



WEEK 1 The Green Flag

From the Book

In chapter 1, Rob introduces the flag that sets everything in motion: the green flag. In the auto-racing world, anxious spectators, crew members, and drivers all want to see the green flag. It's the most anticipated flag and gets right to the "meat" of the matter.

In a race, the waving of the color green signals the beginning of a radical change. It marks the exact moment when all who have gathered for a race are thrown into a "full-throttle, earth-shaking experience" (p. 14). Likewise, the "green flag" of Christian faith – accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior – turns "faith into an experience of energy and excitement" (p. 16). The starting line of Christian faith is marked by that ancient proclamation that Paul recounts in his letter to the Romans: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9, NRSV). To follow the green flag is to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Chapter 1 gives you much to work with as you seek to help listeners move from coasting along to living a fuller and more meaningful life. Below are my thoughts on how you can use the material to share the significance of the green flag for a life of faith.

From the DVD

In the first session of the DVD, NASCAR driver Michael McDowell describes his life before and after his green-flag moment of faith. For much of his life, Michael "coasted." But the death of a friend and mentor gave rise to a stirring in his heart that brought him to the starting line of the faith journey. His taking of the green flag – accepting the offer of a fresh start – came in his total surrender to God, which reverberated through his entire life.

What is your green-flag moment? What led to that point? What did your life look like before that moment? What about your life after? Your green-flag experience can be a source of encouragement to someone in the "cruising" stage of life or to someone considering questions of life purpose and looking to take the next step of faith. What does your congregation need to hear today? How can you draw on your experience to encourage them to go to the starting line or perhaps to cross it once more?

Scripture - [Romans 10:5-13](#) (Salvation for all)

In this passage of scripture, Paul lays out what has become a standard description of Christian salvation: “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, ‘No one who believes in him will be put to shame’” (vv. 9-11, NRSV).

Faith. Confession. On the starting line of the Christian journey, these elements form the green flag that signals the beginning of a new life. On page 15, Rob defines faith as the joining of trust and action. He deems it the starting point for the race of faith. What does it mean in your community to live out this faith? How can you help your parishioners see the life of faith as action that follows a trust in a reality yet to be realized? What does a full-throttle life in Jesus Christ look like? How do your parishioners live in light of their confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? Who needs a restart? Who needs to hear that God will never shame them?

As Rob says on page 18, “Most of us hunger for wholeness. Most of us desire want a sense of purpose, meaning, and contentment. As Christians, we want to love others, ourselves, and God more completely. We want to live in such a way as to have no gap between ideals and actions.” The person embarking on the faith journey begins a movement towards wholeness. That wholeness, that life free of gaps, is the essence of salvation.

It is important to remember that salvation does not guarantee immunity from the temptations and daily struggles of life. For this reason, we need an ever-present guide who knows everything about us and yearns to bring out our best. When we admit that we need God’s help and guidance to navigate the difficult parts of our world, we trust God to see the bigger picture, much like the driver must trust the crew chief, who has a bigger picture of the track (see pp. 21-22). When we put our full faith in God, we issue an invitation to lead us toward healing and wholeness, a journey that often requires restarts.

[Romans 10:5-13](#) offers an opportunity for you to return to the basics with your congregation. It invites all to move from a routine life to a life that makes a difference in the world. This is indeed a great opportunity to teach and help set listeners on a new course in life.

Prayer: God our Savior, God our Lord, thank you for your love that calls us to step out in faith. As we embark on this extraordinary journey with you, be our healer, our help, and our guide. Amen.

Benediction: May the God of love give you the ears to hear the invitation to wholeness and the confidence to take the first step. Amen.

