

# The Race for Your Life

THE BIBLE uses many pictures to explain God's message. One striking image is that of an athlete running a race, which is used to describe a Christian trying to follow Jesus, and to please God.

*Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2).*

Running a race for your life sounds overwhelming – does your life really depend on how well you run? The race we are talking about has a reward worth much more than a gold medal, and it will benefit you more than any physical activity. It is a race for everlasting life.

*I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day (2 Timothy 4:7-8).*

## Beginning Training

So, how do you get ready? First, just like any sporting event, you start by training. We can't follow God and live a life pleasing to Him without making this sort of commitment. We have to stop living a life of apathy and make a conscious choice to make Him part of our lives. Jesus said this to some 'lukewarm' believers:

*I know your works, that you are neither hot nor cold. I could wish that you were hot or cold (Revelation 3:15).*

In preparing for an event, an athlete will start regular training. They will re-evaluate their diet



and their social life will change as the training becomes more demanding or more frequent. The event becomes their absolute focus. Every decision they make will be reached knowing that they have training to complete or food preparation to get done.

We need to be equally focused on godly things. Jesus spoke regularly about having a close relationship with God. This means that we should think of God first when we have something to worry about, something that is upsetting us, or something to celebrate. Simply offering a prayer every time we experience one of these emotions will help bring our focus back to God.

We need to be close to God daily in preparation for the 'big event'. Just as an athlete will build up their training regime, so we need to prepare for the big challenges in our life with Christ.

By spending time daily with God’s word, the Bible, we ensure a mindset fixed on Christ. Athletes running a long distance have water stations throughout the race – they are there to refresh them and keep them going. Daily Bible reading does this for those who are following Christ. It sustains us, giving peace of mind and reminding us that we are not alone in this life.

Athletes have to show incredible control – they do not overindulge or allow themselves to act on impulses which might otherwise break someone not so focused. Their determination is aimed at getting them to their goal. The Christian likewise needs to develop control and the right personal attributes.

*The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control (Galatians 5:22–23).*

## Teamwork

“Teamwork makes the dream work” is the favourite quote of many employers. The thing is, it is true!

Any task that needs to be done is made easier with a companion or even a group of people



working together. We can look after each other and encourage one another when our individual focus falters. We can rely on each other to keep our training fresh. When we have a common goal, we meet all types of people. This brings new ideas, it brings a fresh approach that can breathe life into tired lungs and legs. In terms of our race for life, people who share the same faith can help each other in the same way.

When joining this race, we are reassured that we can find likeminded people to help, a group of people who have the same goals to meet and the same challenges to face. Christ knew this formula worked when he sent his disciples out in pairs to spread his message. He hadn’t been doing his work alone and he didn’t expect them to have to do it alone either.

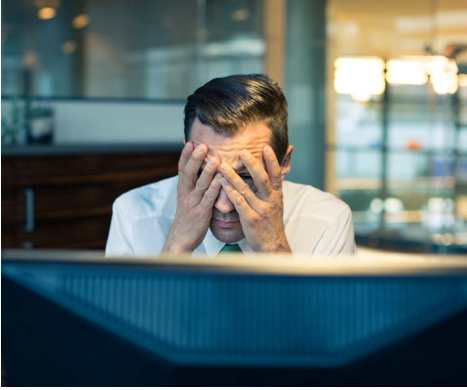
*Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together... encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching (Hebrews 10:24–25).*

## ‘Hitting the Wall’

At times during this race, we will be challenged, and the prize may seem unattainable. Have you ever heard of an athlete ‘hitting the wall’? It is when they physically and mentally cannot comprehend the reason for what they are doing. Scientifically, the body has run out of its most ready source of energy and this causes the brain to shut down, giving only negative thoughts. The best way to cope is to immerse ourselves in our goal and to focus on the support being offered.

*Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all (Psalm 34:19).*

We have examples in the Bible of how those who loved God kept their focus. King David is



*babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby (1 Peter 2:1-2).*

If you've ever watched a new-born child cry for food, the desire is very clear! There's a desperation to be filled and satisfied; to the child's instincts, it is a matter of life and death. The Bible is just as important to the Christian. It is where we turn for guidance and help. Reading the Bible every day is a very good habit to develop.

Athletes in training put up with many setbacks, such as injury and illness. Someone who is focused on their goal, and who has put in all the work, will not allow these setbacks to end their race. They understand that it is part of the journey, part of the work needed to get themselves ready to endure the race.

We cannot expect that just because we are following God, life will be 'plain sailing'. Life is full of ups and downs, good days and bad days. Being a follower of Christ is not a guarantee that we will never worry again or never feel pain. However, it is an understanding that we won't be alone; the Lord Jesus promised to be with us every step of the way – he is our pacesetter. What's more, we can have fellow 'runners' to help us, to coach us, and to remind us why we joined the race in the first place. It's an understanding that there is more to this life and that the prize is eternal life – worth more than any medal.

described as a 'man after God's own heart' (1 Samuel 13:14) and his life was full of decisions which put God at the centre of his race. He made mistakes – after all he was only human – but he is held in high regard by God and mentioned again in the New Testament. It is widely thought that David wrote the majority of the book of Psalms, a book which many people turn to for comfort in times of distress. This book tells us about making God our focus:

*Those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing... who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it (Psalm 34:10-14).*

## **Fuel and Focus**

David did this because he realized that God's prize is worth aiming for. We will examine the prize itself in a further article. It takes a desire to want to better oneself and a belief that it is possible. This is possible with the help of God's word, the Bible. Reading the Bible should be as regular as eating is to us.

*Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and all evil speaking, as newborn*

