

Equipped to run the race - and win!

When was the last time you ran a race? Perhaps it was several years ago going back to school sports day, or maybe it was quite recently when you took part in a local marathon or charity run.

I loved running when I was at school and my favourite race was the 100 metres. I would set my eye on the finishing tape and just go for it as fast as I could! Running the 200 metre race was a bit more demanding, as we had to run in a curve and the finishing tape wasn't always in sight. But the ones I didn't enjoy at all were the 400 and 800 metre races. I was a sprinter and could run fast at a constant speed, but this wasn't the way to do well in the longer races. For them, you had to pace yourself, so that you didn't run too slowly at the start, but didn't set off too quickly and end up running out of steam before you were half-way round the track!

Christian living can be compared to a race - not a quick sprint, but a lengthy, arduous steeplechase, where we have to negotiate hurdles and other obstacles along the way. The apostle Paul urges Christians to “*run in such a way as to get the prize*”¹. How can we do this? Paul gives us some pointers in the next few verses.

Engage in strict training.² Another word for training is discipline, a concept many of us don't like. But, in living out our Christian faith, discipline has an important role to play. We need to discipline ourselves to read the Bible daily so we can learn and apply God's truth to our everyday situations. We also need to exercise discipline in prayer. This means building in to our lives consistent times of prayer when we praise and worship our Lord, confess specific sins, and bring our requests to him. Discipline is also important in choosing what we allow into our minds, either through our eyes or ears. Therefore, we need to be selective about what we read or watch on TV. We need to be careful about what we listen to, for example, unclean jokes, gossip, or prolonged negative talk, are just some of the things we would do well to avoid.

Run with purpose.³ The purpose of every Christian is to bring honour and glory to Jesus Christ. Practically speaking, how do we do this? The New Testament book of Hebrews gives us some ideas.

1. Get rid of excess baggage⁴. We need to let go of anything that holds us back in our Christian lives - this could be something that's not wrong in itself, but it might hinder or distract us by taking up too much of our time or our thoughts. Then there are specific sins that trip us up and make it difficult to run with purpose. Can you think of a particular sin that is causing you to stumble in the race? Don't be afraid to face up to it and deal with it with God's help.
2. Fix your eyes on Jesus⁵. This involves making sure that he remains the focus of our lives, day in, day out. But sometimes, if we're holding on to a wrong attitude or behaviour, this can make it difficult for us to look Jesus in the eye, as it were. If this is true of you at the present time, admit your problem to God and turn away from it. You'll find you'll be able to run the race much more easily.
3. Think about what Jesus suffered to make us right with God⁶. According to this verse, this is so we “*will not grow weary and lose heart.*” What an encouragement for us to keep running with purpose!

Be self-controlled⁷. All athletes who are running to win have to control their bodies by watching what they eat; how much rest they get; by taking part in training sessions; etc. They wouldn't get far on the race track without self-control in these areas. Where might you have a problem with self-control? Food and drink? Sexual temptation? Anger? Speech? If lack of self-control is an issue for you, talk to God about it. Remember he has equipped you with everything you need to run the race - and win!

¹ 1 Corinthians 9:24

² 1 Corinthians 9:25

³ 1 Corinthians 9:26

⁴ Hebrews 12:1

⁵ Hebrews 12:2

⁶ Hebrews 12:3

⁷ 1 Corinthians 9:27