—Stephane Germain Brooks

Director [Emmaus Ministries](#), *The Upper Room*

HYMN & SONG SUGGESTIONS—Jackson Henry

He Is Lord, He Is Lord! (UMH 177)

I Know Whom I Have Believed (UMH 714)

One Bread, One Body (UMH 620)

This I Believe (The Creed) <https://us.songselect.com/songs/7018338/this-i-believe-the-creed>

By Grace We Have Been Saved (WSM 3110)

WEEK 2 The Yellow Flag

From the Book

Temptation. It's tempting to talk about it only theoretically. It's much harder to get real and speak of it with concrete examples. But Rob isn't afraid to give concrete examples of temptation, including inappropriate relationships, embezzlement, and lying. I invite you to do the same.

What temptations are the people in your congregation facing? Don't be afraid to name them. At the same time, do so cautiously. Talking about temptation can cause people to feel afraid or shameful. That isn't the goal. The opportunity here is to help people see that temptation is a sign of God's presence in our lives.

Once, while preaching on [Matthew 4:1-11](#), I went off script and used two of the ushers as an impromptu example to prove a point I was making. I don't remember what I said exactly. Whatever it was, I truly was making up the scenario in my head. After the service, one of the ushers to whom I had referred in my fictitious story met me at the door. He said, "I want you to know that I understand exactly what you were talking about, and I promise I'll take care of it." I tried to tell him that I wasn't aware of any real issue and that I was trying to make up an example, but he didn't need to hear that. He had heard something in what I said and he was going to do what he could to make the situation right.

Sometimes God's cautioning presence surprises us.

Rob ends this chapter by highlighting the importance of small groups composed of people who trust one another. As you develop your sermon, think of how Sunday school classes, Bible study groups, youth, women's, and men's groups can provide a space for people to hear God's cautioning voice.

From the DVD

A common theme emerges out of what the NASCAR and IndyCar professionals share on the video. The yellow flag gives everyone a chance to take stock, evaluate the situation on the track, and anticipate moving forward stronger. Caron Myers and Danny "Chocolate" Myers share a wonderful story about how they met. Caron comes across as steadfast and patient, while Danny appears to have needed time to open himself to new possibilities.

I get a sense that the situation could have easily gone differently. Caron might not have been so patient, cutting the relationship short. Danny might not have been willing to change his lifestyle. It is beautiful when we are able to stop our busy lives long enough to really take stock of what's happening in front of us. It's then that we can welcome the best of what God is offering us.

From Scripture

Jesus' baptism and time of testing as told in the Gospel of Matthew fascinates me. Why would the Son of God need to be baptized? John the Baptizer may have been wondering the same thing when he tried to stop Jesus, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, yet you come to me?" (Matt. 3:14, CEB)

Similarly, why would the Son of God need to be tested? Doesn't being God's son come with some perks? I mean, you'd think that Jesus would be above the need for baptism and exempt from being tempted.

If we approach these stories from a perspective that dehumanizes Jesus, then it's hard to find much point to them. But if we let go of the idea that Jesus entered into his ministry knowing exactly what that meant, knowing how it was going to unfold, then a wonderful thing happens. Jesus becomes like us. Someone we can relate to. Someone human.

Read again the scripture passage, but this time, back up and include the story of his baptism ([Matt. 3:13-4:11](#)). Imagine Jesus coming up out of the water and seeing the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and resting on him. Imagine his reaction when hearing a voice from heaven say, "This is my Son whom I dearly love; I find happiness in him" (Matt. 3:17, CEB).

As disciples, we look to Jesus as our example. But Jesus trod a road that none had traveled before. Thus, when he heard the voice from heaven, he didn't have someone he could look to as an example, to know how to interpret his being named God's son. He could not have known that his proximity to God would bring great temptation.

But "Then the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt him" (Matt. 4:1, CEB). At God's directive, Jesus found himself in a situation to learn what it meant to be God's son. Does it mean performing miracles to meet his own immediate needs (stones to bread)? No. Does it mean testing God's love for him (angels sent to save him)? No. Does it mean worshiping the devil in exchange for glory and fame? No. But the temptation remains nonetheless.

