

By Any Means

THE TWO boys on the front cover picture are heading off on a fishing trip. They are making their way through a picturesque old Dutch town, which contrasts with the modern bike and ‘hoverboard’ they are riding. There really are some interesting ways to get around these days!

This reminded me of a television programme, where the participants had to make the journey to a target destination, using whatever means of transport they could find. These included



all sorts: from buses and motorcycles to camels, helicopters and a tuk-tuk. The entertainment came from the travel, but the effort, imagination and perseverance of those trying to reach the goal were impressive.

Focus on the Goal

The Apostle Paul uses this sort of language in Philippians, speaking about his own life.

He had everything that a Jew of his time could want: a family pedigree, high quality education and strong standing amongst his peers. However, he wrote:

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:7–8).

He was happy to turn his back on all his privileges, so that he could ‘gain Christ’. What did he mean by this? He wanted to be associated with Jesus Christ – his way of life, his willingness to die to self and live for God, and to know the power which raised Jesus from the dead.

That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death (v10).

He also wanted to be part of the resurrection himself – to be part of the Kingdom of God. And he was willing to do whatever was necessary to do so.

If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead (v11).

That focus is repeated a few verses later.

I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (v14).

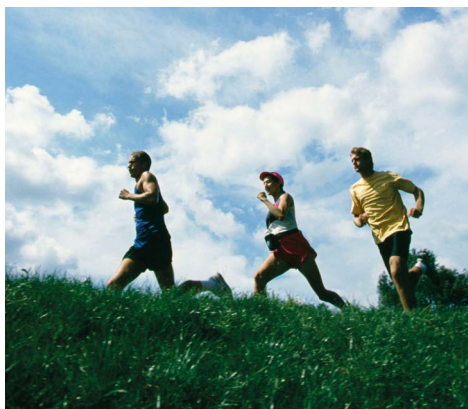
There is a word–play here which is not clear in the English Bible. In the Greek original, ‘press towards’ is also translated ‘persecuted’. Paul had previously persecuted the young church with great energy, having people imprisoned and executed. After his conversion, he put that energy into preaching, building the church, and building his own relationship with the Lord God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Using that Energy Correctly

It would be easy to misunderstand Paul here. Was he saying that it doesn’t matter how we get there? Did he mean that the end justifies the means? No – and he is very clear about this.

Writing to Timothy, a young believer, Paul used the image of an athlete to explain this. Sportspeople are individuals with whom we associate effort, focus and energy.

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



Later in the chapter, Paul reminds Timothy of the need to make effort, to do it in the right way, and to be guided by the Bible:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (v15).

Removing What’s Wrong

God has told us how He wants us to live in order to please Him. It means copying the example of Jesus to the best of our ability. It also means getting rid of anything in our life which holds us back. In Hebrews chapter 11 is a catalogue of faithful men and women who did these things, and are good examples. Chapter 12 starts like this:

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, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1–2).

The message is clear. If we want to be part of God’s family and be part of His kingdom when Jesus returns to the earth, then we need to focus on that. We need to understand how God wants us to live, and then do whatever we can to please Him.

He does not expect perfection – only Jesus managed that – but He does want us to try to the best of our ability. That’s good news, because it is possible for every one of us.