

Lessons I Have Learned From Running

Franklin Church of Christ
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AM Worship

Introduction:

Repeatedly, the New Testament uses running to illustrate Christianity—I **Corinthians 9:24-27**; **Galatians 2:2; 5:7**; **Philippians 2:16; 3:14**; **II Timothy 2:5; 4:7-8** and **Hebrews 12:1**. Over the past seven years, I have been an on again, off again runner. Like Paul, I have learned that growing as a Christian is very much like growing as a runner. I would like to share with you some of the parallels I have learned. Hopefully, we will all be strengthened by this.

Discussion:

- I. I must have proper goals.
 - A. The fact is, I will never run as an end unto itself. Some people find running fun and exhilarating. To say the least, I do not. If I am going to run, I have to have proper goals.
 - B. I have learned that my goals must be based out of what is truly most important. For instance, while I don't particularly care for being a fat guy, the goal to lose weight is not very important to me. In addition to that, the goal to lose weight has an end. That is, if I get down to the weight I want, I stop running. Therefore, the goal to lose weight is rarely enough to get me out of bed early to run. However, what is truly important is a healthy life allowing me to live long enough to take care of my wife, raise my children and spread the gospel. Whenever I focus on those goals, I can draw forth the motivation to run.
 - C. In my Christian race, I have found the same thing. To motivate myself to live according to Christ's moral and doctrinal precepts I have to have goals based out of what is most important. For instance, if I am in a spiritual low and my goals are based on performance to maintain appearances to you and the elders, I am not very motivated to work properly and live the godly life. If I am only trying to insure that I keep my job as a preacher, I find it hard to be motivated to wear the full armor of God and fight the good fight of faith. However, when I think about what God has done for me and am focused on glorifying Him in return (**John 15:8**), Christianity becomes easier. When I focus myself, as Paul did in **Philippians 3:12-16**, on going to heaven, then I have the motivation to live according to Christ's principles, to fight the good fight, to continue through discouragement.
- II. Companions help.
 - A. I have always found it easier to run when I at least have someone who is holding me accountable to my running, asking me if I am doing it. I have always found it easier to get up and run when I have an appointment to keep with someone else. It is easier to keep up a harder pace when someone who runs better than I do is there to help push me.
 - B. I have found the same to be true in my Christian race. My companions help. You can almost always tell what kind of Christian a person is away from the building by looking at the kind of people they spend their time with. My darkest days spiritually were my early college years when my best friends were not Christians and my Christian friends were far too worldly. My turnaround came when I moved in with an older Christian couple, got a job with a Christian and became best friends with the preacher in the church across town.
 - C. The preacher in **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12** demonstrates that walking with others will help us keep up our strength and our safety. On the other hand, **I Corinthians 15:33** demonstrates that choosing our company unwisely will corrupt us. Paul said do not be deceived. There is no doubt some of you might be upset because I have dared suggest that it is dangerous for you to keep a great deal of company with non-Christians, especially those of you still in school or parents of those still in school. And yes, I recognize that we must make contact with non-Christians in order to convert them. But we must make sure that those companionships are kept on God's terms, not on our friends' terms, lest we deceive ourselves and be corrupted.
- III. I must have self-discipline.
 - A. Though it is easier to run with companions to help, I have to recognize that it is my decision to run or not to run. Therefore, I must discipline myself. There are days when running companions

may not be so disciplined themselves. Or days in which their discipline in other areas mandates that they not run with me. I have to make the decision to run. If not, I can only blame myself.

- B. In those early college days to which I referred, whose fault was it that I was in a spiritual low? Was it my friends' fault? NO! It was my own. I allowed myself to be deceived and allow bad company to corrupt good morals. But it was all my doing. No matter what my companions do, I must be disciplined to do what God has said.
- C. **I Peter 4:1-5** shows that we have already committed enough iniquity in our lives before we became Christians. We must not allow undisciplined companions to run our lives. Instead we must control ourselves and live according to the will of God, recognizing each of us will give account for what we do in the flesh. **II Peter 1:6** teaches we are to add self-control to our faith.