It's rare that we're able to see it when we're in the midst of temptation. But afterward, it often becomes clear that temptations are invitations to more fully embrace our status as daughters and sons of God.

Prayer:

God, you have named us your children and you have told us you love us. By your Spirit, may we also hear you when you caution us, that we may always be faithful disciples of your son, Jesus Christ. It is in his name we pray. Amen.

Benediction: (May the Road Rise to Meet You)

May the road rise up to meet you.

May the wind be always at your back.

May the sun shine warm upon your face;
the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of God's hand.

—Doug Hagler

Associate Web Developer, [The Upper Room](#)

HYMN & SONG SUGGESTIONS—Jackson Henry

May the Road Rise to Meet You <https://songselect.ccli.com/Songs/577408/may-the-road-rise-to-meet-you>

Jesus, Tempted in the Desert (TFWS 2105)

Lamb of God (TFWS 2113)

Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days (UMH 269)

Our Lord, You Were Sent (SoG 13)

WEEK 3 The Blue Flag

From the Book

On page 44, Rob writes, “Jesus demonstrated a blue-flag way of life for his followers.” Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (Phil. 2:7, NRSV). The question confronts us today, how do we move aside to allow someone else to be healed or to advance their race of faith?

Moving aside might mean allowing someone else to take credit for a shared success. It might mean allowing a less experienced or younger person to assume a leadership position you currently hold and supporting them in turn. It might simply mean being humble about your own accomplishments to allow space for another person you may neither know nor see. Heeding blue-flag moments does not necessarily mean that you must slow down your own race. It simply means that you intentionally give space for others to continue their race.

Rob reminds us that we experience blue-flag moments each day. A colleague may appear distraught. An elderly couple may need assistance. A leader may call for volunteers. And in each of these moments, we can either move on with our own race or heed the blue flag and run the race of our life as Jesus raced, so that all might find victory.

What invitations to heed the blue flag come to members of your congregation? Are some financially gifted? Are there those among your faith community who can teach or mentor children? Can someone offer practical assistance to another in need? Is there someone in your community who gives time, energy, or resources in an exemplary way? Focusing on what we have to offer often makes it easier to notice blue flag moments. Help your congregation think about their own giftedness so that they might take heed.

Paul urged the Philippians, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil.2:5, NRSV). What does that mean for you? What does that mean for your congregation? How can you together embrace the mindset of Jesus to heed blue flag moments?

From the DVD

IndyCar driver, James Hinchcliffe, speaks to our common urge to maintain control. He reminds us how difficult it is to relinquish our authority and allow others to take over. The key for him is to know what you don’t know. How, in your context, can you help others accept the limits of their knowledge? How have you come to understand the limits of your own knowledge?

Hinchcliffe’s story demonstrates that It is often easier to be aware of our blue-flag moments in life at dramatic times. But few of us come back from the brink of death after rocketing into a wall at 225 miles per hour. Again it is helpful to remember that we encounter blue-flag moments each day.

Here are some characteristics of these moments to remember:

Sometimes you’re a blue flag. Sometimes other people are. None of us is in only one of these roles for our entire life. We all have opportunities to be in both positions.

Reflect on a time when someone made room for you. What did that feel like for you? How were you empowered, allowed to continue your race? This could be a way to begin a conversation within your congregation about gratitude to people who have moved over.

Reflect on a time when you have moved over for someone else. What did you do? How did you feel? Were you able to see how that impacted someone else? Often, we do not see how one small blue-flag moment creates an opportunity for someone else. Nonetheless, the call remains.

In either situation, what would have happened if someone did not move over? Remember, there is no penalty for not heeding the blue flag in auto racing. It is a courtesy flag. It acknowledges when someone else is having a better race, or needs space for their race.

Identify ways that people are currently living out these blue flag moments around you. Highlight specific opportunities for more people to do so. There may be people selflessly leading small groups, mentoring newer or younger people around them, or serving humbly in other ways.

