

Running Your Race

Air Dates: June 20-24, 2022

Day One

I'm sure we're all familiar with the Olympic games and enjoy watching the many different races they have. It is amazing to see how hard and long those athletes work to qualify for the Olympics. There's a race that you and I are in, and it's a lot more important than the Olympic races. It's described in 1 Corinthians 9:24-26:

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;

Paul gives us three important guidelines here about running our race.

First, he says to run in such a way as to get the prize. Lately I've heard lots of reports of how some schools are trying to eliminate any system that has winners and losers, so that nobody's self-esteem will be wounded by not winning. Well, let me tell you, that's not the way we are exhorted to run our race for God. We're out there to win. Just participating and making a show isn't enough.

Second, we have to go into strict training. I think this is the part where many of us lose our races; we haven't yet gone into strict training. What does that mean in our Christian race? It means purity of life; it means building our spiritual muscle and endurance through Bible study, prayer, fellowship. It means imposing on ourselves the sacrifices and disciplines that will make us strong.

Third, we are not to run aimlessly. We should have purpose, goals, and a strong commitment to get to the finish line. We can't flit from one thing to another; we must stay focused and run with a purpose.

All of our hearts stop beating when we see the Olympic ceremonies where those medals are awarded and the national anthems are played. When you're in the winners' circle, all the hard work and discipline are worth it.

I think if we could really get a vision of the prize that awaits us—that eternal prize—we'd get more serious about running our races. Can you imagine standing in God's winners' circle, hearing him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant," and winning a crown that you can then cast at the feet of Jesus? That scene makes the Olympics look like kid's play. Don't you want to be in that winners' circle? If so, you have to run to win, you have to go into strict training, and you have to run with a purpose.

Day Two

Are you a good runner? I've never gotten into running for exercise. But there's one race I want to win, and that's the race that God has set out for me. As believers we're all in a race, and as we saw yesterday from 1 Corinthians 9, we should be in that race to win.

Hebrews 12:1-2 gives us some further good information about running our race:

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. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The good news is that we each have our own race to run; we're not competing with each other. We are told to *run with perseverance the race marked out for us*. God has a race planned for me and it's different from the one he has planned for you. But it is marked out; and each of us has one. So, I don't have to run your race, and you don't have to run mine. But each of us needs to know the race marked out for us, and then run it to win.

Do you know what race God has marked out for you? He's not trying to hide it from you; it's there. But first you've got to get on the running field and start moving. You won't find the race marked out for you sitting on the sidelines. Maybe you've been trying to run somebody else's race—trying to be like someone else or wishing you could do what he or she does, instead of accepting the race God has for you. Every race is important; one is no more important than another. But it's foolish to try to run someone else's race. Run the race marked out for you.

And the writer to the Hebrews says to run it with perseverance. Marathon runners go through what they call "hitting the wall," that place in the race where they feel as though they cannot possibly continue. Everything in them wants to quit, but they've learned through training and experience that if they'll keep going, they can run through that wall, find their second breath and finish the race.

Have you hit the wall in your spiritual race lately? Ready to quit? It happens to all of us, but don't give up! Run with perseverance the race set out for you. Keep running through the wall. Your faith is being tested, your endurance is being strengthened; God is working on your behalf, but you've got to run with perseverance.

Day Three

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 (Hebrews 12:1).

As you run your race, all around you are witnesses to cheer you on and encourage you.

Who's watching you? Well, Noah is. Noah understands what it's like to be ridiculed while you're running the race. When he set out to do what God told him to do, he looked entirely foolish. "You're building a boat for what—a flood?" Can't you hear their friends and neighbors laughing at him, calling him a fool. Been ridiculed lately? Maybe your family has no appreciation for this race you're running. Perhaps your coworkers think you're nuts for running this Christian race. Remember, Noah is watching you from the grandstands in the clouds. And he's cheering you on.

So is Abraham, that great man of faith. God sent him to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, even though he did not know where he was going. Do you feel like that's where God has you—going some place but he hasn't yet told you where? Abraham kept running that race in spite of his lack of understanding. You see, Abraham knew how to run by faith, not by sight. And he's up there now in those grandstands, just yelling his lungs out to encourage you to keep on running, even though you don't know exactly where God's taking you, but you know he has good plans for you.

