

Running the Race

Ed Dunn

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

—Hebrews 12:1

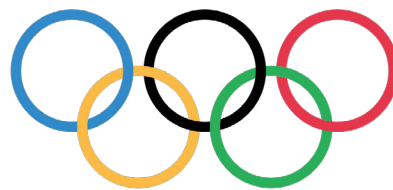
It's not about winning at the Olympic Games. It's about trying to win.

The motto is faster, higher, stronger, not fastest, highest, strongest. It's the trying that matters.

—Bronte Barratt, Australian swimmer and gold medalist



PARIS 2024



It's that special time of late-summer again that only rolls around every four years. For more than two weeks, we find ourselves huddled and glued to our television sets, watching for the exciting, record-setting people, places and times on the screens in front of us. The summer Olympic Games are here again, and this time will be held in Paris, France from July 26th through August 11th, 2024.

**ON YOUR MARKS! GET SET!
HERE WE GO!!**

But Wait! Oh No! A former two-time Olympic gold medalist false starts in the race for which he is favored, and is immediately and unceremoniously ushered off the track and disqualified from the

event. An up-and-coming sprint swimmer, expected to win multiple gold medals, suddenly pulls a back muscle and has to sit poolside for the duration of all of her events. A veteran equestrian show jumper unexplainably falls from his horse, fracturing his neck and is rushed in a frenzy via ambulance to the nearest hospital. *What is happening here?! How can these unfortunate events be taking place?*

I can't recall an Olympic Games where there wasn't some form of a shocking outcome like this for one or more of the competitors. Some events it seems never unfold as they are *supposed to unfold*. Sometimes the champion athlete just *doesn't win*. When this happens, we can be

left feeling a deep sense of personal disappointment. When this takes place, we can be faced with an honest reality of life:

There are times we can't run the race in front of us. Sometimes, we may have to walk, or even sit the race out, altogether.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

—Hebrews 12:1

The Apostle Paul uses such beautiful imagery when he writes of throwing off all that hinders

and entangles us. Having done so, Paul encourages us to run our race with perseverance. He reminds us that we are not alone in our running. Many have run the course marked out for them in life, and many will yet run the race.

As I read this verse, I don't believe Paul's imagery here demands that we must literally run every step of the way in our lives. Sometimes, physically, we can't run every step of the way. Due to unforeseen tragedy or events beyond our control, there are times we end up *walking the race*. Depending on the nature and severity of the tragedy or events, there are times we must simply stop, and sit the race out, altogether.

Years ago, I remember a high school two-mile run I was pushed into running by an over-eager coach. The two-mile run was a distance on the track I truly hated to run. Suffering from a side stitch that just wouldn't quit and shin splints halfway through the eight-lap race, I had to walk for a few hundred meters, and then, eventually, I had to step off the track and stop walking. I felt such a feeling of total dejection and defeat.

In our physical lives, we can be beset by weakness and limitation. We can face hardship after hardship and bear insults, persecutions and endless difficulties. In the face of these realities, we can feel dejected and defeated. Yet, spiritually, we hold close to the greatest comfort. We know that *the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*, as the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 9:11 reminds us.

Time and chance do indeed happen to us all. Yet, we find great comfort in the truth that Christ Jesus is our speed and our strength. Christ Jesus alone marks out our course in life. He is the author and the finisher of our race. He has already run our race, with and for us, and he is our sure and true victory.

In our weakness and limitation, Christ's strength makes us strong. As we share this strength, this victory with so great a cloud of witnesses, we rejoice that Christ is their strength and victory, as well. As we together share physical weakness and limitation, insult and persecution, so too we share spiritual glory and eternity in and with him. We share a crown that will not perish.

The Olympic Games can inspire us with the motto: *faster, higher, stronger*. The achievements of the greatest competitors can truly take our breath away. Of course, there are no guarantees that the favored champions will win and set new records. But we can watch and we can hope.

With so great a cloud of witnesses, we all closely watch and rest our hope in the greatest of champions, Christ Jesus our Lord. We huddle together and stay glued to his life, his transforming work in us, and his never-ending love and grace. In him, we let go of dejection and defeat. In him, we celebrate the greatest of victories. And so, we enjoy the splendor, the ceremony, and the excitement of the Games every four years. We celebrate the physical achievements and the new records set. We know that the best of these two weeks of competition is only a pointer.

We rest in the victory we have in Christ. □

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...my power is made perfect in weakness... so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. —2 Corinthians 12:9-10