From Scripture

[Matthew 20:29-34](#)

Consider the context of this story, which Rob summarizes on page 45. Jesus and his disciples are on their way to Jerusalem. Although Jesus has told the twelve disciples what will happen, they do not know how to react appropriately to the news. Instead of humbly receiving Jesus' call to serve others, even to the point of death, they begin jockeying for position.

Consider what happened next. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. He knows his death is imminent. He knows his disciples still fail to grasp even the most fundamental aspects of discipleship. It is clear that he could use all the time available to remind them what it means to walk in the path of discipleship. What does he do? As he and his disciples leave Jericho, Jesus takes time to care for two blind men. The call to heed the blue flag of Christian discipleship often comes at the most inopportune times. Jesus has shown us the way of faith.

Prayer:

God our creator, our redeemer, and our sustainer, we thank you that you moved aside from your heavenly position to live among us in the person of Jesus Christ. Help us to live according to that example – to recognize moments when we can move aside for others. Open our eyes to see those moments, be with us and empower us in those moments, and forgive us when we miss them. We pray these things because we want to be more like Jesus' example and because we are grateful that you first loved us. Amen.

Benediction:

As you go from this place take care to notice blue flag moments. By the power of the Holy Spirit, care for others in whatever way you can in that moment. Be willing to live according to Christ's example and give up your position or your status to let others be rewarded. In every moment when you move over, and especially if you see a moment you've missed, know that God is with you, has already given up position for you, and loves you unconditionally now and forever. Amen.

—Geoffrey Parker

Program Manager, Young Adult Spiritual Development

[Journey to the Table](#)

The Upper Room

HYMN & SONG SUGGESTIONS—Jackson Henry

Be Thou My Vision (UMH 451)

Open My Eyes, That I May See (UMH 454)

Open Our Eyes (TFWS 2086)

Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You (The Servant Song) (URW 117)

I Will Rise <https://us.songselect.com/songs/5183450/i-will-rise>

WEEK 4 THE RED FLAG

From the Book

Reading chapter 4, I was reminded that my brother always said to me, “You aren’t happy unless you’re running Mach 5 with your hair on fire!” I come by it naturally. For years my mother’s favorite prayer was “God, give me patience. And I want it *RIGHT NOW!*”

As I look back through the many years of my life I can see those times when God waved the red flag. It happened most recently when I needed back surgery. As the year began I was in some pain from a ruptured disc, but I just didn’t have time to stop and have it taken care of. I had too much to do in launching a new program. The summer immediately prior, my family had to deal with my absence because I was traveling extensively. I believed I *had* to delay surgery to spend summer vacation with my family. But when I finally had surgery my 12 year-old said she was glad. “Maybe next year you can actually do something and have fun with us on vacation.” OUCH!

I’m normally not a good patient. I get upset because I am not healing fast enough. I want to get back to normal. I told everyone I would be out of work three to four weeks. Then my Dr. told me eight weeks! I did return to the gym after four weeks, but I needed longer to get my strength back. God was using that time to not only strengthen my body, but also my soul. I spent time in prayer and silence listening for that still, small voice. As I walked each day, I enjoyed the sounds of nature and the beauty of God’s creation. When I did return to my job, I still had work to do to continue my physical healing, but I felt that my Spirit was in a much better, and stronger, place.

As you contemplate Rob’s message in this chapter, think about those times when your own race has been put under the Red Flag. Did those times serve as a distracting or depressing time in your life, or did you use the time wisely to strengthen your faith and your walk with God? How did your spiritual practice shape this time, and what did you learn about yourself?

I am also reminded of a line from *The Sound of Music* when Captain von Trapp says, “Activity suggests a life filled with purpose.” We can’t allow ourselves to get so distracted with activity that we don’t recognize that we’ve lost our purpose. Are some of our church members, or maybe even our churches themselves, caught in this trap? How can we take a Red Flag to help us get back on the track?

