

You Want Me to do What?

Hebrews 12: 1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Introduction:

Imagine a group of people coming to your home and interrupting your Twinkie-eating, TV-watching routine with an urgent message: Good News!

We are from the United States Olympic Committee.

We have been looking for someone to run the marathon in the next Olympics.

We have statistics on every person in the entire nation on computer.

We have determined that out of the three hundred million people in this country, you are the one person in America with a chance to bring home the gold medal in the marathon.

So, you are chosen.

You are on the team.

You will run the race.

You are surprised because the farthest you've run in years is from the couch to the refrigerator.

The one time you began a running program you ran down your driveway, onto the sidewalk in front of your house getting to the end of your yard only to turn around exhausted and panting barely making it back to your La-Z-Boy lounge.

And just yesterday you were sweating so profusely, dripping like a faucet on the clean kitchen floor, your wife asks you, "Did you go for a jog?"

"No, but I did get the mail."



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After the shock of being selected passes, you are gripped by the realization of what's happening in your life.

You picture yourself mingling with the elite athletes of the world.

You allow yourself to imagine that maybe you do have what it takes to run the race.

At night you dream about standing on the podium after the race and hearing the national anthem, seeing the flag raised, and bending low to receive the gold medal.

You begin to feel a rush of emotion.

And you get caught up in this idea, you say to yourself, "This is the race I was created to run. This is my destiny. This is why I was born."

This race becomes the great passion of your life.

It begins to dominate your mind.

It occupies every waking moment.

To run the race well - to win it if you can - becomes the central focus of your existence.

It is what gets you out of bed in the morning.

It is what you live for.

Now, before you just tune me out, or hit the disqualification for consideration button, let's take a few minutes to consider what the Bible says about the real and most important race.

The first thing we have to look at a:

I. The characteristics of the race

As a believer in Jesus Christ, you run a race.



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It, too, is the race of a lifetime.

It, too, should dominate your mind.

It, too, should occupy your waking moments.

It, too, must become the central focus of your existence.

It, too, should be what you live for.

Consider again *Hebrews 12: 1* ***Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,***

Now, let's continue in our consideration of the characteristics of running a marathon.

A. You have been chosen for the race

That's correct, in this race, like the Olympic race, you have been chosen.

This time, however, the Olympic Committee is not selecting; but God Almighty has chosen you.

He has chosen you to run the race of a lifetime.

Imagine the thrill if an Olympic committee knocked on your door selecting you to represent your country?

Imagine, more importantly, God is knocking on the door of your heart selecting you for his team.

If you have trusted in Jesus Christ God has done just that.

B. The race is both a contest and a conflict

This is no ordinary race.



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The Greek word for race is agon from which we get our word agony.

The race is a contest in daily progress toward Christ-likeness.

In many respects we race not against opponents, but against ourselves.

The question becomes, am I more like Jesus today than we were yesterday?

The race is a conflict in that there is an internal struggle of the soul.

Our natural bent is toward sinfulness and laziness.

Are we engaging in the necessary disciplines and activities that will enable us to grow and mature in Christ-likeness?

C. The race is unique to you

It has been marked out especially for you.

Like the orange cones on the roadway that indicate the path of a long distant race, God has marked out a race distinctive for you that will take you on an adventure.

While the destination is the same for everyone - a life like Jesus, the journey that gets us there is different for everyone.

Stop comparing your track to everyone else's track.

D. The race has no time outs

Like the marathon run, this race has no time outs, no breaks, no intermissions, and no halftimes.

We are instructed to run and keep on running.

E. The race is full of obstacles

Unlike the marathon and more like a steeplechase, this race is full of obstacles, barriers, hurdles, and hazards.



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They can't be avoided or erased.

They come in different sizes and at different stages.

Furthermore, there are no shortcuts.

F. You run to win this race

1 Corinthians 9: 24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.

Winning is not beating the other runners.

The prize is becoming a spiritual champion.

A spiritual champion is one sold out to Jesus, straining to become more like him everyday.

The finish line of faith is a life that is more Christian today than it was yesterday.

The goal is not necessarily perfection, but definitely progress.

G. Winning the race will require great endurance

Winning this race will require

not only great endurance,

but perseverance,

patience,

and resolve.

Victory requires that we run with

undying persistence,

steadfast endurance

until we arrive at the finish line victorious.

II. The principle for the race

Back to my home and the U.S. Olympic Committee's invitation.

It dawns on me: I can't run a marathon.

More to the point, I can't run a marathon even if I try really, really hard.

If you are serious about seizing the gold and standing on the winner's platform, you will have to enter into a lifetime of training.

You must arrange your life around certain practices that will enable you to do what you cannot do now by willpower alone.

Do you realize the number of hours an Olympian trains?

The average Olympian trains four hours per day, 310 days per year, for six years before succeeding.

That translates into more than 7,000 hours of training for an event that may last a very short time.

This need for training is not only for athletes; it is required for playing a musical instrument, learning a new language, or acquiring a new skill.

In fact, it is mandatory for any significant challenge in life - including becoming a spiritual champion.

The single most important principle for running the race toward becoming a spiritual champion is:

Spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder, but of training wisely.

According to **1 Tim. 4: 7** The apostle Paul encouraged his young Timothy to, "**train yourself in godliness.**"

This thought lies behind Paul's advice to the church in **1 Corinthians 9: 25** **Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.**



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When it comes to running marathons or becoming a spiritual champion, I'll say it again, the need is not to try harder but to train wisely.

