

DISCIPLESHIP

Running The Race - Even If You're Not A Runner

Discussion

Over the past year and a half or so I've become an avid walker, probably averaging two and half hours a day. I have a friend who is also an avid walker, and we will regularly do one to two hours of walking together. The other day as we walked, we were remembering our high school days, and I mentioned that I ran cross-country track in high school. My friend immediately remarked that he never cared for track and field events, but he had been a football player and loved it.

What he didn't like was the coach pushing them into track and field events during football's off season. He decided that since he didn't like running but he did like hitting people, he would become a sprinter. This way, he only had to run a very short race and that would be it for track, plus it helped him develop quickness, which he could use in football to more rapidly hit someone.

I realized immediately that there were a lot of the differences in our thinking and our approaches to the challenges and tasks of life (plus I'm not big on hitting people). As a long distance cross-country runner, my training, planning, and execution before and during a race were all completely different from his. In a sprint, it's all about getting off the starting line quickly, then running as fast as you can for a short distance. In fact, the last thing you want to see as a sprinter during a race is someone passing you, your goal from the outset is to be quicker than everyone else in the race.

In cross-country running, your thinking is completely different. You plan for a race that will traverse varying terrain and surfaces, while a sprinter is always on a gravel track and a flat surface. As a long distance runner, you learn to run in any condition because there is a high probability that in any race, the climate and other weather conditions will change over time; in contrast, a sprinter is not likely to encounter climate changes during the sprint.

The sprinter normally runs in front of a stadium full of fans, while the cross-country runner is lucky if a couple people even notice him or her. The sprinter puts all of his energy and strength into a quick burst of time, while the long distance runner has to learn to be patient, set a good pace, and conserve energy for the last half mile – where most races are won. Furthermore, unlike the sprinter, the long distance runner actually expects people to pass during the race – it's all about pace and running your individual race that assures the victory. As long you pass the lead runner just before the finish line, the other passes don't matter.

In the end, one runner is a tactical runner and the other a strategic one – but both run the race to win, but with a different pace and strategy. As I meditated on this, the Lord revealed something else to me – that everyone runs the race. That is, when the team bus pulls up to the field and the team gets off the bus, each of them – the javelin throwers, hurdlers, sprinters, milers, relay runners, long-jumpers, pole-vaulters and cross country runners – are all there to run their race – the one they've trained for, the one they're gifted for.

But so too are the trainers, the coaches, the managers, the equipment guys, the bus drivers, the referees, the timekeepers and that statisticians. All of them, on that day, are there to run the race set before them and to do it to the best of their ability. Even more importantly, while each has an individual race or job to do, all are there to win as a team, to be the absolute best team that they can be. Shouldn't we as Christians have the same attitude?

Sometimes I wonder if some of us don't run the race at all because we feel that we don't have the skills or gifts required; we don't think that we have a race to run. I think we look at really gifted people and assume that God is doing all His work through them, and we think "How could He possibly use me?" – and yet nothing could be further from the truth. If you are a believer and have accepted Christ as your personal Savior, he has a race for you, he has gifts and talents for you; your job is to ask him what he wants you to do and then be prepared to do it.

Just as with the track and field team, running the race as a Christ follower takes many people, not just the track stars. And every one of those people on the track team took the time to learn their jobs, to develop their talents and gifts, and to exercise between events to stay in shape. Whether it's the trainers or the runners or the timekeepers, all of them have to stay sharp, to exercise, and to learn, in order to be at the top of their game or profession – and so do we.

This week, take the time to seek out God and ask Him what His will is for you; then respond by getting in the race. It is only through careful attention to preparing for a race that we can actually run the race. You don't have to be a winner, you just have to run the best race that you are capable of, or be the best trainer or coach or bus driver. Do all that you do to the glory of God, and you will be running the race that God has set before you – even if you're not a runner.

In Christ,

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July 3, 2009