From the DVD

Ann Schrader shares from her heart in the video segment about a time when her marriage, and her life, were in trouble. She mentions hitting a brick wall (a scary term for racing families) and trying to remain busy in order to avoid facing the problems. Then Ann tells us she had to “go down the lazy river, and let go and let God do the work.” How have you seen people avoiding difficult problems in their lives? What spiritual practices can empower your community to stop and face its problems?

Towards the end of the video, Rob shares what was, to me, the most profound statement – “There are times when every car needs to leave the race – multiple times during the race. And what happens **here** (pit row) makes all the difference when they’re back on the track. We are no different!” What we do when we stop—the spiritual practice that feeds our souls—makes all the difference when we re-enter the race.

From Scripture [Luke 5:12-16](#)

The beginning of the scripture reading tells us about the cleansing of a man who was a leper. The NRSV describes this man as being “covered with leprosy.” Other versions say the man was “full of leprosy.” Whatever the translation, the text indicates that he was clearly in an advanced stage of his ailment. And yet his request of Jesus takes almost a resigned or a reluctant tone – “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.” (v. 12) Why did this man hesitate? Did he fear rejection? But why would he think that Jesus might not choose to heal him? Isn’t that what Jesus did?

Responding to the ill man, Jesus instructs him to tell no one, but to “show yourself to the priest...” (v. 14). This is to fulfill the instructions in the Old Testament that any cleansing must be verified by the priests. It would certify Jesus’ cleansing of the man.

The last two verses of the reading point to the red flag. As Jesus grows in popularity, larger and larger crowds follow him. Rob writes, “You can feel the press of their demands on him. How could Jesus possibly take time for himself when there were so many people in need?” (p. 63) Nonetheless, Jesus withdrew to a deserted place to pray. What a wonderful vision for ourselves! We must take time from the busyness of our ministries, our families, and our communities, and have time to be in prayer.

Prayer:

Father God, when we become distracted by the activity of our world, help us to remember that losing contact with you is the greater danger. May we use our delays in life to move closer to you. Thank you for your presence and grace in our lives. Help us to draw from your strength to guide us in all of our days. Amen.

Benediction:

May the God of scripture and our hearts bless you this day and in the days to come. And when we are delayed in our lives may God find us open vessels, ready to be refueled by our relationship with Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

—Hess B. “Doc” Hall, Jr

Upper Room Emmaus Ministries, [Face to Face Program Manager](#)

Hymn and Song Suggestions—Jackson Henry

He Touched Me (Shackled by a Heavy Burden) (UMH 367)

My Faith Looks UP to Thee (UMH 452)

Change My Heart, O God (TFWS 2152)

I’m So glad Jesus Lifted Me (TFWS 2151)

Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone) (WSM 3104)

I Will Rise <https://us.songselect.com/songs/5183450/i-will-rise>

WEEK 5 THE BLACK FLAG

From the Book

In chapter 5 Rob discusses the black flag. The black flag is perhaps the most challenging flag to deal with. I am struck by what Rob says in the first lines of the chapter: “A black flag isn’t good. In fact, it’s the worst kind of news for a driver: It means *you* are the problem” (p. 71). From that point, four prominent themes emerge: sin, self-knowledge or awareness (self-appraisal), hope (changing direction), and new starts (starting over).

Considering these themes, there is much that you as a pastor or worship planner/leader can do with chapter 5. Below are my thoughts on some of the ways in which you might attempt to engage the black flag with your congregation.

From the DVD

What do we do when we realize *we* are the problem? Cliff Champion, in the DVD, tells a compelling story from his life when God waved the black flag at him. I have always appreciated a sermon in which the preacher tells a personal story from his or her life. There is something quite beautiful to me about a preacher who can make him or herself vulnerable in such a way. I am better able to connect with what he or she is saying, and I find the experience much more meaningful on many levels. What experiences from your life surface?

