

Equipped to run well

The Olympic Games is a huge sporting event. With over 300 events taking place from around 30 sports, the host city gets packed with spectators and competitors. Of all the events on offer, my favourites are the track events. I never cease to be amazed at the speed of the sprinters in the 100 and 200 metres races, while I admire the stamina needed to successfully complete the longer races, such as the 3,000 metre steeplechase.

Life 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. In one of his letters to the church in Corinth, the apostle Paul uses athletic imagery to encourage the people there to run the race of life well and urges them to “*run in such a way as to get the prize*”.¹ He then goes on to identify ways in which they - and we - can do this. Like Olympic athletes, we need to engage in strict training, run with purpose, and be self-controlled.

Engage in strict training²

Another word for training is discipline, a concept many of us don't like but it's a necessary component of living well. We need to discipline ourselves to regularly read the Bible 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 God, 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. As such, we need to be careful about what we read or watch. We need to be careful about what we listen to - unclean jokes, gossip, or prolonged negative talk, are just some of the things we would do well to avoid.

Run with purpose³

The purpose of every follower of Jesus Christ is to bring honour and glory to him. **Hebrews 12:1-3** gives us some pointers. Firstly, get rid of excess baggage (verse 1). 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. Secondly, fix your eyes on Jesus (verse 2). 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, confess the sin and turn from it. You'll find you'll be able to run the race much more easily. Thirdly, think about what Jesus suffered to make us right with God (verse 3). 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-controlled⁴

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 well!

¹ 1 Corinthians 9:24 (NIV)

² verse 25

³ verse 26

⁴ verse 27