Moses is right there on the front row in those heavenly grandstands. Moses understands the fear of the Red Sea that's in front of you right now—that impossibility that appears to be more than you can

handle, and it looks like your enemy is going to get to you soon and destroy you. Moses has been there; so he's up there telling you to: "Keep looking at the invisible God. Don't give up."

Rahab's watching you run your race. Rahab understands rejection. She knows what it's like to be from the wrong side of the tracks, to have a sordid past. But Rahab found forgiveness, and she got right in the race, a transformed woman, and she won big time. Rahab's pulling for you. She's saying, "If I can make it, you can make it! Don't quit!"

For many of you, there's your grandmother, your grandfather, your aunt or uncle, maybe even your mother or father or other loved ones. They're watching you from the heavenly grandstands. Their race is finished; they've won the prize. And they don't want anything less for you. *Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses*, let's run our races to win!

Day Four

Are you training to run in the Olympics or maybe run a marathon? Not many of us can qualify to run in these difficult races. But we're all qualified to run in the race that God has marked out for each of us. And it's much more important to run in that race than in the Olympics.

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 (Hebrews 12:1).

Can you imagine a runner at the Olympics or in a marathon coming on the track with a coat on and a backpack and a purse? No way! They get rid of anything that will slow them down even a millisecond.

In the same way, if you're going to run your race effectively, you must throw off everything that hinders you. What is hindering you?

Maybe it's laziness and lack of discipline. You just haven't yet disciplined yourself to study God's Word and pray like you know you should. Oh, you keep intending to and you really want to. But somehow, when the alarm goes off, it's just too easy to roll over and go back to sleep or just put it off. Without the Word of God firmly entrenched in your mind and heart, you're never going to run the race to win.

Are you hindered by the cares of this world? Do you let money or people or jobs or other circumstances get you down all the time? If you worry and fret a lot, you can't run the race very well. Don't you hear all those people in the stands encouraging you: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6).

Could it be that you're hindered by busyness? Maybe your life is full of all kinds of things and activities. Not necessarily bad things, but they crowd your life so much that there is no room left for the things of God.

Or perhaps you're entangled with your past, or your low self-esteem, or your failures. Can't you hear Rahab calling to you now. She's saying, "Forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead."

What sin is entangling you? Could it be lack of sexual purity? Is it an unforgiving spirit? Have you been dishonest or deceptive? Is it a tongue that is out of control, complaining, criticizing, judging? Can't you hear the Apostle Paul saying to you: "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?" (Galatians 5:7).

We're surrounded with the saints of old, watching us run our race, because they know the joy that is set before us, and they know we're going to miss the prize if we keep trying to run with all that stuff holding us back.

Day Five

I've been focusing on our race—the race that God has set before each of his children. I've pointed out that we each have our own unique race, and you don't have to run mine and I don't have to run yours. And unlike earthly races, all of us who run can win if we run with perseverance the race marked out for us, and get rid of all the stuff that entangles and hinders us.

But the last part of that passage in Hebrews 12:1-2 is probably the most important:

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Any successful runner knows one critical rule of running: Stay focused on the finish line. Winning athletes are those who can keep focused no matter what's going on around them.

The longer I run the race that God has marked out for me, the more I realize that if I stay focused on Jesus, if I never lose the wonder of his love for me, if I talk about him and think about him and read about him, if I stay in first love with Jesus, I can run with perseverance. But when I take my eyes off Jesus, I become disappointed, discouraged, and ready to quit.

Have you taken your eyes off Jesus lately? Oh, when you do, that's when you start to get entangled and that's when sin moves in. When you take your eyes off Jesus, you're a sitting duck for all of Satan's flaming arrows that are headed your way to keep you from winning this race. People will fail you. Churches will fail you. Dreams will be shattered. Hopes will be dashed. And if you start looking at those things, instead of Jesus, the race becomes drudgery and dismal.

I think of many people I know who started running their races with enthusiasm and commitment, but they took their eyes off Jesus and became disillusioned. Let me assure of this: Jesus will never fail you. Please, stay fixed on Jesus. The Christian race comes down to this simple—not necessarily easy—but simple priority and that is, fixed on Jesus.

We want to be able to say with the Apostle Paul:

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Therefore: **Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.**