You may not have a story as powerful as Champion’s to tell, but to personalize a hard topic even in a small way may help some in your congregation with whatever they are struggling with. It may also provide clarity and insight on current problems they are facing. Can you think of a time in your life during which the black flag was waved at you? What was going on in your life at the time? What passages of scripture spoke to your experience and helped you make sense of it? What role did the Holy Spirit play in the situation? If the Holy Spirit did not play a role, why not? What would you want me, as someone in your congregation, to learn from your experience? What knowledge and insight did you glean from it that I can apply to my life?

From Scripture

A major topic of this chapter is sin. It is the thread that connects all the other prominent themes I mention in the list above. What is the general attitude toward sin in your congregation? Is it a subject people are open and willing to talk about? Is it discussed only reluctantly? Is it spoken about at all? I think Rob makes an important point when he refers to Jesus’ commentary on sin in [Mark 9:42-48](#), writing, “Sin is not the same as bad. Sin makes bad things possible” (p. 74). He goes on to say in a later passage, “Sin confuses our ability to determine right and wrong, good and bad. It doesn’t mean we are bad. It just means we can go bad” (p. 75). This point is one that might do well to be emphasized. Just because we sin, it doesn’t mean there is something inherently wrong with us. In fact, it means that we are human and not unlike some of the most respected and well-known characters in scripture.

At the end of chapter 5 Rob writes, “The best of people experience black flags. Moses lost his temper in the wilderness and didn’t obey God’s instructions. He was black-flagged from entering the Promised Land, yet he is considered the greatest prophet of Israel” (p.82, see [Numbers 20](#)). He goes on to mention some other characters from scripture who experienced a black-flag moment in their life: Saul (see [Acts 9](#)), Cain and Abel (see [Genesis 4](#)), Samson (see [Judges 16](#)), and David (see [2 Samuel 11](#)). Can you think of other figures in scripture who experienced a black-flag moment? What do their stories teach us? How might their stories provide us not only caution and instruction but also hope?

Whatever you decide to preach on and however you decide to do it, I cannot imagine a sermon on any of the topics from this chapter ending on any note other than hope. Even some of the more tragic narratives from scripture Rob

mentions in chapter 5 end in hope—the hope that comes from knowing that we are never beyond God’s reach or that we are never too far gone for God to take us back.

What message of hope would you like to give to your congregation today? What new start, in all of life’s challenges and messiness, is God offering each of us?

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for never letting us out of your reach, no matter what we have done or how far we have gone. Thank you for loving us and for all of the characters and stories in scripture that encourage us and give us hope. Amen.

Benediction: May the God of peace—the God of hope and new beginnings—go with us all this day and forevermore. Amen.

—Andrew Garland Breeden
Associate/Acquisitions Editor, [The Upper Room](#) magazine

Hymn and Song Suggestions—Jackson Henry

A Charge to Keep I Have (UMH 413)

I Want a Principle Within (UMH 410)

Make Me a Servant (TFWS 2176)

Just a Closer Walk with Thee (TFWS 2158)

Sanctuary (TFWS 2164)

Love the Lord (WSM 3116)

Week 6: The White Flag

From the Book

Chapter 6 opens with the following statement: “You don’t have to win every time to win . . . depending on what you’re trying to win” (p. 87). A few lines later: “You can be the ultimate winner without winning every time” (p. 87). Each of these statements may, on the surface, seem paradoxical, each a riddle to be solved.

But Rob goes on to explain what he means by each of these statements in a discussion on *surrender*—the overarching theme of the chapter. Chapter 6 takes a close look both at what surrender means and what it doesn’t mean. Surrender means showing grace to others, not always having to be right, and trusting God with the outcome of any situation in our lives. By the same token, surrender is not giving up; surrender is not apathy.

The main idea of chapter 6 is summed up in these two lines: “When we surrender to God’s will, we let go of many things: our need to control, our desire to be right, our own vision for how we want life to turn out. But that doesn’t mean we give up, especially in our trust in God” (p. 90).

