptist Hymnal, or may wish to read the words :

All the way my Saviour leads me- what have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt His tender mercy, who through life has been my guide?
Heav'nly peace, divinest comfort, here by faith in Him to dwell!
For I know, whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well;
for I know, whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.

All the way my Saviour leads me- cheers each winding path I tread,
gives me grace for ev'ry trial, feeds me with the living bread.
Though my weary steps may falter and my soul athirst may be,
gushing from the rock before me, lo! A spring of joy I see;
gushing from the rock before me, lo! A spring of joy I see.

All the way my Saviour leads me- Oh, the fullness of His love!
Perfect rest to me is promised in my Father's house above.
When my spirit, clothed immortal, wings its flight to realms of day,
this my song through endless ages: Jesus led me all the way;
this my song through endless ages: Jesus led me all the way.

AUTHOR Fanny Jane Crosby
CCLI SONG # 2741682 Public domain CCL No 5664

Alec now shared his Message:

SPIRITUAL FITNESS (1) RUN THE RACE

If you don't know where you are going you will probably end up somewhere else. So where are we going, what are we aiming at today? We are aiming at being motivated to become and to remain spiritually fit.

Concretely that means choosing to take steps to improve our spiritual fitness.

In December 1988 Sibylle and I flew from Sapporo Chitose airport in Hokkaido to Tokyo Haneda airport in Honshu. We moved there to work with Steve our senior pastor who together with his wife had started Urayasu International Church which we were to further develop together.

Steve's parents were missionaries in China and he himself was born in Kunming in southern China. At 6 years of age he was transferred to a boarding school 2,000 miles away from his parents in northern China. He wasn't so wild about this and became even less excited when the Japanese invaded that part of China.

In 1945 Steve was in his second internment camp, Weishien camp in Weifang province, when he was met by a balding, middle-aged white-skinned man.

The man said he wanted to give him a pair of running shoes. He said they were nothing special, but although damaged had been repaired and might last him a while. He knew Steve liked running.

Hearing of Steve's attitude to the Japanese the man said Jesus had said we should pray for our enemies. Steve took the shoes, decided to pray for the Japanese and the Lord led him

to spend his life sharing Jesus with the Japanese in Japan, (which is why we met and worked with him), and after his retirement, with Japanese people in London.

Two weeks after giving Steve the shoes the man, who had a brain tumour through overwork, went to be with the Lord. Wearing his shoes Steve was one of the coffin-bearers at his funeral. The man's name was Eric Liddell.

Eric Liddell was born in 1902 in Tianjin in northern China. He was educated from 1908 to 1920 at Eltham College, London, a boarding school for sons of Christian missionaries. He then studied at Edinburgh University, and in 1922 played in seven rugby internationals for Scotland. As a result of having insufficient time for both running and rugby, he chose to run. He was expected to win the 100 metres in the 1924 Paris Olympics.

When he found out that the heats were to be run on a Sunday he withdrew from the 100 metres and planned to run in the 400m. On the day of the 400 metre final a fellow athlete gave him a piece of paper with the words "Those who honour me I will honour". He went out and won the Olympic gold medal.

After the Olympics and his graduation in 1924, he returned to North China where he served as a missionary from 1925. Living in China in the 1930s was potentially very dangerous and in 1937 Eric was sent to Siaochang. By 1941 life in China was becoming so dangerous that the British Government advised British nationals to leave. His wife Florence and their three children left for her homeland of Canada.

Eric, however, stayed in Tientsin, eventually being interned in Weishien camp until his death in 1945.

Especially when he was younger Eric Liddell was a very fit man—physically, emotionally and spiritually. As an athlete, fitness was very important to him. He understood the truth of 1 Tim. 4:8 For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

He is one of a great crowd of witnesses about whom Graham read to us earlier.

Let us look at Hebrews 12:1-3 again.

What is the key to spiritual fitness? What are the sources of spiritual fitness?

If we want to be physically fit we need amongst other things clean, fresh unpolluted air.

If we aim to be spiritually fit we should remember Jesus said as recorded in Mark 7:20-23 "It is the thought-life that pollutes. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts of lust, theft, murder, adultery, wanting what belongs to others, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, pride, and all other folly. All these vile things come from within; they are what pollute you and make you unfit for God."

If we look inside our hearts, if we set up a search machine to go through our minds, this is what we will find. There is no way that in ourselves and from ourselves we will become spiritually fit. There is no hope of that.

We ourselves in our inner being, in our heart of hearts are not the source of being and remaining spiritually fit. Forget it. We need to look at God in Jesus Christ to do that.

We need to look at God Himself; we need to fix our eyes on Jesus God's Son.

The association for applied sport psychology at the University of Birmingham uses imagery, which is also called visualisation or mental rehearsal, using all our physical senses of sight, touch, hearing, taste and smell to train our minds. To help us get the most out of training. Top athletes use imagery extensively to build on their strengths and to help eliminate their weaknesses, to compete more effectively, to regulate the anxiety they experience during competitions, and to stay confident, focused and mentally tough remaining motivated along the way. This training is vivid, detailed and occurs in real-time.

We are made and being remade in the image of God. His strength is made perfect in our weakness. We are not to be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, to present our requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6-7)

This occurs very vividly, in great detail and in real-time, every day of our short life on this planet.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. (Col.1:15)

Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. (Hebrews 12.2)

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

We are not to be inwardly focused but focused on God.

