

stop halfway. The race must be finished or the prize cannot be won (Revelation 2:10). One runner in the 1968 Olympics began to have cramps in his legs. He kept going only to fall and dislocate his knee. He hurt his shoulder and finished last. “In an interview later on, a reporter asked, ‘Why didn’t you quit when you were hurt and bruised, bloody, discouraged? Why didn’t you quit?’ His answer: ‘My country did not send me 5,000 miles to start the race; they sent me 5,000 miles to finish the race.’”[4] Jesus didn’t die just for us to enter the race—He died so we could finish. Be competitive...fight hard...win!

The race means more when there is a prize at the end. Paul said, “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air.” Paul ran with certainty. His picture is that of a boxer who before his fight, practices his punches toward the air. The Christian race is really real! This run will not be run with fervor if you are not expecting Heaven on the other side. Doubts, worries, and fears will make the race seem as not worth the struggle but cling on to God’s faithfulness (Hebrews 6:18-19; Titus 1:2).

Don’t pull your attention away from the prize (Revelation 3:11). Don’t be the runner that looks for something better.[5] Instead, keep your eyes on the crown. Looking to Jesus will help (Hebrews 12:2). The prize is that valuable and that advantageous to stay focused. “Roger Bannister was the first man to run a mile in 4 minutes. Three months later, John Landy beat Bannister’s record by 1.4 seconds. Finally the two men met for an historic race. As they went into the final lap with Landy in the lead. He was haunted by the question, ‘Where is Bannister?’ As Landy neared the finish line he could not resist the temptation to look over his shoulder and the instant he did, Roger Bannister passed him on the opposite side to win the race. Afterward Landy was interviewed by a Time Magazine reporter and he said in that interview, ‘I made the mistake of looking back. If I had not looked back I would have won the race.’”[6]

Are your eyes on the prize (Philippians 3:14)?

Don’t Fill Your Body with Intoxicants.

Good athletes are cautious about their intake. Paul used three important words:

- “temperate.” This word could be translated as self-controlled.
- “keep under” The word is *hupōpiazō*. Thayer said it means, “to beat black and blue, to smite so as to cause bruises and livid spots.” The body would be figuratively beaten by the spiritual mindset so as to not hinder the run.
- “subjection.” The word is *doulagōgō* and it means to bring to slavery.

With these words in mind two thoughts are of value:

Let go of the weight (Hebrews 12:1). Put down the baggage of sin and anything that will keep you from running well.

Stay within the boundaries (2 Timothy 2:5). You cannot go outside the boundaries and expect to win the prize. Be sure not to do anything God would prohibit and stay away from the boundary as far as possible. David wrote “I will run the way of thy commandments” (Psalm 119:32). We will only run well if we run with God’s rules.

The only way we can finish our course with joy (Acts 20:24) is to run with a pure heart, conscience, and body. What are you filling your body with as you run?

“At the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, in the 400-meter race Derek Redman tore a hamstring on the backstretch and sprawled on the track. He struggled to his feet and began hopping toward the finish line. His father bounded out of the stands, embraced his son, and said, ‘Come on, Son, let’s finish this together.’”[7] God wants to help us win this race. Heaven stands on the other side of the checkered line. Are you running well?

Endnotes

[1]Brad Price, First Corinthians, www.abiblecommentary.com, 2010, p. 325.

[2]Adam Clarke.

[3]Albert Barnes.

[4]<https://www.propreacher.com/olympian-sent-finish-race/>

[5]R.F. Knox, Jr., First Corinthians, Sain Publications, 2009, p. 223.

[6]https://www.drdonjennings.com/documents/textSermons/_Race_Of_Life.pdf

[7]Allen Webster, Seven Things a Loving God Hates, House to House Publishing, Inc., 2006, 148.

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ARE YOU RUNNING WELL?

NOAH HOLSON

WORDS WRITTEN
ON THE HEART
Proverbs 3:3

Running is a popular sport. Many countries participate in local, state, country-wide, and even global competitions such as the Olympics. Running is beneficial for physical, psychological, and most importantly spiritual health. Every Christian is in a race (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

Paul wrote “I have fought a good fight, **I have finished my course**; I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7, emp. mine, NO). Fighting appealed to the Romans, the faith to the Jews, but the course to be ran appealed to the Greeks. Historically, Paul likely had the literal running games in mind when writing this treatise to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). The Isthmian games or Corinthian games were performed every third or fifth year. They included many different skill competitions like “wrestling, jumping, javelin and discuss throwing, and most importantly for Paul’s analogy, racing and boxing.”[1] These games included one winner who was crowned with a garland and given a special seat at the next games. Paul used this present-day competition to bring his readers close to the real race before them.