Here are some suggestions—in the form of some questions for reflection—that may help you address the white flag with your congregation.

From the DVD

When do we know that it’s time to surrender something? Nick Terry tells a story from his life about a time when he surrendered to God. He surrendered the dream of being a pit crew member for becoming someone who helps others come to know Christ through [Motor Racing Outreach](#). Terry says that being a pit crew member was something that would never fill his heart in the same way God could fill it. Terry knew it was time to give up something so that he could move on to something else.

Recall a time in your life when you have had to give up something so that you could move on to something else. What did you give up? What did you move on to? What role did God play in your decision? Did you experience any resentment toward God or toward other people for what you gave up? How did you overcome your resentment?

Terry says, “When I think about winning, I had my mind on one thing that I defined as winning and God had something else on his mind that he defined as winning . . . I was so focused on my definition of winning, I was missing out on what God had for me.” Can you relate to this statement in terms of your own experience? In what ways did you learn to trust God and God’s plan for your life? How can I learn to trust God and God’s plan for my life?

From Scripture

What characters in scripture can you think of who surrendered to God and God’s will for their lives? What was the act of surrender like for them? Was it something they did willingly? Or did they resist? Here are some examples that come to mind: Balaam ([Numbers 22](#)), Jonah ([Jonah 1](#)), and Elijah ([1 Kings 19](#)). What others can you think of?

Rob talks about Jesus’ prayer the night before his crucifixion in [Luke 22:39-46](#). Can you recall a time in your life when you prayed the words Jesus prays in [Luke 22:42](#)? What was going on in your life at the time? Was it easy or challenging for you to surrender yourself to the experience? Was it difficult for you to pray “yet not my will but yours be done”? What do you think was going through Jesus’ mind as he said these words? What in the life and ministry of Jesus

prepared him to be able to say, “not my will but yours be done” and then accept whatever the outcome would be? Looking back, where can you now see God’s presence in your circumstances? What did you learn from the experience? What will you do the next time you are confronted with a similar situation?

At the end of the chapter Rob writes, “surrender isn’t a one-time deal. It’s a lap-by-lap effort, and every lap gives us the opportunity to position ourselves for that final sprint to the finish line” (p. 98). What do you want the last lap of your life to look like? What are some famous “last laps” in scripture that could serve as examples for our own last lap?

Prayer: Dear God, help us to be willing to do whatever it is you are calling us to do. Give us the grace and peace to pray “not our will but yours be done.” It is in the name of your son we pray. Amen.

Benediction: God go with us all this day to the places and tasks to which we are called. May God protect and guide us in all that we do. Amen.

—Andrew Garland Breeden
Associate/Acquisitions Editor, [The Upper Room](#) magazine

Hymn and Song Suggestions—Jackson Henry
If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee (UMH 142)
Nada te turbe Nothing Can Trouble (URW 388)
Goodness Is Stronger than Evil (TFWS 2219)
Jesus, Remember Me (UMH 488)

Week 7: The Checkered Flag

From the Book

In chapter 7 Rob shares his thoughts about the checkered flag, Easter, and what victory means to each of us, regardless of the outcomes of the race or the outward circumstances of our current reality. Victory is living with faith and living by faith in God—no matter how difficult and how impossible life looks to us at that moment.

Through the image of the checkered flag in auto racing, Rob invites us into four stories of victory through difficulty: 1) the tragedy of an IndyCar crash that left Sam Schmidt paralyzed from the shoulders down; 2) the trauma of divorced parents, rejection, life on the streets, drugs, and alcohol; 3) a single mother with four children who lost everything, including two of her four children in a horrific fire; and, 4) the followers of Jesus who believed him to be the Messiah until the religious and military leaders conspired to torture and kill him in a public execution.

As you plan your sermon, read the chapter, reflect on your congregation and the context of your worship service. Invest time in the middle of your planning for five minutes of silent prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to lead you toward the checkered flag with your congregation and its leaders. Ask God to help you pull together the themes of this chapter in a manner that will give your congregation the experience of Easter—unimaginable victory through faith in God—regardless of the circumstances.

