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## Gonna run on...

I'm on my run. The sun warms my face. I'm making tracks down the parkway that flanks the Boulevard. I follow a path through the grass. Back when I started, there was no path. This summer I'm reflecting on God's goodness as I mark 35 years as pastor of Armitage Baptist Church in this world-class city. When I began, there was no path. I marvel at supernatural strength for every step. I ponder God's grace for the race. My mind flits to my preacher father, 58 years the pastor of Ashburn Baptist here in the Chicago area. What an example!

Exodus 23 comes to mind. God gave me this passage in 1980 when we were trying to buy this big old Masonic Temple. We sealed the deal in 1981, exorcised the place, and are still sanctifying it. In verse 20, God tells Moses and the people He will send an angel before them. Then He says He will bring them to the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perrizites, the Canaanites, the termites...you remember the passage. I understood that to say that God would lead us to the enemy, to His enemies, in order to show His power over them.

I didn't know that the first enemy would be an Irish Democrat slumlord family. They owned this building we ended up buying at a rock-bottom price. Wow! God led us to face the gangs. In fact, we took over their headquarter corner when we bought this building. Every night 25 guys would be hanging out on our front steps. I spotted their former chief a couple weeks ago praising God on our front row. God led us to an eyeball-to-eyeball facedown with the Chicago Democratic machine. We stood, they stumbled and backed away.

God led us into a Holy Ghost encounter with radical homosexuals. It's a great story, but suffice it to say Saints 2, Rad Homosexuals 0. What really freaked them out? We loved on them all the way through.

Oh yes, through many dangers, toils, and snares...

I think of when my back problems wouldn't even let me walk and then would only let me walk but not run. A ritual has evolved. As I begin my run, I think of the blessing of being able to run again. I lift my hands above my head, crazy-man like. You know, like the winner breaking the tape...only

was running at a stronger, faster pace than it felt like. So many nights getting up to preach my 3rd or 4th message of the day I thought, "I'm not getting the job done." A couple months ago, I asked all the men who were called to preach to come and sit in the front. About 20 guys came and filled the front row.

I've failed Him, He's never failed me. I want to holler back to all those coming up behind me, "When you don't think you can run one more mile, you can do all things through Christ. When you think you can't go one more step, you don't have one more sermon in you, one more service, one more counseling

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the passing traffic sees no tape and no other runners, just a skinny white man running down the parkway with his arms in the air and his lips moving. I'm thanking God for letting me run one more day, praising Him for His goodness and faithfulness all these years and miles later.

Today, I want to yell over my shoulder to all you servants behind me running at the 2-year mark, the 8-year mark, 17 years, 26 years, 34 years, "GOD IS GOOD! HE'S FAITHFUL! Oh, He will test you to grow you. He'll turn up the fire to purify you. He'll stretch you to within an inch of your life, but He will never, ever leave you. He's running with you right now."

Many days when I thought I was trudging sluggishly, the fancy shmancy sport tool my staff gave me told me I

session, one more deacons' meeting, not one more Bible study in you, when you don't have one more tear, when you just know one more family leaving will break you...they that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength, they will mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not faint. The race is not given to the swift. Your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

He may not come when you want Him, but He's always on time. I'm a witness! I've got to testify! This is my story, this is my song, I'm praising my Savior all the day long. Can somebody help me praise Him? Can I get a witness? I said, can I get a witness? God is good! God is able!

Miracles ahead! Answered prayer. More souls. I believe I'm gonna run on...see what the end's gonna be.