IV. Running is not a compartment of my life.

- A. I have learned that running is not a compartment in my life. Rather, it is part of the entire dynamic of my life. When I am disciplined regarding physical exercise, my entire life improves. When I run properly, I automatically eat more healthfully. I don't want to run in vain. I am happier at home because I know I am doing things that will allow me to stay with my family longer. I am happier in my work because I know I am exercising a discipline that will allow me to work harder and stay here longer. When I exercise discipline in running, setting and meeting goals, I find it a lot easier to set and meet other goals regarding my relational, spiritual and financial life.
- B. However, I have also noticed that if I don't allow the cycle to take place and improve my discipline in other areas, my running is affected. If I don't eat properly, I can't run as well. If I am not working as I should, I become lazier in every aspect including running. If I am not doing things at home that help improve the home life, I don't feel like getting up earlier so I can run. Running is not a compartment of my life; it is part of the whole dynamic of living.
- C. The same is true with my Christianity. It is not and cannot be a compartment of my life. Christianity is not something I do on Sundays and Wednesday nights. It is not something I do while at the office. It is the controlling factor in the whole dynamic of my life. It affects everything else I do at the office, at home, around friends, on vacation, with my relationships, with my finances, etc. If I allow myself into a spiritual low, everything else goes downhill: my marriage, my relationship with my kids, my relationships with friends, my financial situation, etc.
- D. It is also affected by the other aspects of my life. If I allow some negative factor in another aspect of my life to take over, my spiritual life goes downhill. For instance, when I don't stay on top of my financial situation. I begin to be worried about money and paying bills. I get upset and don't feel like praying or studying. Then I am on a downhill slope.
- E. **Romans 12:1-2** says we are to be living sacrifices. **Galatians 2:22** says we are to be crucified with Christ. We no longer live but it is Christ living in us. What does that mean, if it doesn't mean our Christianity cannot be compartmentalized? Our Christianity is our lives.

V. The more I run, the easier it is to run. The less I run, the easier it is not to run.

- A. I read in *Runner's World* that runners go through a transition period when they first begin to run. They are exercising regularly but it is easy for them to get back into the habit of inactivity. The article also said that at some point, when the runner has continued his discipline long enough, it becomes just as easy for him to go out and run as it is for him to plop in the recliner and watch TV. I am still waiting for that time to hit. However, I do know that when I have been running properly, it is easier for me to go ahead and run today. However, if I ever let myself off the hook, it becomes easier and easier every day not to run.
- B. The same is true with Christianity. When I am doing well, praying regularly, studying properly, inviting and teaching others, devoting my life to Christ, it is easier to keep living like that. However, if I let myself off the hook and don't pray one day or don't study or submit to a temptation, then the next day it is always easier to follow that sinful path of least resistance.
- C. This is the message of **Romans 6:12-16**. When I submit myself to obedience, obedience takes over and runs my life leading to righteousness. On the other hand, when I submit myself to sin, I become a slave to sin. It takes over, so to speak and runs my life because it is my habit. Of course, that leads to death.

