

Running The Race

At 7 P.M. on October 20, 1968, a few thousand spectators remained in the Mexico City Olympic Stadium. It was cool and dark. The last of the marathon runners, each exhausted, were being carried off to first-aid stations. More than an hour earlier, Mamo Wolde of Ethiopia – looking as fresh as when he started the race - crossed the finish line, the winner of the 26 mile, 385 yard event. As the remaining spectators prepared to leave, those sitting near the marathon gates suddenly heard the sound of sirens and police whistles. All eyes turned to the gate. A lone figure wearing the colors of Tanzania entered the stadium. His name was John Stephen Akhwari. He was the last man to finish the marathon. His leg bloodied and bandaged, severely injured in a fall, he grimaced with each step. He hobbled around the 400-meter track. The spectators rose and applauded him as if he were the winner. After crossing the finish line, Akhwari slowly walked off the field without turning to the cheering crowd. In view of his injury and having no chance of winning a medal, someone asked him why he had not quit. He replied, "My country did not send me 7,000 miles to start the race. They sent me 7,000 miles to finish it."

If a reporter had interviewed Paul at the finish line of his race, here is what they would have heard:

- **2 Timothy 4:7 (KJV)** I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:
- **2 Timothy 4:7 (MSG)** This is the only race worth running. I've run hard right to the finish, believed all the way.

That's the way Paul lived his entire life:

- **1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (KJV)** Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. 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. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 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.
- **1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (MSG)** You'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. I 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.

HOW IS LIFE LIKE A RACE?

- Like a race, life has a challenging course with many ups and downs
- Like a race, life has a judge who decides where we place at the end
- Like a race, life has a finish line (called death or the rapture)
- Like a race, life ends with the "winners" receiving their rewards

From the world's perspective, winning is based on ...

- Intelligence – the smarter you are the more respect you will receive
- Wealth – the more money you have the happier you will be
- Image – the better you appear the more popular you will be
- Power – the stronger you are the more control you will have

The world views success as being "number one" but God views success as making HIM number one! There is no question that the race of life is going to be full of disappointment, discouragement, and even defeat ... but we can overcome all of that if we just put our HOPE in God.

Hebrews 6:19 (KJV) Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

The Bible calls hope "an anchor of the soul." Anchors stabilize and keep us from drifting. Without an anchor, a boat is at the mercy of the winds and currents. And without HOPE to carry us through, we're at the mercy of life's unpredictable weather.

One of the Old Testament words for hope is TIQVAH which literally means "a cord." It comes from QAVAH which means "to bind together by twisting" (like a braid of rope). HOPE CONNECTS US TO THE THRONE OF GOD! This same Hebrew word is translated "wait" in Isaiah 40:31 ...

Isaiah 40:31 (KJV) But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

HOPE – being connected to God – brings us strength in the race of life. If we run connected to God, we win; if not, we will not finish the race.

VIDEO CLIP: TEAM HOYT

He has no hands but our hands to do his work today.
He has no feet but our feet to lead others in his way.
He has no voice but our voice to tell them how he died.
He has no help but our help to lead them to his side.

The goal is not to run ALONE, but to win TOGETHER – we're a BODY!

Hebrews 11 is like a huge stadium in which the saints of all the ages run their lap around the track and then watch us from the stands ...

Hebrews 11

4 – by faith Abel

5 – by faith Enoch

7 – by faith Noah

8 – by faith Abraham

20 – by faith Isaac

21 – by faith Jacob

22 – by faith Joseph

23 – by faith Moses

31 – by faith the harlot Rahab

39 – and these all

Hebrews 12:1 (KJV) 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,

Did you notice anything about our “examples” who ran the race of life before us? They were all handicapped in some way!

We’re not running in the **Olympics**, where all the glory goes to one winner – we’re running in the **Special Olympics**, where every one of us has a disability, but if you just finish you’re a winner!

You’ve perhaps heard the story from a 1976 track and field event in Spokane, Washington where a handicapped young participant fell and injured himself badly during the 100-yard dash. The amazing thing was that some of his competitors stopped to pick him up and help him finish the race, even though it slowed them down. That’s our goal as the church – to finish the race TOGETHER!

VIDEO CLIP: SPECIAL OLYMPICS AD

2 Timothy 4:8 (MSG) All that's left now is the shouting—God's applause! Depend on it, he's an honest judge. He'll do right not only by me, but by everyone eager for his coming.

Galatians 5:7 (KJV) Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?

If you’re not in the race ... Get in the race!

If you’ve quit running ... Get back in the race!

If you’re struggling ... Stay in the race!

RUN TOGETHER!