

# Rules and Resilience

A large part of an athlete's groundwork will focus on learning and studying the rules and guidelines of their sport so that they can compete fairly. They will also build resilience, so that they can deal with setbacks and difficulties.

## Why We Need Rules

We know that every sport has its rules, and each athlete is bound to compete according to them. These exist to make sure that everyone is aware of what is expected of them and so that all can compete fairly, having the same opportunity to win the prize. The phrase a "level playing field" might come to mind. This provides a good summary of what regulations are intended to do. It would be unfair, for instance, if a single rower was placed in competition against a team of two; or asked to row a greater distance than their competitor.

Therefore we have guidelines to dictate not only the number of people allowed to compete in each event, or how far they must row, but also the competitor's age, nationality and even weight. Every aspect of the sport is covered.

There are penalties given for breaking the rules. These can vary in severity, depending on how bad the 'crime' is seen to be. Ultimately a competitor

risks being disqualified from the competition, with their hard work and training wasted as they are no longer able to compete for the prize.

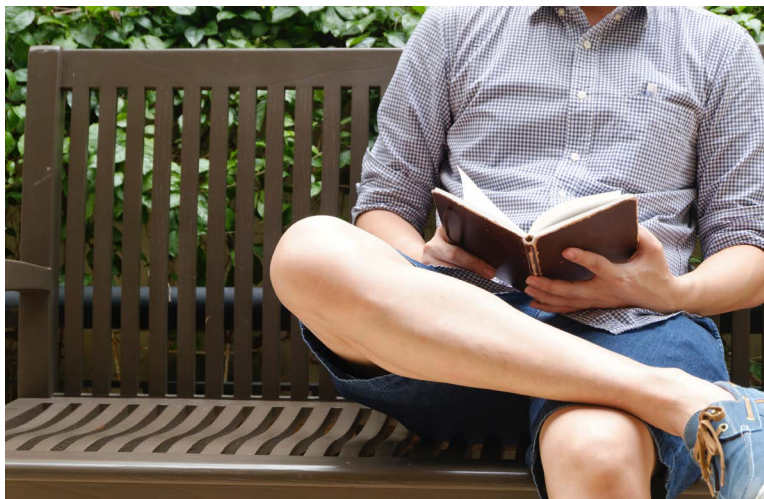
## Guidance from God

The idea of setting out a series of guidelines, however, is not only man-made. In fact, we find it in God's teachings in the Bible:

*If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules (2 Timothy 2:5).*

The Bible uses the picture of an athlete competing according to the rules. All that we need to know is provided in God's Word – the Bible.

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of*



*God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*

God details His commandments to the people of Israel in the Old Testament, and Jesus builds on them in the New Testament, identifying the most important commandments as:

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:37-40).*

All of the commandments of God can be fulfilled through living by the principles which Jesus sets out. In this 'race', many winners can be crowned; our job is to love our neighbour and support each other to the finish line.

## Dealing with Setbacks

At some point during their career, all athletes will face setbacks – whether physical injury, psychological stress or external criticism. The most successful athletes are those who are able to push through these trials to continue towards their goal.

What kind of setbacks might we experience in the 'Race for Our Life'? We might lose sight of our goal; become distracted by our busy life; become discouraged by our struggle with sin or even begin to doubt our faith. How we choose to deal with our setbacks will determine how we fare in our race.

## Endurance

Just like a long-distance runner, perseverance and endurance are important skills to develop. Jesus told a parable about a sower who scattered seed over different types of ground.

Crops sprang up on a patch of rocky ground but quickly withered. Jesus said these are like:

*Those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away (Luke 8:13).*

Some seed was scattered on thorny ground, and Jesus said that these:

*Are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity (v14).*

If we enter the race without the necessary commitment, we will find ourselves pulling out of it when challenged, unable to endure. So, how can we ensure that we endure when 'the going gets tough'?

Having trained to a peak level of fitness, athletes work hard to maintain this throughout their career. To maintain our own spiritual fitness, it is vital that we read God's word and put it into practice.

*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience [endurance] and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope (Romans 15:4).*

*For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise (Hebrews 10:36).*

## Weightlifting

Our toughest setback might be the challenge of putting our sins behind us. We may feel that we are just not good enough, and this can feel like a heavy burden – like a heavy weight on the shoulders of an athlete.

*For my iniquities [sins] have gone over my head; Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me (Psalm 38:4).*



However, we have been offered the incredible opportunity to allow Jesus to take on our burdens if we make the commitment to follow his example:

*Who himself (Jesus) bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you are healed (1 Peter 2:24).*

*So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many (Hebrews 9:28).*

Jesus, who lived a sinless life, didn't deserve to die – yet he was willing to sacrifice his life that we might have our sins forgiven. What a truly selfless act! Because of this we are invited to take off the weight that holds us back and set it aside.

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us (Hebrews 12 v1).*

Unburdened, we are now free to expend our full energy in concentrating on the race before us, without distraction or looking back.

## Peter

The Bible recounts many examples of godly people overcoming the setback of sin. Peter,

a disciple of Jesus, is often remembered for his biggest failure, at the time of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. Before Jesus was arrested, Peter had declared:

*Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you! (Matthew 26:35).*

When Jesus was taken away, Peter followed closely behind. When challenged by those around, however, Peter denied three times that he knew Jesus. We can imagine that this failure on Peter's part would have had a huge impact on his faith. We read that when he realised the error of his ways, he "went out and wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:75).

However, after his resurrection, Jesus met Peter and showed that he was forgiven, rebuilding his faith and putting the incident behind him. In fact, Peter would later be a main preacher of the good news about Jesus, and would lead many to join him in the 'race'.

Peter's example should encourage us to just keep going:

*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast [perseveres, endures] under trial; for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him (James 1:12).*

We should also remember that this is not a challenge that we face alone:

*For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you' (Isaiah 41:13).*