Jesus’ marathon is unpopular, the run hard, but the goal is worth the discipline. We want to run well (cf. Galatians 5:7). What does Paul teach us about how we can do so?

Make Sure You Are on the Right Track.

More than 800 marathons are held all across the world each year. Each one has is different. Paul told the Corinthians about one race not two. There was one path to follow, not three. Some believe any marathon leads to heaven’s prize. “All roads lead to heaven,” or “Jesus is the author of many ways,” are sometimes proposed, but God only has one marathon. One must run His race to get His prize. Peter said, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Some try to travel down:

- The roads of ease and fleshly living (Genesis 6:12; Proverbs 4:14; 13:15). God’s marathon involves overcoming temptation (James 1:12).

- The roads of religious liberalism (2 Timothy 4:3). God’s marathon requires staying within the boundaries (Colossians 3:17; Titus 2:1).
- The roads of selfish pasts (Philippians 3:4-8; Proverbs 14:12). God’s race requires selflessness (Philippians 3:13-14).

What is the right path? It is the way of holiness (Isaiah 35:8-9). It is following the Way (John 14:6). It matters very little if you are running, if you are running on the wrong path. Augustine echoed this sentiment by saying, “You are making great strides, indeed, but you are out of the right way.” Are you on the right path?

Make Sure You Enter.

If we want to run well for the prize, not only must we find the right way, we must be sure to enter it (Matthew 7:13). If we do not enter, we should not expect to compete. These Corinthians had entered the race (1 Corinthians 6:11), have you?

Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3). Signing up for God’s marathon is not hard—it only requires belief, repentance, confession, and baptism. We should not expect to enter the race if we have not done these things (cf. John 3:5):

- Without belief, one cannot run (John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6).
- Without repentance, one cannot run (Acts 3:19; Luke 13:3, 5).
- Without baptism, one cannot run (Galatians 3:26-27; Romans 6:4).

We cannot expect to run the race if we cannot sacrifice our lives and our pasts (Luke 9:57-62). Will you choose to enter God’s marathon today?

Run, Don’t Walk.

Some signs read “WALK, NO RUNNING”—God’s marathon reads “RUN ALL THE WAY.” No competitor wins by walking. Paul told the Corinthians to “run.” He used the word four times. Participating in a marathon demands effort, extraneous effort at that.

The New Testament stresses the importance of exertion in running this race of faith. The phrase “striveth for the mastery” (1 Corinthians 9:25) comes from the Greek word *agōnizomai* and it means to struggle. The “mastery” would have been boxing or wrestling, but the application can be made to running too. Paul said that he stretched himself forward like a runner who put “forth every particle of his strength in running.”[2]

Running implies:

- Doing that which is unnatural. No one runs unless for a specific purpose. We must sometimes do unnatural things for the cause of Christ.
- Overcoming adversity (Proverbs 24:10, 16). Running includes sweat, physical exhaustion, and blood. The Christian life demands loss (Matthew 16:25).
- Passing the scenes quickly. You are more likely to not be distracted when you run rather than walk. Paul wrote “flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14), surely more than a simple walking away.
- Importance. Running implies that you want to get somewhere of value. Heaven is at the finish line, so run as fast as you can, as hard as you can, and as best as you can.

If one will not run, he might as well not be in the marathon. The Christian life is one of labor (Colossians 1:29). How hard are you running?

Be Sure to Look Toward the Prize.

The New York Marathon gives the winner \$100,000. Boston pays up to \$150,000! Grecian victors were treated like royals. A crown, applause, and acknowledgement awaited the victor.[3] Unlike the crown received in Greece, the Christian crown will never fade (1 Peter 5:4). While only one winner was victorious in the games, God’s marathon has many champions (2 Timothy 4:8). Paul urged these brethren to run “that ye may obtain.” Gavazzi said, “Men fail who have no aim in life.” B.W. Johnson said, “He (the boxer-NO) puts a skillful aim into his blows.” Three observations are pertinent:

Be sure to finish the race. Some runners quit before they can obtain the prize. If the main objective is to get the prize, this will not be a problem, but some