

Run To Win!

1 Corinthians 9:24 (KJV) Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

1 Corinthians 9:24 (MSG) You've all been to the stadium and seen the athletes race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win.

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

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,

2 Timothy 4:7-8 (KJV) I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 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.

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

But from God's perspective, winning is based on something else entirely:

Ecclesiastes 9:11 (KJV) I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

Ecclesiastes 9:11 (CEV) Here is something else I have learned: The fastest runners and the greatest heroes don't always win races and battles. Wisdom, intelligence, and skill don't always make you healthy, rich, or popular. We each have our share of bad luck.

You may not like this principle of life, but you can't do anything about it: LIFE ISN'T FAIR! Our human handicap is that we can try ever so hard to succeed and still fail – sometimes through no fault of our own!

Matthew 5:45 (KJV) That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

The plain fact of the matter is that no matter how hard we try in this race called life, we have still left the outcome up to chance, UNLESS WE RUN THE RACE THE WAY GOD INTENDS US TO!

Romans 9:16 (KJV) So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

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 defeat ... but we can overcome all of that if we just put our HOPE in God.

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."

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 renewed strength in the race of life. If we run connected to God, we win; if not, we will not finish the race. WE HAVE TO RUN CORRECTLY! We have to run to win!

WRONG WAYS TO RUN:

RUNNING RELIGIOUSLY WITHOUT POWER

2 Timothy 3:5 (KJV) Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

The Pharisees were religious, but they went through the motions without a real experience. They knew the right words to say and knew how to appear, but they had little reality or genuine relationship with God.

Matthew 22:29 (KJV) Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.

Revelation 3:1 (KJV) And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, was a bit like this. He was in the Temple every week performing his religious duties and worshipping faithfully. But when God broke in to his life, he could not respond with faith because he had gotten so used to the status quo.

The lame man at the pool of Bethesda was definitely like this. He had laid beside the pool for so many years waiting for the moving of the waters that he didn't even recognize his deliverance when Jesus stood beside him!

RUNNING FROM YOUR ENEMIES

There will obviously be times in our lives when we should avoid physical confrontations, if at all possible. There are oppressive situations that at times we need to get away from. However, one thing we should never flee from and that is our spiritual enemies!

Hebrews 12:12 (KJV) Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees;

The word “feeble” in this verse is the word “paraluo” from which we get the English word “paralyzed.” Fear paralyzes our lives! That’s what happened to Israel – right after they experienced a glorious deliverance from Egypt. After God totally decimated their enemies, they were still intimidated when they saw the giants of Canaan. THEY WANTED GOD TO DEAL WITH THE CANAANITES IN THE SAME WAY AS HE DEALT WITH THE EGYPTIANS, WITHOUT THEM HAVING TO FIGHT AT ALL. When that did not occur, they lost their confidence.

The next step was predictable: they began to magnify their enemy’s power above their own, and even above God’s. Running life’s race the wrong way distorts our vision, and we look at our enemies through a magnifying glass.

Numbers 13:33 (KJV) And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

Mark Twain: “I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them have never happened.”

RUNNING WITH YOUR ENEMIES

Judas Iscariot definitely ran the wrong way in life’s race, even though he started out with good motives. He believed that the Messiah would overthrow the Roman government and set up an earthly throne (just like all the other disciples!). However, when Jesus didn’t do this Judas became incredibly disillusioned and it created bitterness in his heart that was fatal to him.

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

RUNNING AWAY FROM GOD

Failed expectations in this life can be both devastating and debilitating. Like a balloon losing air, the rapid deflation of our dreams can send our emotions spinning haphazardly out of control. This happened to the disciples, who never expected the crucifixion to happen!

They collectively began to run away from God's plan and back to their old lives and vocations. Enough of this "save the world" stuff! Fishing we understand! They are running from their purpose and destiny.

John 21:3 (KJV) Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing.

Do you think that they caught nothing was a mere coincidence? No way! In His mercy, God was saying "I will not allow you to prosper in running away from Me back to your old life; I am too committed to your destiny!" Only when they turned around and followed His word did the Lord perform a miracle on their behalf.