The Apostle Paul during a time when he was once again in prison because of his faith and life writes to the Christians in Philippi, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me". Phil. 4:13

When writing to the believers in the church he himself had started in Ephesus he said:

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might". (Ephesians 6:10)

The believers knew that he truly understood what he was writing about. That he was actually experiencing that in reality. He wasn't sitting in a comfortable living room, he wasn't relaxing in the garden, he was in prison. Yet even there he kept his eyes fixed on the Lord.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Hebrews 12:1

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 1 Corinthians 9:24 ESV

The Apostle Paul seems to have been familiar with false starts and disqualifications. Things like running in the wrong lane, overstepping the lane markings, failing to hand over the baton correctly in a relay race, not wearing the proper gear and so on would have easily fitted into his thinking.

Very often we are making progress in our spiritual life but we then veer off track and maybe even start going backwards. It's not just how we start the race; it is also how we continue and how we finish. By God's grace, if we have had a few false starts we are not automatically out of this race. We need to be more concerned about false teachers than about false starts.

Paul writes: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." (1 Cor. 9:24-27)

Paul knew there was a danger of being disqualified, so he went into strict training and did not run aimlessly.

My favourite track athletics event is the 3000m. steeplechase. In Germany it is called the 3,000 meter Hindernisrennen, which means obstacle race which is what it is. But it is not like an obstacle race at a children's party. Each runner must clear a total of 28 ordinary barriers and seven water jumps. The obstacles for the men are 91.4 cms high, and for the women 76.2. The water jump consists of a barrier followed by a pit of water with a landing area inclusively 3.66 m. long.

I sometimes spent time on the track looking at the water jump and thinking about how to tackle it. But I rarely succeeded in clearing it. More often than not I was a little scared of how I might land so I didn't even jump. Not only did I never win a steeplechase, I never once completed a lap.

Because as we all know in the steeplechase you are not allowed to avoid the barriers. You should not go round them or pretend they are not there but go over them.

In our life with the Lord sometimes we deliberately avoid thinking about the real issues. They may be uncomfortable, may seem unattractive, and may seem wearisome and troublesome.

In our spiritual life we need to identify and tackle the obstacles. That is how we should run the race. Not just standing in front of and looking at the barriers; but praying and working and overcoming them.

I can see you thinking, sometimes maybe to get out of danger we should avoid some obstacles, and you are right. But that would be another sermon! It is enough to say now that every test that we have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow us to be tested beyond our power to remain firm; at the time we are put to the test, he will give us the strength to endure it, and so provide us with a way out. (1 Cor. 10:13)

We are blessed when we remain steadfast under trial, for when we have stood the test we will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12)

Sir John Stott, the founder of ICCC, the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, was a prolific writer. A lecture he gave as long ago as 1972 was made into a book with the title: "Your mind matters". How right he was. As Romans 12:1-2 says:

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

"For whatever God says to us is full of living power: it is sharper than the sharpest dagger, cutting swift and deep into our innermost thoughts and desires with all their parts, exposing us for what we really are". (Hebrews 4:12)

The writer to the Hebrews uses strong language! He says we are to throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. These are really clearly understandable images. Starting blocks or stopping blocks? What is blocking our spiritual growth and development? What can we do to become and remain spiritually fit?

Probably if we come to terms with and tackle pride, ignorance, disobedience and unforgiveness in our lives we will be fitter! Pride maybe through looking at our motives; ignorance through being prepared to tackle questions and people and not just thinking and pretending that if we ignore them long enough they will go away. Disobedience and unforgiveness are real hot potatoes though aren't they?

Our loving God and Father gives us life experiences that really challenge the reality of our faith. He places us time and again in situations which test and challenge us but lead to spiritual growth, growth in righteousness.

Hebrews 12:11 reads: "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it".

As a closing thought I have chosen to recommend three things and they are what I call a user handbook and chat room guidelines in an accompanying group framework.

Loving, reading, studying, memorising, teaching and obeying the living and enduring Word of God- that is the user handbook.

Sharing in listening to and speaking with God Himself- to do that we need the chat room guidelines.

All this in the context of an accompanying group framework- the fellowship of the local body of believers.

Our final song (shown on the screen at Bethesda): "I will run"

In this race of life I will count the cost
yes, the battle's won through that rugged cross
Jesus Christ declared 'It is finished now'

So open up your eyes to the victory
for the Lamb of God has set the captives free
we can now declare Jesus Christ in me

I will run, I will never stop running,
You are the One, You're the reason I'm pressing on:

I will run, as You faithfully finish the work You've begun in my life,
I am pressing on, Jesus, I'm pressing on

There's no turning back from this life You gave
I will run this race and throw my sins away
I can now declare I have been set free!
Jesus Christ, my King, He's alive in me.

I will run, I will never stop running....

You're the reason I sing
You're my God and my King
You are holy, You are holy.

You have carried my shame,
there is life in Your name.
You are worthy, You are worthy

You're the reason I sing....

I will run I will never stop running....

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkZtEB9XcOQ>

Author Jeff Lucas, Copyright@ exalt music. CCL No 5664

Alec invited the congregation to remain standing as we shared together saying:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore, Amen.

