

Running The Race

May 5, 2021

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

24. Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

25. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

26. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

27. But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Summary: The Christian life is not for sprinters...it's for marathoners who can steadily keep moving toward a dream.

Sprinters: To race or move at full speed, especially for a short distance, as in running, rowing, etc.

Marathoners: A runner who competes in a marathon

We're in a race...a spiritual race.

Many will never complete the course.

But as a Christian, we have all the tools necessary to equip and train us

Running the Race

Success is not a place we arrive at...it's a process...a journey...it's a lifestyle. Failure isn't a one-time event, and success isn't a one-time event.

They are both processes. We could learn a lot from Olympic examples.

Too many people have what John Maxwell calls Destination Disease. They feel that if they could just meet the right person, gain the right position, get the right job, and earn the right income...that everything would turn out the right way.

But the key is to focus on running the race. And nobody did a better job of telling us how to run a race than the apostle Paul.

He gives us the secret in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (Read)

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Step 1...Start running.

24. Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

This sounds so simple and basic, but it's the most important. So many talk about it, read and study about it, analyze how others are doing it...some even get to the starting line...but few actually get out there and do it!

Quote from medical journal..."we hear it almost every day..."I just can't get myself motivated to lose weight, test my blood sugar, exercise...and we hear an equal number of sighs from diabetes educators who can't get their patients motivated to do the right things for their diabetes or their health.

We have news for you, motivation is not going to strike you like lightning, and motivation is not something that someone else, a nurse, a doctor, a family member can bestow or force upon you.

The whole idea of motivation is a trap. Forget motivation - Just do it! Exercise, lose weight, test your blood sugar or whatever...do it without

motivation and then guess what...after you start doing the thing, that's when the motivation comes and makes it easy for you to keep on doing it.

Motivation is like love and happiness - it's a by-product. When you actively engage in doing something, it sneaks up and zaps you when you least expect it. As Harvard psychologist Jerome Brunner says, "You're more likely to act yourself into feeling than to feel yourself into action. So act - whatever it is that you know you should do - just do it."

How many people miss out on the best of life because they're still waiting to feel like doing something? Most say, "When I get this the right way...or when I get a little bit better...or when I get a little bit more money...or when I get some time...or when this gets fixed...then I'll do my part."

A key in running the race is to get in there and get started immediately.

The person who waits for things to be perfect before they run the race will never enter the race.

A person is never what he ought to be...until he is doing what he ought to be doing!

Poem...typical of most people...

They were going to be all they wanted to be - tomorrow

None would be braver or kinder than they - tomorrow

A friend who was troubled and weary they knew

would be glad for a lift and they needed it too

and on him they would call and see what they could do - tomorrow

Each morning they stacked up the letters they'd write - tomorrow

And thought of the folks they would fill with delight - tomorrow

The greatest of people they just might have been

The world would have opened its heart to them

**But in fact they passed on and faded from view
And all that they left when their living was through
Was a mountain of things they intended to do - tomorrow**

It's time to act...to get into the race - right now! So, in running a successful race, the first step is simple...start running.

The second thing Paul said in running a race successfully is to desire excellence.

25. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

He talked about excellence when he talked about running the race.

He said, "Run is such a way so that you can get the prize."

In the book "Men in Mid-life Crisis" by Jim Conway, there's a great paragraph.

Listen to what he said. "I feel a weakening of the need to be a great man...an increasing feeling of 'let's just get through this the best way we can, never mind hitting home runs, just get through the ball game without getting beamed."

That's the way a lot of people go through life. They just want to escape...they just want to, at best, survive. They settle for the mediocre.

Bruce Lockerbie said, "Mediocrity is a personal problem...it is a personal trait...a personal concession to less than our best.

It says, I guess good enough is good enough."

I run into people all the time who want to blame their environment...they want to blame the organization...or the place they live for their haphazard, average, slipshod, lousy life.

If you are a mediocre person, and you don't go and pursue excellence in your life, it is your personal problem. It's no one else's.

Excellence is a choice just like attitude is a choice.

We are mediocre not because of talent...not because of conditions...not because of bad luck...not because of background...not because of personality. We are mediocre because of choice, our choice!

Paul said, when you run the race, run to win the prize. If you aren't going to go for excellence, get out of the race.