From the DVD

The checkered flag represents victory! It is the culmination of all the planning, preparation, and effort.

The checkered flag represents teamwork. The driver cannot win the race alone. Victory is the result of the focused effort of many people. It is shared by the team.

On the DVD, the interview is with Sam Hornish Jr., a former champion at the Indianapolis 500 and also a NASCAR Champion. Sam and his father began racing together when he was a boy and he quickly experienced success. And, in the midst of success, Sam grew in his love for God and did not let success become his master.

Sam is, to this day, a deeply committed Christian, the father of three children and an active member of MRO ([Motor Racing Outreach](#)). More than racing or winning, Sam said, “I want to be a good husband, a good father, and an obedient follower of Jesus Christ.... I am seeking God’s will now, and I find myself doing more faith things than race car things.”

Perhaps, in your sermon, it will be important to tell Sam’s story as well. There is victory for those who live faithfully all of their days. Sam’s story highlights the victory that comes through obedience and faithfulness. There will be people in your congregation who need to hear the good news today.

Rob commented on the desire of Sam Hornish, Jr., “to have his kids join him in the winner’s circle”, Then he went on to say, “I would say that his kids get to see their dad win every day as he lives his life for Jesus Christ.” What does winning in daily life look like for those in your congregation?

In the video, Rob notes that in IndyCar racing, “The starting line is also the finish line. At Indianapolis, you cross this line many times during the race.” In fact, it is not uncommon to have to restart the race. In the same way, a relationship with God and the worship of God is both the starting point and the ending point of the Christian life. Each week, we come together in Sunday worship to remind ourselves of this important truth. We all have a beginning and we all have an end.

At the beginning of this week, what lap are you on? How is the race going? Where will you end when the checkered flag waves? How can you celebrate with others in the winner's circle?

From Scripture [Luke 24: 1-12](#)

Resurrection is at the center of the Christian faith. Without it, our faith is in vain. As Paul wrote, "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain." (1 Cor 15:13-14, NRSV). On the other hand, if the resurrection is true, then victory in Jesus Christ is assured. The stories in chapter 7 (pp. 103-121) are powerful stories of resurrection, restoration and hope.

Which of these stories, if any, would be most helpful to your congregation at this time? Are there any of the stories that would be harmful or inappropriate to use at this time in your particular congregation? Are there other stories in your life or in your community that better illustrate the message of the checkered flag? How do those stories intersect with the story of Jesus' resurrection? The story of the resurrection is found in all four Gospels. As you prepare, re-read each of them. Which version of this story is most compelling to you? What details of the resurrection stand out as you reflect on the checkered flag?

Prayer:

Great and gracious God, today above all days, we fall on our knees and shout "Glory!" "Glory, halleluia!" "Christ is risen!" "Christ is risen indeed!" And because he lives, we can live also – joyfully, confidently, faithfully, obediently – because in Christ we have the victory! Victory over sin! Victory over self! Victory over life! And victory over death!

God, we thank you for the promise that because he lives, we shall live also. Give us the desire and the ability to bring our children and your children into the winner's circle with us—with all the saints. For we pray this in the Easter faith that Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen. Let it be so.

Benediction:

Dear friends, go from this place to run the race that is set before you. God is your starting place and your ending place. Remember that this race is the one race that matters for all eternity—together we are the team that will help you take the checkered flag. And one day, we will be together in the winner's circle—with our family—forever. Go from this place to love and serve the Lord! I send you out with the blessing of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

—Tom Albin

Dean of [The Upper Room Chapel](#) and Ecumenical Relations

Hymn and Song Suggestions—Jackson Henry

Woman in the Night (UMH 274 see v. 8)

The First One Ever (UMH 276 see v. 3)

Christ Is Risen <https://us.songselect.com/songs/5242683/christ-is-risen>