So, when the plans seem to have changed and God didn't have the courtesy to inform you, trust Him! Don't run away! When nothing seems to make sense, remember that He is somewhere near, preparing you a meal that will sustain you.

John 21:9 (KJV) As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.

Psalms 23:5 (KJV) Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

RUNNING AHEAD OF GOD

After ten years of waiting for their promised son, Abraham and Sarah began to speculate how they could fulfill the promise themselves (without God, if necessary). The result was Ishmael, a son without promise, a divided family, and centuries of political and religious conflict. Running ahead of God creates major problems!

Next, Abraham and Sarah did something typical of human beings – they asked God to accept their connived solution and make it His!

Genesis 17:18 (KJV) And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!

Please let my plan become yours, God! But because He knows the end from the beginning, God refuses to accept our plans. WHY? BECAUSE HE WANTS A SUPERNATURAL ELEMENT IN OUR DESTINIES THAT WILL KEEP US DEPENDENT ON HIM. That's why He gives us destinies that rise above anything we could possibly produce on our own. That isn't unkind, it's gracious! Who would want to settle for a natural inheritance when you could have a spiritual one?

Genesis 21:9-11 (KJV) And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son.

If you have run ahead of God and produced an Ishmael or two (who hasn't?), sooner or later your fleshly provision will clash with your spiritual destiny and Ishmael will have to go. This can be painful, but it's absolutely necessary ... and it's for the ultimate good! EVEN WHEN WE HAVE SPOILED GOD'S PLAN, HE HAS ANOTHER WAITING FOR US!

Lamentations 3:22-24 (KJV) It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

This proved true in the life of one of history's great composers ...

He was a has-been, a fossil, a relic, an old foggy, but it hadn't always been so. As a young man, George Frederic Handel was the talk of England, the best paid composer on earth, and his fame soared around the world. But the glory passed, audiences dwindled, and one project after another failed. Handel grew depressed. The stress brought on a case of palsy that crippled some of his fingers. "Handel's great days are over," wrote Frederick the Great, "his inspiration is exhausted."

Yet his troubles also matured him, and his music became more heartfelt. One morning Handel received a collection of various biblical text from Charles Jennens. The opening words from Isaiah 40 moved Handel: "Comfort ye my people."

On August 22, 1741, he began composing music for the words. Twenty-three days later, the world had "Messiah," which opened in London to enormous crowds on March 23, 1743. Handel led from his harpsichord, and King George II, who was present that night, surprised everyone by leaping to his feet during the "Hallelujah Chorus." From that day audiences everywhere have stood in reverence during the stirring words: "Hallelujah! And He shall reign forever and ever."

The world would be a poorer place if Handel had not let God get rid of his Ishmaels and bring his Isaac into the world!

**SO HOW DO YOU WIN IN THIS RACE CALLED LIFE?
JUST KEEP RUNNING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION!**

In the book "The Ten Laws of Lasting Love," Paul Pearsall relates an occasion in his fight against cancer when he and his wife had to overcome an attack on their hope:

Any time a doctor came with news of my progress, my wife would join with me in a mutual embrace. The reports were seldom good during the early phases of my illness, and one day a doctor brought particularly frightening news. Gazing at his clipboard, he murmured, "It doesn't look like you're going to make it."

Before I could ask a question of this doomsayer, my wife stood up, handed me my robe, adjusted the tubes attached to my body and said, "Let's get out of here. This man is a risk to your health." As she helped me struggle to the door, the doctor approached us. "Stay back," demanded my wife. "Stay away from us."

As we walked together down the hall, the doctor attempted to catch up with us. "Keep going," said my wife, pushing the intravenous stand. "We're going to talk to someone who really knows what is going on." Then she held up her hand to the doctor. "Don't come any closer to us."

The two of us moved as one. We fled to the safety and hope of a doctor who did not confuse diagnosis with verdict.

DON'T CONFUSE DIAGNOSIS WITH VERDICT!
DON'T CONFUSE FEELINGS WITH FACT!
DON'T CONFUSE RIGHT NOW WITH ALWAYS!

RUN TO WIN! RUN WITH HOPE!