VI. I have to start where I am and grow.

- A. When I first started running a few years ago with my friend Max Dawson, we went to the local high school track. Keep in mind that I was about 24 and he was 53. I certainly figured I could keep pace with a guy more than twice my age. I do not remember how many miles he ran on that track. All I remember is that by the time we finished that first lap around the track I was through. However, the next day I made two laps. A few days later I made three laps. Finally, I made four laps and ran a whole mile all at one time. Then I finally ran a mile in under 11 minutes. Then under 10 minutes. Then under 9 minutes and finally I ran a mile in under 8 minutes. The difference between us had little to do with age. Rather, he was healthy and trim. I was unhealthy and fat.
- B. What did I learn? I had to start where I was. I was not and am still not a marathoner. I am reminded of that every time I take an extended break from running and then get back into it. I have never gotten back to barely making a quarter mile, but even right now I cannot run an eight minute mile. I have to start where I am able and grow from there.
- C. That is the same with Christianity. No, I am not saying we overlook sin in our lives because we are young Christians. Rather, I am thinking about some of the disciplines we have to have to be strong Christians. I imagine when you hear preachers mention praying or studying your Bible regularly, you think of the great examples of people you have heard about that pray and read for hours every day. No wonder so few people don't study and pray. If they are trying to go from being spiritually fat and unhealthy to being a Christian marathoner, they are going to be overwhelmed. Instead start where you are. Maybe you cannot read an entire Bible book when you sit down, but you can read a chapter, or maybe only half a chapter. Maybe you cannot pray for 30 minutes, but you can pray for 3 minutes. Start where you are and grow from there. Remember, Christianity is not about being perfect today. It is about being better today than you were yesterday (**II Peter 1:5-11**).

VII. I can endure more than I think.

- A. Sometimes when I am running, I reach points when I think I need to stop. My thighs ache or my breathing is becoming difficult. My throat is drying out. My feet begin to hurt and my body is just tired. I sometimes get to the point where I think I am just not going to make it to the end of my run. Especially if I have increased my speed or distance. However, with the exception of times when I have had a physical injury, I have always finished my run. I have always been able to endure more than I thought I could.
- B. The same is true with Christianity. Whenever I have found myself facing hardship or discouragement and I get to a point where I feel like I am ready to throw in the towel and quit preaching or just quit trying to live right I have learned that I can keep going.
- C. I can often endure much more than I think I can. I can generally endure more temptation, more ridicule, more discouragement from within and without the church, more hardship, etc, than I often think I can. The reason is not from within of course, it is because of the grace of God. "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (**Philippians 4:13**). The reason is because God never allows me to experience something I cannot overcome (**I Corinthians 10:13**). God only allows enough to make me grow (**James 1:2-4**). If I accept the tests and grow from them, I can always go farther than I thought.

VIII. When I am not doing what I should, I get mad at those who remind me.

- A. If I go through a time of weakness regarding my exercise and diet, you can be assured that Marita and I will get into a fight. Inevitably, she will ask me if I should be eating what I am or if I have run today. My response will generally be to tell her to mind her own business. She then reminds me of point number two of this lesson and the fact that I have asked her to be a companion who helps me. I then remind her of point number three that it is my decision and she needs to keep her nose out of my business. The conversation will go downhill from there.
- B. Why does that happen? A few reasons. Number one, she has made me feel guilty for not keeping my goals and being disciplined. At that moment however, I am not wanting to be disciplined. Therefore I retaliate to stop the reminder of my lack of commitment. Secondly, I can use that type of bully treatment and I know she will back down. Not only that time, but she will

think twice before saying anything the next time. That is until I get another boost of discipline and then tell her, "No matter how angry I get, don't let me eat _____."

- C. This is also true in my race as a Christian. I get upset at brethren if I am having a time of spiritual weakness and they condemn or even just talk about whatever sin I have committed. I begin to justify myself and explain in my own mind, if not to them, how they don't understand my position and how hard it is for me, and on and on it goes. The real problem is, if I have allowed darkness into my life, I don't like the light (**John 3:20-21**). The point is I have learned if somebody encourages me to do right and I get mad, I need to examine myself because I am probably sinning.

Conclusion:

At the beginning of the lesson I pointed out that I have been an on again/off again runner. With running, that is not so bad. But I pray that none of us will ever be on again/off again Christians. Understand the words of Paul in **I Timothy 4:8**. Bodily exercise profits little. I have not preached this lesson to encourage you to start running, even though I do think some form of discipline regarding exercise will help you not only physically but also spiritually. I have preached this lesson to demonstrate how you and I need to run in our spiritual race. Let's discipline ourselves and press on for the goal, shunning the darkness and running to the light.