**Life is a Distance Race**

The Olympic games have been around for a long time. From the 8th century BC until the 4th century AD, the games were held every four years in Olympia in southern Greece. By 648 BC, events included foot races, a pentathlon (foot race, long jump, discus and javelin throws and wrestling), boxing and chariot races.

The Romans were in control when Christ came, but the games were still going on. The apostle Paul often drew analogies between these athletic events and important aspects of living the Christian life.

**Self-Discipline.** In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul pointed out that athletes exercise self-control in all things because they are preparing for a race that will crown only one winner. The Christian life is a race that is infinitely more consequential. Our goal is to receive, not a perishable wreath, but an imperishable crown of life. While it is true that we cannot earn eternal salvation through meritorious works, we can disqualify ourselves by living undisciplined lives (v. 27).

**Following the Rules.** Paul wrote, “If anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules” (2 Timothy 2:5). Jesus put it this way: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter” (Matthew 7:21). Anyone running the race as a Christian must be diligent to understand what the will of the Lord is (Ephesians 5:17), then live by His authority (Colossians 3:17).

**Perseverance.** The writer of the book of Hebrews admonished us to “run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1). The Christian race is not a 100 meter sprint, it is a long-distance race. The only way we can persevere is, like any good distance runner, to “lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us” (v. 1).

**Keeping Our Eye on the Finish Line.** Verse two of Hebrews 12 emphasizes the importance of maintaining focus to enduring the challenges of the race. “…fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.” Paul described this single-minded focus this way: “One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

As Christians, we can learn a lot from dedicated athletes. We must know the rules and God’s word is the only place they can be found. With self-discipline, we must run faithfully for a lifetime by setting aside the sins that have plagued us in the past and stay focused on Jesus, the One who authored our faith and the One who can help us cross the finish line.

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