How many times have you heard a sermon or listened to a Bible Study or read a book about following Jesus and said to yourself: "I've got to try harder to be a better Christian"?

That's like me saying, "I'm going to try really hard to compete in a triathlon."

It won't happen by an act of my will alone.

I would only be able compete in a triathlon by actually training for a triathlon.

We arrange our life around certain disciplines that help us gain power and strength to become more like Jesus each day, to live a life as Jesus taught and modeled.

The activities of prayer, Bible Study, worship, service, evangelism, stewardship are among the needed the disciplines for running the spiritual race.

- **Prayer:** How often am I talking with Father each day?
- **Bible Study:** Am I engaged in a regular time of Bible reading, devotion, and study?
- **Worship:** Am I praising Father in regular times of worship?
- **Service:** Am I using my God-given gifts to serve Him and his people?
- **Evangelism:** Have I spoken to someone recently regarding his or her relationship with God?
- **Stewardship:** Am I investing regularly and consistently in God's church with my time, talents, and financial resources?

The secret to winning the race, to truly live a Christlike life, is to order my life around those activities, disciplines, and practices that were modeled by Christ, in order to accomplish through training what we cannot now do by trying.

III. The need for the race

Returning to the notion of running a marathon in the next Olympics, you begin working out; you quickly understand the need for intentional training.

The Olympic Committee enlisted you to run, not a sprint, but a 26.2-mile endurance competition.

In a sprint, you run a short distance as fast as you can.

Speed is of utmost importance.

But in a long-distance contest such as a marathon, endurance is the key.

You want to make it to the end.

I'm told that two critical times exist in a marathon race.

The first one is at the beginning.

As you leave the starting line, you feel so good that you believe that you can keep up this pace throughout the race.

The temptation is to run too fast too soon.

Energy is expended and none is left for the end of the race.

The second critical time in a marathon is at the halfway point.

You suddenly realize that you still have as far to go as you've already run and you're already very tired.

Runners call it "hitting the wall."

You've come to the end of your stamina and you're not sure you can put one foot in front of the other anymore.

Races are not always won by the fastest.

But rather by the one that keeps hanging on, who refuses to give up.



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Those who persist prevail.

D.H. Groberg was a poet who wrote a poem called, "The Race." It describes a young boy who ran a race, falling many times, yet finishing.

He wrote in one stanza

And to his dad he sadly said,
"I didn't do too well."
"To me, you won," his father said.
"You rose each time you fell."

Likewise, the great need for spiritual races is persistence.

Time and time again The Scriptures exhort us to persist and endure.

The apostle Paul prayed for the Colossians **"May you be strengthened with all power . . . for all endurance and patience" (Col. 1:11)**. Paul reminded Timothy, **"if we endure, we will also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12)**.

Then the writer of *Hebrews* states, **"For you need endurance, so that after you have done God's will, you may receive what was promised" (Heb. 10:36)**.

In the spiritual race you are running, don't quit.

Never give up.

Keep going.

If you have tripped and fallen, don't stay down.

Maybe life has thrown you some curve balls.

Maybe in your race you've been knocked off your feet a few times.

You are thinking since you're already on the ground, there's no point in getting back up.

Rather than getting up you're planning on hanging it up.



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The movie, Chariots of Fire, is the true story of Eric Liddell, a man who ran in the 1924 Olympics for Scotland, then went on to become a missionary.

Before his run in the Olympics, Eric Liddell ran in a meet between England and France.

He ran the 100-, 220-, and 440-yard events.

In the 440, he got off to a bad start.

When the gun sounded, there was a lot of shoving to get in front to the inside lane.

Liddell tangled feet with J. J. Gillies of England and tumbled to the track.

He sat there dazed for a second, not knowing whether he could get up, when someone screamed, "Get up and run!"

He jumped to his feet and took off after the pack, which was now a full twenty yards ahead of him.

In a quarter mile, that's a long distance to make up.

In his unorthodox style of running he took off after the pack.

He pulled into fourth place ten yards behind the leader, J. J. Gillies.

With forty yards to go, he pulled into third place, then second.

Right at the tape he passed Gillies, stuck his chest out, won the race, and collapsed to the track in total exhaustion.

Medical personnel had to assist him off the track that day.

An article appearing the next day in The Scotsman newspaper said, "The circumstances in which Liddell won the race made it a performance bordering on the miraculous.

There is something noble and honorable about not quitting - about getting back up and dusting yourself off and continuing to compete.



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Remember it is not about finishing last or finishing first, but simply about finishing.

Don't give up on God because he hasn't given up on you.

You can do this.

You can finish the race.

You can bring home the gold.

Conclusion:

Back to your home, the Olympic Committee leaves.

You are left pondering their proposal.

It all comes down to one question: Will we engage in the training so that we will have the endurance to run the race?

Will we get off the couch and get in the race?

The same question applies to the spiritual race: Will we engage in the training so that we will have the endurance to run the race?

Will you get off the couch and get in the race?

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- I. The characteristics of the race
 - A. You have been chosen for the race
 - B. The race is both a contest and a conflict
 - C. The race is unique to you
 - D. The race has no time outs
 - E. The race is full of obstacles
 - F. You run to win this race
 - G. Winning the race will require great endurance

II. The principle for the race

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III. The need for the race