

Runners in a Race

I. Introduction

A. Scripture uses a number of figures and metaphors to paint “portraits” for us of what being Christ’s disciples is about. For instance, the Christian lifestyle is likened to running a race. Consider some things Scripture teaches connected to this theme.

II. Dedication: Run to Receive the Prize

A. The backdrop for this portrait of discipleship is the Greek games that 1st century readers of inspired epistles were familiar with. The dedication needed to truly follow Christ is likened to that which was demanded of a runner in the Greek games who was committed to winning the prize. **1 Corinthians 9:24**

B. Athletes in these games, as with many professional athletes today, would devote themselves to the point of agony in order to excel as much as possible in their sport. This imagery is used different times in the New Testament to describe the level of devotion we must have to the truth. **Jude 3**

III. Training: Spiritual Exercise

A. The dedicated runner in the Greek games would commit to rigorous training to meet the demands of their race. Likewise, the Christian must engage in spiritual training and spiritual exercise to successfully run the Christian race. **1 Timothy 4:7-8; Hebrews 5:12-14**

IV. Discipline: Temperate in All Things

A. As a part of the athlete’s training and preparation, great temperance would be exercised. The apostle Paul draws upon this to illustrate the self-control that is needed for the Christian. Rather than allowing our passions and desires to control us, we must control our passions and desires, making them our servant, rather than our master. **1 Corinthians 9:25a; 9:27a**

V. Subjection: Run According to the Rules

A. Bringing our passions under subjection is an example of subjecting ourselves to God’s will. Just as the athlete in the Greek games needed to abide by the rules to avoid disqualification, we must abide by God’s rules and follow the course He has established. **1 Corinthians 9:27b; 2 Timothy 2:5; Luke 14:26-27**

VI. Self-Denial: Lay Aside Every Weight

A. The illustration of running in a race is further applied to the need we have to “lay aside every weight.” Things that unnecessarily weigh us down as we run this race can include things that are overtly sinful, but it can also include “thorns of life” when such things are allowed to distract us from our course. **Hebrews 12:1a; Luke 8:14; Luke 9:23**

VII. Endurance: Finish the Race

A. The Christian race is more of a marathon than a sprint. We must *continuously* devote ourselves to God. Looking to the “cloud of witnesses” of Hebrews 11 and the example of Jesus should help us persevere with steadfast obedience to the Lord. **Hebrews 12:1b; 2 Timothy 4:7**

VIII. Motivation: An Imperishable Crown

A. Those who faithfully start, continue on, and finish the course the Lord has set have promise of a crown that *all* of God’s faithful children will receive. **2 Timothy 4:8**

B. This crown is superior to the crown received by winners in the Greek games (or any athletic competition). This imperishable crown serves as motivation for faithfully running the race set before us. **1 Corinthians 9:25b-26a**