William Johnson said, "Quality is a race with no finish line.

Competitive excellence requires 100% all of the time.

If you doubt that, try maintaining excellence by setting your standards at 92%, or even at 95%.

People figure they're doing fine so long as they get somewhere near it. Excellence gets reduced to acceptable, and before long, acceptable doesn't seem worth the sweat if you can get by with adequate. After that, mediocrity is only a breath away."

There are four attitudes we can see in people that focus on excellence.

- 1. Attention to details...they are people who really do believe that everything counts.**
- 2. Continual improvement...they are never satisfied with where they are.**
- 3. Self-discipline...**
- 4. Personal high standards... Pat Riley "Excellence is the gradual result of always striving to do better."**

The 3rd thing Paul said about running the race is found in verse 25...everyone who competes...goes into strict training.

He said get the tools you need. If you're going to run the race you've got to make sure you have the right resources to make the race successful.

Stanford Research tells us that 95% of the people that hear a principle...they hear it...they agree with it, and they understand the principle...but - they don't have the ability to apply it to their life. And the reason is they never were given something that will enable them to carry it out.

That's why we have Bible study...and Sunday School, and other training events (VBS).

That's where we're to be given the proper tools and resources to enable us to take the biblical principles we hear in sermons or read in the Bible and apply them to our lives. But the problem goes back to the mediocrity that has crept into the church...especially when it comes to Christian education.

If you're a Christian, make every effort possible to go to Sunday School and Bible Study.

Seek out someone who can disciple you one on one.

If you're a teacher, don't settle for mediocrity when it comes to your lessons. Don't wait until Saturday evening to take a quick glance at your lesson. You owe it to yourself, your students and to God to give it your very best.

The fourth thing Paul tells us here is to maintain an eternal perspective. When you're running the race, make sure that you see the big picture. The greatest way to keep from short term failures is to have a long term mindset.

See the eternal picture. Understand that we're going for a crown that will last forever compared to one that's not going to last.

Hebrews 12 (The Message)...

"Do you see what this means - all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start

running - and never quit. No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished the race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed - that exciting finish in and with God - he could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls.

How do we maintain an eternal perspective?

- 1. Get serious about the race you're to run.**
- 2. Get rid of the excess baggage.**
- 3. Let Jesus be your model.**
- 4. Study the secret of His perseverance. The secret of perspective and perseverance is "that he never lost sight of where he was headed."**

The fifth thing we see is that we plan our race by setting goals.

Paul said, "Don't run like a man running aimlessly." The goal is not running to run...it's running to win the race.

Ed Trenner said, "Life without goals is like a race without a finish line."

This flies in the face of all those who like to fly by the seat of their pants...those who just wing it all the time. They say whatever happens must be God's will, so just go with the flow. And that's a lie from the pit of hell.

What I'm talking about here are personal goals.

John Maxwell says, "Whatever you got is the size of who you are."

The problem is that along with corporate goals, very few failed to set any personal goals for spiritual growth...the kind of goals that would have made reaching the other goals satisfying.

God can't bless an empty head and He can't bless an empty heart. Put something in there. Set personal goals for your own spiritual growth.

Read the Bible...study it...find other resources that will enhance your reading and meditation on the Word.

You can't put out what you haven't put in. The first agenda of life is to get it on the inside. Get some water in the well before you draw it out. If you're not putting anything in, God can't even help you.

Quit asking God to do something that he isn't about to do for you, and can't do for you. Start growing.

John 14 says that God will bring to remembrance those things we learned...it never says He'll put things in there that we never took the time to study and learn.

Set goals for personal spiritual growth.

Read, study, and listen to tapes...

The last thing Paul says about running the race is to persevere.

He says, "I beat my body, I discipline my body so that I won't be disqualified. In other words he says, "this is a long exhausting race, and I've got to persevere.

It's going to get tough but I must force myself to keep going to the end."

The Christian life is not for sprinters...it's for marathoners who can steadily keep moving toward a dream.

We're in a race...a spiritual race. Many will never complete the course.

But as a Christian, we have all the tools necessary to equip and train us to complete the course and gain the victor's crown.

Let's not give up at a time which could be our greatest hour!