

## Finishing the Right Race

“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace”  
(Acts 20:24, *NIV*).

**W**ayne Cordeiro in *Doing Church as a Team* tells of one Olympic marathon that will be remembered for its tragic ending. Two hours and four minutes after the race began, the first runner was sighted. He was way ahead of everyone else as he passed through a tunnel leading to the stadium. The crowd erupted as he came into their view. The runner was exhausted, stumbled, got up, and seemingly lost his sense of direction. He did not know which way to go. The crowd began yelling directions to the runner. Dazed the man ran one way, and then the other. He finally fell, laid there, as the crowd shouted, “Get up! Get up!” He struggled to stand and slowly ran to the finish line. Everyone was shocked when the judges announced that the fastest runner was disqualified. There were two finish lines: one for the sprints and one for the marathon. The “winner” ran to the wrong finish line and collapsed. The runner had finished, but in the wrong lane.

“So he sent his brethren away, and they departed: and he said unto them, See that ye fall not out by the way” (Genesis 45:24).

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:6-9).

Peter’s final words were, “I am warning you ahead of time, dear friends, so that you can watch out and not be carried away by the errors of these wicked people. I don't want you to lose your own secure footing” (2 Peter 3:17, *NLT*).

### Help Others in the Race

Many have heard of the remarkable Special Olympics story where one runner stumbled and another participant stopped, went back, (He did this despite shouting from the crowd, “Go forward”), and helped him up. They crossed the finish line together. The helper was in the lead, about to cross the finish line, when he turned around to help the fallen competitor. A West Virginia University commentary gave this conclusion, “Winners, in my estimation, are those who give their all to a task without losing sight of the deeper meaning of sharing and cooperation.” This story teaches us the importance of sharing, caring, cooperation, teamwork, and compassion.

A similar display of courage transpired in 1992. Derek Redmond (Great Britain) had an opportunity to fulfill his dream of winning the gold. He knelt to begin the 400-meter race. His eyes were fixed on the finish line. Ready, set, go! Derek accelerated past other runners, and fell to the ground with a torn hamstring. His dream was shattered; his work wasted. Derek tried to get up and stagger toward the finish line. It was Derek's Dad, wearing a Nike baseball cap, jumped from the stands, and pushed a security guard aside. He rushed to his son, lifted him, and told him, "Son, you do not have to do this."

His son replied, "Yes, I do!"

"Then we are going to finish this together."

They struggled arm-in-arm through the finish line.

We have an audience of faith heroes watching us run the race. The runner in Hebrews 12 can glance back at examples of faith—those that ran the race before us. He can look upward to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Be inspired, fellow countrymen, pilgrims on the earth are watching.

"Hold tightly to the word of life, so that when Christ returns, I will be proud that I did not lose the race and that my work was not useless" (Philippians 2:16, *NLT*).

### **Keep the Rules of the Race**

In the 1988 Olympics Ben Johnson and Carl Lewis were considered the two fastest men on earth. The race was set, the gun went off, and the runners sped down the 100-meter course. Ben Johnson set a new world record. Shortly after the finals, word came from the officials that Ben Johnson had tested positive for steroid use, and was disqualified. He had run unlawfully.

"Follow the Lord's rules for doing his work, just as an athlete either follows the rules or is disqualified and wins no prize" (2 Timothy 2:5, *NLT*).

A course is marked off with flags. Runners cannot cut corners and shorten the race. We must run the race that is set before us. Paul provides a set of rules in 2 Timothy.

"Run from anything that gives you the evil thoughts that young men often have, but stay close to anything that makes you want to do right. Have faith and love, and enjoy the companionship of those who love the Lord and have pure hearts. Again I say, don't get involved in foolish arguments, which only upset people and make them angry" (2 Timothy 2:22-24, *TLB*).

"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good,

treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God- having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them” (2 Timothy 3:1-5, *NIV*).

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

An article from the Highland Church of Christ poses these thought provoking questions:

1. Have you known anyone who broke the rules and did not finish the race?
2. How many of your mates (perhaps, in your Bible school class) started the race with you? Where are they today?
3. Has there been a time when you broke the rules and stumbled badly in the spiritual race?
4. What is making the Christian life difficult for you?

Remember, leader what one African proverb says, “When the big tree falls down small trees have a problem.”

Paul warns Timothy not to become entangled with the affairs of this life. We cannot be consumed with the things of the world. Watch for the weights and the sins that will slow you down, cause you to falter, and bring you to a standstill.

“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” (Hebrews 12:1).

Weights may not be sin, but anything that becomes a hindrance. Throw off anything that would keep you from having the advantage.

This list could include:

1. Laziness (Proverbs 6:10-11)
2. Love of money (1 Timothy 6:10)
3. Desire for pleasure and the things of the world (1 John 2:15-17).
4. Root of bitterness (Hebrews 12:15-16)

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:15-17).

“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright” (Hebrews 12:15-16).

Sin cripples us in the race. There are two major areas where pastors fall: financial and sexual sins. What are your private thoughts—the ones you would not dare tell anyone. Everyone has an area of temptation.

Steps to keep you from falling:

1. Make a covenant with your eyes (Psalms 101:2-3).
2. Free fornication and adultery (Proverbs 5:15-18; 6:24-32; 7:24-27)
3. Have a code of conduct pre-established.
4. Read and meditate on God’s Word (Joshua 1:8).
5. Have a life of prayer and fasting (Psalms 51; a fresh relationship with the Lord (Jeremiah 2:13).
6. Keep your eyes on Jesus (and not on others). He is standing there at the finish line (Matthew 25:23).
7. Be accountable to someone.
8. Stay on the altar of sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2).
9. Keep a right spirit (Luke 14:11; Psalms 51:10-12)

We need to take care of our attitude after we no longer occupy a position in the church. If removed from office, how well will you do at running the race?

### Study Questions

1. What spiritual significance can be derived from the story concerning the runner that finished the wrong race? \_\_\_\_\_

---



---



---

2. What were the Apostle Peter’s words in 2 Peter 3:17? \_\_\_\_\_

---



---



---

3. Why did Paul marvel (or become astonished) in Galatians 1:6-9? \_\_\_\_\_

---



---



---

4. What does Philippians 2:16 say? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

5. What is the benefit of the audience of faith heroes in Hebrews 12? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

6. Summarize the set of rules Paul gave to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:22-24. \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

7. Provide four examples of weights that could hinder a person in the Christian race. \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

---

---

8. What are two major areas where pastors are tempted to fall? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

9. List five things one can do to keep from falling into sin. \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---