

Sunday, June 3, 2012

Finishing Your Race #2
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The apostle Paul would take natural truths and bring them over into the spiritual realm to impart a principle to his people that would enable them to overcome.

We all know what it's like to start and what it's like to not finish when we start something. How do we prepare to run this race we are in called life? When we get saved God's grace is so abundant totally apart from works and anything that we could do to be saved. Jesus paid the price completely and fully by the blood he shed.

We enter this race by virtue of the new birth, we come out of the starting gate and it is a course we have never run. When you are an inexperienced runner you don't know how to pace yourself for the long distances, you can seek the advice of a coach but most of the times it comes by doing and experience. People can be spiritually coached and some will listen and some won't. There has to be a willingness to listen and cooperate with what is being taught. When we begin to run our spiritual race we realize it is challenging and the devil has set up some circumstances and we don't know how to handle them when they come our way. We forget that we are not in a 100 meter dash but that we are in it for the long haul running a marathon.

How to prepare to run your race

1 Corinthians 9:24 (KJV)

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

Other translations say to run your race to win. Get a little of competitiveness in you spiritually and somehow get a mindset that you are going to run faster than your adversary the devil.

1 Corinthians 9:25-27 (KJV)

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.

The Grecians loved to go to stadium games. In this passage of scripture Paul says if you are going to finish your spiritual race you must develop the same passion that you have for the stadium games that you go to see.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (MSG)

²⁴⁻²⁵You've all been to the stadium and seen the athletes race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win. All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You're after one that's gold eternally.

²⁶⁻²⁷I don't know about you, but I'm running hard for the finish line. I'm giving it everything I've got. No sloppy living for me! I'm staying alert and in top condition. I'm not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else all about it and then missing out myself.

Everyone has their own mindset and they will do according to what it is. There is nothing wrong with that. It seems that lessons learned the hard way are not soon forgotten. But remember the bible teaches us it's good to be stubborn for the right reasons but it can be to our destruction. When this occurs the bible says that it is as witchcraft. It is good to be stubborn as long as it is within the word of God. If you don't have any there will be no determination. You must run to win.

In verse 25 **temperance** means discipline or self-control and strive **for the mastery means** to struggle or contend with an adversary. Ephesians 6 tells us who the adversary is and specifically in verse 12;

Ephesians 6:12 (KJV)

¹²For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

We do at times contend with an adversary. Your adversary the devil is going to do everything he can to not just cause us to stumble but to get out of the race and not finish.

In the natural there may be time when you are running a race that you feel like walking but if you are going to contend to be a competitor in the race you keep going.

We cannot afford to get out of our spiritual race and we must run it to win.

II Timothy was the last epistle that Paul wrote before he was beheaded. It is amazing that he had these words to say.

2 Timothy 4:6-8 (KJV)

⁶For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

⁷I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

It is so easy for us to get the wind taken out of our sail and decide that we want to quit and throw in the towel when things start to not go our way. Paul kept his eye on the finish line and was not consumed with the adversity that he was going through. He knew life was a marathon and he was going to keep on running even in the midst of difficult and trying times.

All good athletes train hard. If we are not willing to train hard we have chosen the wrong race. Our reward at the end is our eternity in heaven in the arms of Jesus.

Somewhere in the journey of running our spiritual course unfortunately sloppy living grips us. we can run on the word of God for so long but over time we deplete it. We have to be consistently feeding our inner man because it runs out of food spiritually and it doesn't do what it ought to do to stay abreast spiritually and on top of things. Then the focus changes from the things that are spiritually important in our lives and our focus starts to focus on the natural things of life and we start to give our attention almost totally to those things and forget that we are running a spiritual race that leads to the arms of Jesus.

We are going to engage in spiritual conflict but we are going to win because Jesus Christ is the author and finisher of our faith.

Paul wrote Philippians while he was in prison. He wasn't whining or complaining and had a right to. He was in prison for preaching the gospel. Circumstances were against him. If we are going to finish our race and finish well we are going to have to do as Paul did and spoke of in the book of Philippians.

Philippians 3:13-14 (KJV)

¹³ Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

¹⁴ I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:13-14 (MSG)

Focused on the Goal

12-14 I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

Philippians 3:15-19 (MSG)

15-16 So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you'll see it yet! Now that we're on the right track, let's stay on it.

17-19 Stick with me, friends. Keep track of those you see running this same course, headed for this same goal. There are many out there taking other paths, choosing other goals, and trying to get you to go along with them. I've warned you of them many times; sadly, I'm having to do it again. All they want is easy street. They hate Christ's Cross. But easy street is a dead-end street. Those who live there make their bellies their gods; belches are their praise; all they can think of is their appetites.

How do you finish?

Hebrews 12:1-2 (KJV)

12 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

² 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2 (MSG)

Discipline in a Long-Distance Race

1-3 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 this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating 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!

We need to picture ourselves running into Jesus' arms when we finish our race here on earth.

Acts 20:24 (KJV)

²⁴ But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

When we get in the race we cannot let everything that comes our way blow us away. We are responsible for ourselves and ourselves alone. If we are going to finish our race with joy we are going to have to look in the mirror and know that the responsibility is on us.

Pastor prayed this prayer for those who haven't been running their race to win, for those who are inspired to run the race and to run their race with depth and an aim to win.

Father, right now we come into your presence and I pray that your spirit descends specially upon the men and women. Father you choose them before the foundations of the world, they have entered into the race, they have the ability and talent to do it because you gave it to them, and I pray right now in Jesus name the tormenting spirit that is so deceitful that causes us to be slothful at different times in our life we break its power and release a special invigoration of the spirit of God that strengthens our inner man to enable them to run their race and pray that the time is redeemed and they catch up in Jesus name. I pray right now that they are reinvigorated to run their race with passion, earnestness and accuracy. In Jesus name. Amen. And amen.

