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**Series: Forrest Gump ~ Lessons from I John**  
**Sermon: Run Forrest Run!**

**I John 1:5-10 (NIV)**

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

**Isaiah 40:6-8 (NIV)**

A voice says, “Cry out.”

And I said, “What shall I cry?”

“All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.”

**Sermon:**

Run, Forrest Run! That boy liked to run. But he was running away from something. He was either running away from bullies, or running away from danger - even when he ran across the country several times in the movie, he was running away from his past. I know a lot of people who run. And they're running away from toxic relationships, from temptations, from regret. Even people who actually run for fun, many of them are running away from obesity - they'd rather be fit than fat. Running is a good thing. It means you're going somewhere, doing something. But many times, we don't run away when we should.

Twenty years ago, I was in Seminary in Kansas City - working several jobs trying to pay my way through and one evening, a few friends and I went to a Kansas City Royals Baseball game. It was a promotion night. There was a table where you could get a Kansas City Royal's baseball with imprinted signatures of the team - if you signed up for a Capital One Credit Card. I walked by, but it did catch my eye. And somewhere in the 5<sup>th</sup> inning or so, I couldn't resist anymore. Never had a credit card before. Might come in handy. I'll just use it for \_\_\_\_\_. Emergencies. Yah, you did it too. I got the baseball. It's amazing how many “emergencies” came up that year. That was an expensive baseball. That was dumb. I bought into it. I fell for temptation. It took us a while to dig out of a hole that we dug for ourselves. For the last decade or so, we haven't had a single credit card - I learned my lesson. And got a little thing called Discipline along the way. Now when Capital One asks, What's in Your Wallet, I say “cash.” It's a whole lot better. But if I could go back 20 years to a baseball stadium and look at that so-called smart kid about to do something dumb, I'd yell at him, “Run, Michael Run!”

I'll tell you the truth. The world is full of temptations. And to be a part of this world, some may believe that we have to fall into these temptations. Few problems have been more troublesome for believers down through the centuries than worldliness. In an effort to be “relevant” and reach our culture, there is the very real danger that we will become just like the culture and lose our distinctiveness.

I would argue that with the pervasive influence of modern media, the tug of the world is greater now than it ever has been. Daily we are bombarded with attractive people telling us that we can't be happy unless we own the product that they are selling or adopt the lifestyle that they are pursuing. We thumb through magazines that lure us with beautiful homes, new cars, luxury items, or expensive vacations that all can be ours, if we just get enough money or go into enough debt. Americans to spend billions on casino gambling and lottery tickets. Just one lucky hit and you will have it all!

One attempt that Christians sometimes use to counter worldliness often have swung to the opposite direction: withdrawal from the world, along with extra rules to reign in the flesh - to use John's language. This is the method of the monastic movement and of isolationist groups, such as the Amish. An extreme example of the ascetic approach was Simon the Stylite who lived in the 400's. He wanted to live so he was never tempted by anything, so he lived in extreme austerity for 36 years on top of a platform on a 60-foot pillar. Thousands of people flocked to see this "unworldly" man and listen to his preaching. I doubt that Simon is a model of what John had in mind when he warned us not to love the world!

Maybe some of you grew up in traditions that had lists of what constituted "worldly" behavior. Our Methodist Tradition was no exceptions. It usually included the "filthy five": drinking, smoking, attending movies, playing cards, and dancing. This evening, I'm exploring the Dancing prohibition at a church service at Rose Villa - trying to see why we weren't supposed to dance. Even today, many religious colleges required their students to sign pledges not to participate in these "worldly" activities. There was a Uber religious college close to one of the places I lived that had these rules. But they often went farther than that. You couldn't hold hands with your boyfriends/girlfriend on campus. A student who was near graduation was publicly dismissed from the school because he put his arm around his fiancée. It was also a school that had curfews at night. But the curfews were different for men and women - guess who got to stay out later.

Concerning such manmade rules, Paul wrote in Colossians 2:23, "These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence." The rules approach to the problem of worldliness doesn't work!

Worldliness is, at its core, a matter of the heart. If your heart is captured by the world, you will love the things of the world. If your heart is captured by the love of God, you will be drawn to Him and to the things of God. John wrote this letter to churches that were being infected and confused by certain heretics. They claimed to have enlightenment, but John says that they were still in the darkness. They tried to draw people into their inner circle of knowledge, but their doctrine and their practice revealed that they did not truly know God.

You must choose your love and then maintain your choice: you love either the world or the Father, but not both. He's saying the same thing that Jesus said in Luke 16:13, "You cannot serve God and Mammon." You cannot serve them both. You must make a basic decision in life: Will you live to know God and His eternal love, or will you live for this world and its fleeting pleasures? You can't take a little of both.

What is it that you need to run from? What is that temptation that has you? What do you fall for? I betcha, if you had a chance, you'd go back into time and yell at yourself for something, right? If Steve could go back in time, is there a moment where Steve would yell at himself, Run Steve Run? Are you thinking of a time right now - if only I could go back and whack myself in the head, What are you thinking? Let me tell you something - temptations don't stop. They keep coming. There might be a future self that would like to whack you around this week. What temptations are you in danger of today? Can you find the Discipline to overcome? Take about 10 seconds and think - what do I fall prey too?

Here's a hint. If you've ever had momentary thought of "I really shouldn't do this, but. . . ." Guess what! That's a hint! That's a God given hint of Run, Michael Run!

Here's something that I find kind of fascinating, but also kind of sad. If you would look at the top issues that the church talks about these days, the top things that churchy people get all wrapped up about it would be what? Gay marriage, homosexuality in general, abortion, the rise of Islam, End of the world - you know these big cultural divides. And they are worthy of discussion and debate. But let me tweak the question, What concerns or issues do you think I get in the pastor's office? None of those things. We get, "My son is on drugs. What do we do?" Our marriage is in the toilet, my spouse has a wandering eye." "We're broke, addicted to gambling."

“Alcohol is tearing apart our family - and it’s cost me everything I have.” These are legal things, but they’ve hooked people in. Run, Christian Run! Not in this church, another church, a guy was a problem gambler. But he’s going to vacation in Vegas because “they have good buffets.” Run Bob, Run! Again, another church - church camp to be more specific (not here), Jimmy admits that he has a problem with online pornography. Not just a casual user, but everyday he has to watch - he can’t stop himself. Today, there are more website visits to porn sites than to Netflix, Amazon and Twitter combined. And Jimmy is at a camp of kids. I had to tell Jimmy to not have his smartphone during the day while he’s out and about with the kids, and he initially balked. Run, Jimmy Run! How did Peter put it? “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith . . .” (I Peter 5:8-9a). It’s OK nowadays to sleep around. Granted, every generation did this - it’s just much more open today. But over 50% of kids today before they’re 24 will have an STD. 50% I don’t like those odds. Run Kid Run! But it’s not just kids: According to the CDC, 1/3 of all Americans also fall into this category of having, or once had an STD. Now, maybe I’m just a prude, but I don’t like those odds. Run Dude Run! Temptations run the gamut from food to desires of the flesh to Envy to Laziness, to selfcenteredness to pridefulness, to (Did I get everybody yet). Soda pop and gas station corn dogs. (OK, maybe that doesn’t hit you . . .)

What I get in my office, mostly, are hurting people who have fallen into some form of temptation. And I’m just as guilty or prone to mistakes, but we do have one more line of defense than the unbelieving world. We understand that we are to love the Lord more than we love the world. You know there’s a line somewhere. Do your current actions promote the Gospel, or promote waywardness? We are like grass, here today and gone tomorrow. But the things of God last forever. Don’t be devoured by temptation.

Run, Christian, Run for your life. And if you do this, if you listen to that voice, “maybe you shouldn’t really ought to be doing” whatever your particular stumbling block is, He will give you life for your run. That you may stand firm in the faith, and not have some of the avoidable life pain that we inflict upon ourselves. And you’ll find blessings along the way. What’s my message today? Keep running. Run for your life! And he will give you life for your run. And the family of God said, AMEN!